

## **Central Home Owners Panel (CHOP) Meeting**

Held Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2019, 6pm – 8pm

Board Room, Park Street

### **1. Welcome, introductions, apologies & declaration of interest**

- 1.1. The Chair welcomed everybody to the meeting.
- 1.2. Apologies were received from 3 members.
- 1.3. There were no declarations of interest.

### **2. Notes from meeting held 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2019 and matters arising**

- 2.1. Minutes were agreed
- 2.2. 4.5 Compliance & Home Ownership Manager confirmed that the information for home owners would remain general as there is a danger specific information could be misread and misrepresented.
- 2.3. 4.10 Compliance & Home Ownership Manager had not heard back from the resident regarding query.
- 2.4. 3.3, 3.4 & 3.6 J Customer Strategy Research Summary slides have been supplied to members.
- 2.5. Reference was made to a query about an empty parking lot - Compliance & Home Ownership Manager to take action. This was raised in the previous meeting but not recorded in the minutes.

### **3. Repairs and contractor timescales**

- 3.1. Director of Property Services highlighted management changes to the Property Directorate. Director is responsible for responsive repairs and his colleague is Head of Compliance. Reference made to Property Directorate Annual Plan 2019-20 and the Key Performance Indicators (KPI) which recorded an overall repairs satisfaction of 85%. The Customer First Strategy is closely linked to the work of his Directorate; relating to safer homes, information governance and having the right tools for the job. The Property Directorate are piloting the House Mark app on mobile devices to record information. The performance of Mears is affecting the overall service satisfaction score and their poor performance mainly due to recruitment, retention and training issues are closely being monitored.
- 3.2. It was confirmed that a random sample of properties (10%) are selected for post inspection. CHOP noted the sample size was perhaps not larger enough

but reflects that a large size is not fully practical. Reference was made to the Gas Servicing & Repairs Score Card; the aim is to try to speak to as many customers as possible who are prepared to give us feedback. The surveys are conducted by an external company. There is a target of 100% for properties to have a valid LG3R (Domestic) gas servicing certificate.

- 3.3. HPS are now known as Property Maintenance.
- 3.4. In reply to a question about validating repairs it was confirmed that when the repair is completed the Property Maintenance tradesperson will press complete on their PDA and take a before and after photograph of the repair. If a complaint is received the photographic evidence is referred to. It was confirmed that Hyde do monitor contractors and acknowledged that Hyde doesn't always get things right. MB welcomed feedback from CHOP members.
- 3.5. CHOP noted concerns around the service of T Brown's in particular the lack of customer service. Director of Property Services to look into.
- 3.6. CHOP welcomed the data on repairs reported and completed that they had received.
- 3.7. Director of Property Services confirmed that he was happy to attend every other CHOP meeting to give feedback about performance or discuss specific contractor issues linked in with the Customer First Programme.

#### **4. Update on fire safety progress**

- 4.1. The Fire Safety Taskforce Lead introduced himself to members. He gave members an overview of the Fire Safety Programme. A new Fire Management Plan was produced in September and the majority of recommendations from Savills were taken on board and included in the plan. He explained that the Fire Risk Assessments have three categories; high, medium and low risk and explained the criteria for each category. An update was given on the Building Safety Taskforce; 5,000 actions had been created from the assessments.
- 4.2. The Fire Safety Taskforce Lead reports directly to the Hyde Board updating them on the project and looking at how we can procure quality over cost. Hyde is working well with our partners on Fire Safety. CHOP highlighted issues with fire alarms and the lift being out of service for a number of days at Bermondsey Spa. This will be investigated.
- 4.3. Reference was made to the main recommendations from the Grenfell Inquiry Phase 1 report which referred to premises information and the sharing of information including the use of gerda boxes, better signage and the increased frequency of fire door checks which had proved to be an operational challenge to Hyde.

- 4.4. Advice Note 14 – Issued by the Government in December 2018. Relates to buildings over 18m tall and requires checks to all external wall systems. It was highlighted that this measure was nationally causing difficulties due to risk averse lenders and that Hyde are working with home owners and leaseholders to provide documentation, however this was a challenge which was proving frustrating to all parties. Hyde and other housing providers are asking the Government to clarify what they mean by “reasonable requirements”
- 4.5. Reference was made to the draft statement circulated to CHOP members relating to a proposed communication to be posted on the Hyde website relating to the re-mortgaging, staircasing or selling your home if you live in a Hyde tall building. CHOP commented that residents might not necessarily know how tall their property is so there should be a link on the website to check if their home is affected. If residents are impacted Hyde should make documents available on request and the information should be provided free of charge. This will be considered, and members updated. It was noted that there is no fee for the provision of Fire Risk Assessments.
- 4.6. The question was asked as to whether they felt the fire works taken place already, particularly in Bermondsey Spa, had gone well and if there were any lessons to be learnt. CHOP agreed with the answer provided but it was noted that in particular the post works tidy up at Bolanachi had been very poor and this should be considered in any works in the future.

## **5. Service charge update including feedback from actuals and communications plan**

- 5.1. Reference was made to the Customer Strategy and the cross team working between Resident Services, the Property Charge Team and Compliance. Hyde are starting to make proactive contact with residents from across the Hyde Group reviewing block by block looking at content, layout and services, this exercise was providing lots of learning points for the team and involved taking time to explore the data that was not always at their fingertips.
- 5.2. So far the new Service Charge Case Management Team are making good progress with their case work. In hindsight the Service Level Agreement (SLA) was over enthusiastic. CHOP asked what was the average time taken to resolve a query? An update will be provided.
- 5.3. It was acknowledged there was a need for one simple letter to be produced to cover all elements of the service charge. Feedback from the recent HRE inspection on service charges highlighted the need for staff to be pro-active in delivering the right message and communicating with residents.

- 5.4. CHOP provided examples of poor service such as; when a stated preferred time for contact had been ignored and not met, when complaints posted online had disappeared and that staff had been unable to trace them and the need to constantly chase for requests.
- 5.5. In the five workstreams relating to how Hyde manages service charges building trust had been highlighted as a key area for improvement together with the time frame for answering queries.
- 5.6. CHOP expressed their frustration that after thirteen years Hyde are still sorting out its service charge data. It was acknowledged this was partly due to how information is managed between systems including manual data. This will be addressed by the Customer First and the Information Governance Programmes and a project team has been set to manage these changes. As these improvements are put in place and residents should see improvements in the estimates in the new year.
- 5.7. This improvement to the programme includes the recommendations made by HRE to improve the service charge process. In 2017 residents were given an assurance that the new system would resolve everything, however, there are things that are still outstanding which Hyde are working through. It is appreciated there would be a level of mistrust in what Hyde are saying now, however there is a clear plan on all deliverables and cross team working including data improvements so whilst we understand resident mistrust, we are working very hard to improve this. It was also stated that Property Managers are really keen and proactive in working across teams in relation to service charges. It was acknowledged that when Look Again was introduced Hyde recognised that it needed to improve the service charge process.
- 5.8. The Head of Property Charges (Interim) acknowledged that there have been long standing issues with service charges and residents are understandably wary when new promises are made. He stated that he had been in a number of meetings including with the Trust in Service Charge Project and he was encouraged that Hyde was looking at the Service Charges from a customers prospective listening and learning from past mistakes. CHOP stated that historically the same errors occurred on service charge statements year after year.
- 5.9. It was recognised that Hyde should be checking the printed invoice before it is sent out to reduce the number of challenges from residents.
- 5.10. CHOP asked why are Hyde paying contractor's invoices for work that had not been carried out. A number of organisations are moving to the use of smart meters to avoid paying estimated bills, CHOP said that they had raised the possibility of installing smart meters.

- 5.11. The collation of invoice packs is time consuming as although the majority of invoices are easily available, some are more difficult to retrieve. Hyde are currently working to ensure that all the invoices included in the income pack will be stored centrally to make them quicker to recover. We hope that all service charge accounts will be audited by an external auditor starting with the charges that commence from April 2020.
- 5.12. It was confirmed that Hyde use Monarch to check that utilities are VFM from energy suppliers and this contract is being reviewed.
- 5.13. CHOP noted that statements look better, overall communications had improved and emails are now acknowledged. But there are still issues particularly ones that continue and reoccur each year. It was pointed out that previous mistakes on bills had re-occurred such as the example of Legionella testing had reappeared on a bill for 2018/19 and that a payment had been requested despite this being identified as inaccurate and a refund given for the year before and that this had happened 3 years in a row.
- 5.14. It was noted that the role of the local Property Managers is critical in gathering information about the actual services that are provided to residents.
- 5.15. CHOP also noted that when one resident in a block identifies an incorrect service charge identified and refunded it does automatically apply to everyone in the block. There was a concern that some vulnerable residents may not be challenging their service charge payments and therefore being charged in error by Hyde. It was confirmed that Hyde are working with IT colleagues to ensure that when a charge is removed from an individual's account an adjustment will be made to the entire block. This suggestion was one of the recommendations that had come out of the HRE Service Charge Inspection.
- 5.16. It was noted that self service was on its way, starting with a basic setup.

## **6. Resident Engagement Strategy Consultation**

- 6.1. Reference was made to the Resident Engagement Strategy 2020-23 report circulated to CHOP members. The RE Team are consulting with residents and staff about what should go into the Strategy and there are no preconceived ideas about what should be included and all suggestions are welcome. It was noted that the CHOP meeting tonight was a good example of quite a traditional form of engagement. CHOP made the following suggestions;
  - Could Hyde's new self -serve portal be used for engagement?
  - Could Skype be used for meetings to reduce travel and increase membership especially from areas further from London.
  - Increased local engagement was recommended, residents liked face to face. The example of a multi-team drop-in surgery event held at Bermondsey Spa

was used as best practice where residents had the opportunity to meet Hyde staff responsible for Fire Safety, Communal Heating and Communal Cleaning teams.

- It was suggested that where Hyde had offices these could be used for engagement and face to face contact, possibly surgeries or drop ins. At the moment the offices were only being used for transactional activities which could be done on line
  - Office opening times were also restrictive and needed to reflect that residents worked.
  - It was suggested that better use could be made of the homeowner welcome packs and that resident engagement should be promoted and general information about Hyde included.
  - As part of the strategy consultation, resident engagement terminology will also be reviewed.
  - It was also suggested that CHOP should continue to publicise its work more widely with residents including through the Oak and that Hyde could use its own channels such as Twitter for this.
  - Additional feedback from CHOP members was welcomed on the OAK.
- 6.2. It was agreed to defer the Customer Strategy research summary until the next CHOP meeting.

## **7. AOB**

- 7.1. The following dates have now been confirmed for CHOP meetings for 2020 in the Board Room at Park Street on a Tuesday evening from 6 to 8 pm, 4.2.20; 19.5.20; 1.9.20 and 1.12.20.

The meeting closed at 8pm.