

Central Home Owners Panel (CHOP) MEETING

Held Tuesday 20 November 2018, 6pm-8.30pm
Board Room, Park Street

1. Welcome and apologies

- 1.1. Apologies were received.
- 1.2. The Chair welcomed a new CHOP member following a successful application and interview and everybody introduced themselves.

2. Declaration of interest - None

3. Minutes from the last meeting

- 3.1. Members expressed their appreciation for the minutes of the last meeting as well as the format of the meeting papers.

4. Response from Service Charge Team

- 4.1. Regarding the information usually provided about how to obtain copies of invoices (referring to Section 22) not being included with the actuals this time, the Service Charge Specialist explained that a lot of information had been moved online to try to reduce the amount of documentation going out in the post.
- 4.2. CHOP challenged this saying that if residents don't know this is an option then they won't raise it as a query. The Service Charge Team need to make residents aware of what info they can request. Whilst this info should be include in new welcome packs for residents, it hasn't always been and people buying properties from other people might not be aware as well. It was suggested that the Service Charge Team communicate clearly to people what information is available and then have links on the website to request these.
- 4.3. The Service Charge Specialist shared that the team were looking at how they could make the process of querying service charges more efficient as delays are caused by having to wait for info from other departments, e.g. Resident Services, contractors etc. Property Managers are carrying out estate inspections to be proactive and check what services residents should be being billed for in advance. The checking process is underway with about 85% completed already. CHOP requested some feedback from the Service Charge Team about how well the process has worked, any trends identified and how many amends have been picked up.
- 4.4. The Resident Engagement Manager shared that the Hydewide Residents Eye service charge inspection recommendations should also be able to help tackle some of these issues and improve services, once they have been signed off, he will be able to share these with CHOP.
- 4.5. CHOP asked to be involved in reviewing the format for the statements before they go out next time. CHOP reiterated that they are very happy to look at any documents/communications in advance of them going out to pick up any

issues and hopefully reduce queries to the Service Charge Team in the future.

- 4.6. CHOP also asked for some evidence that where an individual in a block has reported an issue with the service charge that all residents affected have been informed. The Service Charge Specialist explained that the new service charge system automatically generates bulk refunds.
- 4.7. CHOP requested to see some high level figures on refunds per block following the actuals so that they can see how effective the improvements to the system have been and help communicate this to other residents. Some high level graphs showing total charge, total refund and the reason for refund would be acceptable.
- 4.8. CHOP would also like to see any data on whether anyone was undercharged, and how much Hyde has to refund each year due to inaccurate statements and how much this reducing by each year. CHOP members also said that it was really encouraging to hear about the automatic bulk estate refunds as this is something which did not happen in the past.
- 4.9. CHOP also wanted to check that where refunds are applied, the management fee is also reduced in line with the new totals. The Service Charge Specialist shared that with the new service charge system, the management fee is automatically amended to 15% of the new total.
- 4.10. The Service Charge Specialist shared that this year, a Central Service Charge Resolution Team had been set up to handle enquiries with individuals from key teams across the business to try to turnaround queries quickly.
- 4.11. A group from Compliance, Legal and Service Charges has also been set up to identify any mismatches between lease agreements and service delivery.
- 4.12. CHOP challenged the Service Charge Team on the 20 day response time to service charge queries and asked about the current back log and timescales. The Service Charge Specialist explained that where queries can be resolved within the Service Charge Team (e.g. apportionment) they are meeting the 20 day response time but where the issue sits outside of the team, e.g. where a contractor is involved, this is taking a bit longer. Where responses cannot be made within 20 days, the resident is informed of the required extension and the reason for it. CHOP requested data from the Service Charge Team at the end of this year's actuals resolutions on the percentage dealt with within 30 days and the average length of time for a response. This data will help CHOP share info back to other residents and hold Hyde to account; it will also be useful to share with Hydewide Residents Voice.

5. Update on joint GHSB/HRV meeting

- 5.1. One of the CHOP members shared an update on the joint meeting between Group Housing Services Board (GHSB - one of the subcommittees of the overall board) and Hydewide Residents Voice (HRV):
 - HRV (Hydewide Residents Voice) has a good membership representing residents from the across spectrum of tenure and geographical location, they are also a very committed core group who do a lot of work without recognition, especially from other residents.
 - HRV are very civil society focused and were very challenging about Hyde selling properties to raise funds rather than improving them. (Hyde has

been selling some properties where the cost of repairs was prohibitive or geographic location was remote from Hyde’s core areas and the money reinvested in building new homes.)

- HRV were very well prepared on the government’s green paper on housing and in trying to shape Hyde’s business plan.
- Pleased that GHSB was seeking opinion from HRV on high level business issues such as how Hyde uses its surplus and its social responsibility objectives.
- Impressed by the openness of GHSB in hearing from residents and also in sharing plans and information. It was also noted that GHSB welcome the scrutiny work being carried out by Hydewide Residents Eye which is independent from Hyde and carried out from a customer perspective (as opposed to an internal audit). HRE’s work also helps Hyde to fulfil its regulatory requirement for resident scrutiny.

6. CHOP Recruitment update

- 6.1. The summary shared on The OAK after the last CHOP meeting resulted in two people requesting to observe a meeting – will be invited to attend February 2019 meeting after sending apologies to this meeting due to sickness.
- 6.2. The email to tenants and residents associations resulted in another observer joining us as an observer at tonight’s meeting.
- 6.3. We’re also very pleased to welcome a new member on board tonight.
- 6.4. We have also had interest from another resident who will be invited to attend the next meeting as an observer.
- 6.5. Social media and direct email campaign planned for New Year once terms of reference is updated.

7. Feedback from tenants and residents associations and The OAK

- 7.1. We also received feedback from a number of tenants and residents associations and from [The OAK](#). The issues affecting home owners that were raised include:

Issue	Response/Feedback from CHOP
Service charges - transparency around costs and surpluses plus concerns that home owners are subsidising tenants’ service charges	We have asked Service Charge Team to improve communication to residents on what information they can request after receiving their actuals. There is a common misconception that tenants do not pay service charge and we have asked Service Charge Team to look at how they can help clarify and communicate this to home owners.
Communication in general and with Property Managers	The specific feedback provided will be shared with Hydewide Residents Eye (HRE) to be added to their latest inspection report on resident communication.
Communal cleaning & grounds maintenance	Hydewide Residents Focus are seeking wide feedback about these services as part of the November Resident Feedback Campaign and the performance of these services continues to be monitored by Hyde and involved residents.
Communal repairs	This issue is being explored as part of the November

Issue	Response/Feedback from CHOP
	Resident Feedback Campaign and is being considered as a possible topic for resident inspection next year.
Other issues mentioned included ASB/security, emptying of communal bins, fly tipping and a request for a local meeting in Stockwell.	The Resident Engagement Team will look into these issues and feedback to CHOP at the next meeting. CHOP also reviewed an ASB letter as part of this meeting and feedback will be shared with HRE for their latest inspection report on resident communications. One of the observers also shared that there had been a local meeting held in Stockwell but that it had been held during the day which made it difficult for those who work to attend.

7.2. The question was raised as to whether Property Managers have the ability to set how they engage with their local areas and whether they could set up a monthly 'town hall' in certain areas. The Resident Engagement Manager explained that in theory yes, however because their patches are so large and such meetings are quite time consuming this could provide difficult. The OAK Property Manager pilot had been set up to try to tackle this. CHOP mentioned that one of their biggest concerns which they had shared at the start of the Property Manager model being introduced was that they would be stretched too wide, however if overall resident communication at Hyde improves there might not be as much need for face to face communication.

8. Work plan for the coming year

8.1. The following plans for 2019 were agreed, in addition to the standing items of service charge update and communication and complaints info/samples for review:

Meeting	
February 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate Complaints Manager – info on home owner complaints • Digital Communications Manager - review of Homeowners section of website as well as CHOP section
Later in year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director of Customer Operations and Digital Services to share overview/plan on upcoming service improvements/consultations • Service Charge Team – upcoming consultations and how CHOP can help improve any communication around Section 20s and FAQs.

8.2. It was decided that it would be more helpful for the Strategy and Research Manager to meet with Hydewide Residents Voice than CHOP in regards to the new customer survey programme; in particular it would be good if members could trial it and then share feedback.

9. Update on fire safety consultation

9.1. The following update was shared from the Katerina Birkeland, Home Ownership Manager, who was unable to attend the meeting:

This is a contractor award notification so essentially it's the outcome of the tender assessment process that Hyde staff and involved residents conducted week beginning 5 November 2018. They scored the tender submissions and once these are assessed, we'll be in a position to advise residents who the proposed contractors are for each of the service contracts we're entering into.

Once we know the outcome of the tender reviews, we'll consult further with residents regarding our proposals to award to some/all or one of the tendering contractors. Residents will then have the opportunity to respond with comments/observations which we review, consider and respond to before we award the contracts.

10. Review of CHOP terms of reference

The CHOP terms of reference was reviewed with the following changes made:

- 10.1. Lead Officer updated to 'Resident Engagement Advisor'
- 10.2. Quorum removed and statement around four being preferred minimum number inserted
- 10.3. Under 'Membership & constitution'
 - Minimum membership number removed
 - The following was added in: "In the case of a full quota of members, a waiting list will be kept. Residents will also be offered other methods of sharing their feedback with CHOP."
 - It was added that members could join meetings via phone or other appropriate technology
 - Clarification of what constitutes a home owner added – shared owner/leaseholder/freeholder
 - Requirement for all members to join and participate on The OAK added
- 10.4. 'Purpose' section moved to beginning of document and 'give feedback' added to purpose
- 10.5. Under 'Relationship with other formal grounds and local engagement' it was clarified that issues/feedback would be shared with HRV and HRE via minutes on The OAK

11. Review of communications for HRE inspection

11.1. Example 4 – ASB

- Layout is fine
- "Dear resident" is appropriate as sent to all
- No jargon (apart from ASB which maybe should be clearly defined at the start)

- Letter seems to be coming from the starting point that it is ASB; however in the 2nd paragraph there is no indication that Hyde has investigated it – asking residents to let them know themselves. We don't really know what the issue is – are they saying it is the building work or not? Also doesn't say how long building work is going on for or sorry for the inconvenience – is this work on one of Hyde's buildings? Perhaps the letter should say that some residents have found the noise unacceptable rather than it is unacceptable – if haven't actually investigated the issue. There's a 'telling off' in the letter but it might be Hyde's building work that's the problem. Mixed messages – we don't know if it is ASB so we're writing a letter to keep you (or the complainant) quiet. Trying to do two things with the letter – should write to complainant saying they are investigating it and then also send a general reminder to residents about noise nuisance– but softened. CHOP weren't sure that the ASB case reference should be included at the start – is this more for Hyde's administrative use? Might confuse residents. The letter also doesn't say what Hyde is going to do about the issue.

11.2. **Example 5 – Revised Actual Service Charges for 2017/18**

- Quite good – a generic update, explains purpose, gives clear explanation about why and help and advice – where to go.
- There was debate around the sentence 'It is not a demand for additional payment...', one member thought it sounded a bit weird and could be softened or taken out completely, another member thought it was important for reassuring people, especially those for whom English is not their first language.
- It was suggested that the letter state at the beginning that every property is different but that there are some similarities.
- It was suggested that maybe a FREEPOST envelope should be included for those we don't have an email address for but it was acknowledged this might not be practical.

11.3. **Example 6 – Stage 1 complaint**

- Not addressed to anyone
- Bad English 'You will like a reply'
- Mentions consultation carried out in 2012/13 – however then goes on to say there was no consultation
- Would prefer to have each point set out and then addressed, the abandoned car issue seems to be in the wrong order.
- None of the putting things right relates to the CCTV – letter gives assurance that matter was looked into but there is no indication that anything has been put right.
- At the start of the letter, CCTV is 90% of the complaint, but putting things right is 100% about fly-tipping.

- CHOP would like this letter escalated – it is particularly poor and it looks like there are issues still outstanding. Is there a remedy needed for the whole block? If Section 20 not carried out, does this mean residents cannot be charged?
- Is there a template structure for complaints letters? Need some key phrases, e.g. “We apologise for this”, “We’ll put things right by...”
- Can identify some likely template sections of the letter – they just haven’t dealt with the complaint.
- Was this letter reviewed by a second person before it goes out? What’s the process for this?
- What does ‘upheld’ mean to residents?
- CHOP’s review of the homeowner section of the Hyde website has been postponed till February 2019 – however it was noted that whilst there is a lot of useful information on there, do residents know it’s there?

12.AOB

- 12.1. CHOP asked to put on record their appreciation to the acting Chair for taking on the role of Interim Chair and asked if this role can now be formalised, and another Vice Chair elected at the next meeting.

Meeting closed at 8.30pm