

RESIDENTS' SCRUTINY PANEL

BREYER

INTRODUCTION

The Scrutiny Panel is a newly established group of residents who meet to discuss the performance of specific areas of Newlon's activities. Currently it is looking at the responsive repairs contracts but it is hoped that it will widen its remit to consider other areas of Newlon's activities.

The aim of the group is to scrutinise the contractor's delivery, and Newlon's management of the contract; to establish if it is effective and meeting the agreed standards. The Panel was provided in advance with an extensive range of materials to consider, covering job completion rates, the budget & spend and benchmarking information. It was decided that three of the Panel members would then attend the face-to-face meeting to discuss the delivery of the contract.

The Panel members met with Neil Watts, Divisional Director, and Graham Shaw, Operational Manager, from Breyer and Duncan Lee, Assistant Director Customer Services for Newlon. The Panel identified 5 areas to be discussed at the meeting and questioned Breyer and Newlon on specifics of the delivery, the effectiveness of the service and the monitoring of the service. The full notes from the meeting are attached as appendix 1.

This report contains the Panel's recommendations and a rating of very satisfied; satisfied, neither / nor; concerned or very concerned for each area.

Appendix 2 has brief notes or comments from Breyer on actions and follow-up to the recommendations.

ASSESSMENT

Area 1: Job completion rates within agreed timescales

Current performance figures collated by Newlon were circulated but were found to have errors for some months. There are also differing methodologies being used for the statistics within Newlon as well as at Breyer. The Panel were not overly concerned at this stage but recommended that the issues are dealt with.

Panel's rating: Neither satisfied nor concerned

Recommendations:

- That the job completion statistics are checked for accuracy before being seen by the Panel
- That ideally there is one methodology used for the statistics presented to the Panel and where this is not possible that a clear explanation of the different methodologies used are included on the sheets.

Area 2: Emergency jobs

Although relatively small in number, emergency repairs showed the worst rate of completion within target time (i.e. 24hrs). Breyer and Newlon explained that the reported, lower completion rate was caused by an administration problem, linked to delays in entering information into the electronic system. A new system/procedure has since been implemented.

Panel's rating: Satisfied

Recommendation:

- That Newlon monitors the new system of recording emergency jobs to see if this improves the statistics for rate of jobs completed within timescale and that this is re-assessed at the next Scrutiny Panel meeting with Breyer.

Area 3: Use of personal data assistants (PDAs or handheld computer)

The Panel asked if all operatives used PDAs and if this was an issue for the collection of accurate information. Breyer explained the use of PDAs and the system for uploading data.

Panel's rating: Satisfied

Recommendations: None specific

Area 4: Use of resident feedback and complaints

A discussion was held about residents being surveyed for their satisfaction with repairs. The Panel were also interested to know if Breyer collected and used qualitative information from residents as statistics alone may not give the full picture. Residents' own words could help to give a more full picture. Breyer do.

Panel's rating: Satisfied

Recommendation:

- That Breyer supply the verbatim or qualitative feedback from residents for future Panel meetings.

Area 5: Call monitoring for customer care standards

Breyer monitor calls with residents in two ways; Newlon will also listen to calls and assess staff when technical issues have been resolved with BT.

Panel's rating: Satisfied

Recommendations:

- None specifically about call monitoring at Newlon as it is not yet able to be done due to delays with BT.
- Newlon to consider explaining and promoting the new Service Centre, the changes to call handling, call monitoring and the improved handling of repairs to residents as a positive development.

Diversity and awareness of different needs

A discussion was held on how Breyer train and support staff to be aware of diversity issues with residents.

Panel's rating: Very satisfied

Recommendations: None specific

CONCLUSION

The meeting was felt to be a productive and useful one by all those who attended. The Panel welcomed the opportunity to meet with representatives from Newlon and Breyer.

- The Panel commended that Breyer's completion rates for repairs improved over the last twelve months with figures either approaching or surpassing the target set by Newlon of 95% of repairs to be completed on time.
- The Panel also commended the improvements to Trust Call, now the Service Centre, with procedures in place that should help keep residents informed while they are waiting for a repair to be completed.

- Neil Watts also suggested that as the Panel develops it could not only look at short term issues but also work towards more long term goals, such as a Charter of Aspirations for the service generally.
- Panel will next meet with BSW for the gas contract and then hold a follow up meeting with Breyer to assess progress

Appendix 1: notes from the Scrutiny Panel's meeting with Breyer and Newlon

Residents' Scrutiny Panel

26 April 2012

Breyer – day to day repairs contract

Scrutiny Panel: Heath Richards; Marion Frenz; Jacky Tong

Breyer: Neil Watts, Divisional Director; Graham Shaw, Operations Manager

Newlon: Duncan Lee, Assistant Director Customer Services; Ewan Moar Senior Resident Involvement Officer.

Introductions were given and Neil gave an overview of Breyer, a family owned and run business, founded in 1956. It has expanded from being a roofing firm to include varied services such as B-Line - the day-to-day repairs service, a construction wing and a provider of renewable energy equipment such as solar panel systems. They have been providing Newlon's day-to-day repairs service since September 2010. Breyer also provide the repairs service for Dartford Council and Southern Housing. Each have their own methods of resident scrutiny and Breyer work within each of their specific structures and arrangements.

AREA 1 – Job completion rates (i.e. within agreed timescales)

Question (Q): These seem to be improving in the last 3-4 months, with some heading towards the 95% rate, others are at around the 88% completed within target timescale. Is that your impression?

Response Breyer (RB): Yes fair to say that in the middle of last year we were failing quite badly and we worked hard with Duncan to put this right. The cause was identified as an administrative problem mostly with a certain amount of incorrect data entry happening. Since then there has been better IT integration and closer working with Newlon.

Q: So is this a case of something that was less affecting the residents than being a problem of collecting statistics?

RB: Yes less a problem on site (i.e. a problem with the repair) and rather a 'back office' issue (i.e. entering and monitoring information).

An explanation was given on the collection and monitoring of statistics: the timescale starts from the point of booking the repair. Statistics are then monitored month on month so that a job not completed within the month it is raised will then be counted in the month that it is completed. This shows a true reflection of target hitting over the year. Other Housing Providers do not use this system, which can 'loose' jobs and under count uncompleted work. Breyer stated that Newlon's system was the better method.

Current performance figures were circulated by Newlon but were found to have errors for some months (notably April 2012).

Q: Emergency jobs have the worst completion rate within target time (24hrs). It is a small number of jobs, but is an important area. Is this an area for Breyer to look at, either for the work not being completed or for completion times not being recorded properly?

Response Newlon (RN): We found there was a problem with Orchard (Newlon's

database) in the way that it was set up. It was working to a 24 hour setting and would automatically add the completion time as the time the Service Centre operative updated it. Therefore a job completed the night before, within timescale, would be entered on the system the next day and have that next day's entry time added incorrectly as the completion time.

To correct this Orchard has now been set to a 'day' setting, not 24hrs, and operatives have been told to manually over-ride the 'time completed' section and add the actual completion time. This is expected to improve figures.

RECOMMENDATION: That Newlon monitors the new system of recording emergency jobs to see if this improves the statistics for rate of completion within timescale.

AREA 2 - use of Personal Data Assistants (PDAs or handheld computer)

Q: This follows on from statistics and job completions – do all operatives have PDAs?

RB: Yes all Breyer operatives do – but there are occasional problems, when they don't work, are broken etc. We also have subcontractors for certain jobs such as the scaffolders and drain specialists – they don't carry them.

Q: Does the use of the PDAs help with completion stats?

RB: The system is: a job completion is recorded on the PDA, this then gets logged on Service Manager (Breyer's database) manually by a supervisor. This is so that errors can be checked, that residents can be called back or the operative called to check details. Once logged as completed at Breyer, it then goes to Orchard (Newlon's database). This system allows for checking by text, if the response is negative the resident is then called, if that too is negative the repair can be inspected.

There was also an issue of Service Manager settings: A job could be raised on the system that was actually booked the previous day and then could be manually adjusted to show the date as being for the previous day. However a control setting in Service Manager means that if that job was also completed the previous day the completion date could not be back dated to the day before. This has been changed so that now a note can be added to the job that highlights that this is linked to an earlier day.

Q: Will stats collection be better at the next meeting?

RB: It is actually now very accurate, but human error will mean there is the occasional blip.

AREA 3 – Resident Feedback and complaints

Q: How much information is collected from residents about work completed?

RB: about 120-150 residents per month. We are contracted to reach 10% of jobs

Q: And Newlon?

RN: Yes, it used to be 30% of all jobs but there has been a change in the way jobs are handled – Trustcall (TC), the repairs call centre at Newlon, has recently been restructured. This is part of a major piece of work to improve customer satisfaction, following the Status survey results in December 2010 which showed repairs satisfaction had dropped slightly. TC has become the Service Centre and is now the first point of contact for all calls to Newlon and can handle many other queries apart from repairs; such as rent payment and requests for information.

Another part of their new work is to actively manage repairs. All jobs booked are followed up with a call to the resident to see if the job was attended, if completed, if satisfied and can we help in anyway. Residents are called the day after the appointment. The Service Centre then co-ordinates any follow up necessary. The aim is to improve the communication over repairs and improve resident satisfaction.

Q: When did this happen?

RN: Mid February, but with call backs starting in the last few weeks.

An additional piece of work involves 'Work Flows': another area of concern for residents is staff not responding to calls or emails within timescale. Now such calls are logged at the Service Centre and the staff member is requested to respond using a work flow (similar to an email) that has a deadline attached to it. Staff are then monitored as to whether they respond in time.

Q: What do Breyer find are the common themes from resident feedback?

One of the worst is actually showing ID badges. Breyer's repairs service is delivered by a section of Breyer called B-Line. All operatives wear B-Line uniforms, the vans are covered in B-Line Logos, so it is actually not difficult to identify an operative from Breyer, but residents still report that they did not remember seeing an ID presented.

Q: In terms of the feedback presented, statistics are used in the main, but do you collect qualitative information too? And is this used to give more depth and understanding of problems? Can we see it?

RB: Yes that is something that can be done.

ACTION: Breyer to supply the verbatim or qualitative feedback from residents for future Panel meetings

RN: Newlon used resident feedback gathered, including qualitative information, in the Repairs Service Review, one of the documents received by the Panel. This was completed in response to the STATUS survey results and aimed to identify concerns and recommend actions to improve. The new Call Centre system and the active handling of repairs was one of the main recommendations arising.

Q: One of the results showed that if a repair was not completed right first time then satisfaction was very poor for 'being kept informed'.

RN: Yes – it was issues like that that has led to the changes and the active management of repairs by calling all jobs back after they have been attended. Have also worked with Breyer to improve communication with their operatives too.

RB: Operatives have this re-inforced at their 'toolbox talks' and should not leave a job that can not be fixed first time without either giving a date for return wherever possible.

Where this is not possible – such as a variation (when a simple job becomes more complicated and needs Newlon to agree the additional work), communication has been improved so that they should be kept updated at each step of the variation process. i.e.: the variation is passed to Newlon; Newlon agrees or rejects the variation; new job is booked for a specific date etc. so that resident is aware of what is happening throughout.

Operatives also have to make a real effort to contact a resident who appears not to be at home for an appointment – not just card them and leave.

AREA 4 – call monitoring

Q: Does Newlon do call monitoring, how often and how are issues picked up on?

NR: Yes all calls are recorded and there is a new system for managers to oversee this. However, Newlon House (the new offices at Tottenham Hale) has not had its permanent BT telephones lines fitted, meaning we can not retrieve any calls at the moment.

The lack of BT lines has had implications for various aspects of Newlon so is very high on the agenda and BT suggest that they will be installed imminently, but we are reliant on them doing so.

When it is working the procedure will be that Team Leaders listen to 10 calls per officer per month for Service Centre staff and 3 calls per officer per month for other teams. They will be scored and marked against a set of service standard criteria and action will be taken with the member of staff if they fall below expectations on a certain number of calls (number to be confirmed).

Q: When will this begin?

NR: We don't know – but once the BT lines are installed.

Q: Shouldn't Newlon be promoting these improvements to residents as a positive piece of work?

NR: Newlon took a decision not to advertise in advance as the process has several steps and would not happen in one go. Call handling was also expected to actually get worse, before it improves once the new system is properly up and running.

RECOMMENDATION: that Newlon considers explaining and promoting the new Call Centre, the changes to call handling, call monitoring and the improved handling of repairs to residents

Q: The same question was then asked to Neil and Graham about call monitoring at Breyer

BR: Yes we have two systems, Silent listening – listening in to calls as they take place; and listening back to recordings. Staff also have what is called a 'Brick Plan' in

which blocks such as training and development are put in place to help staff build their capabilities. Call listening is one element of their assessment and development.

Q: How do residents know what standards are being worked to?

RN: Newlon has a set of standards that is published and promoted to residents. We also have to be mindful of how we handle residents' requests that we can't do. Newlon has a budget and has to set limitations on repairs and requests, however we should be able to say "no" in a way that is courteous and apologetic, with an explanation where necessary and support to resolve the problem in other ways where possible.

AREA 5 – Diversity and awareness of different needs

Q: Does Breyer train its staff in diversity and cultural awareness issues?

RB: Yes it does. It also produces a good quality manual for staff covering these issues.

Staff are also trained where suitable in identifying disability needs. Staff are not Occupational Therapists but are given training to look for certain problems and identify where aids and adaptations may be suitable. Training was developed in conjunction with Cambridge University and the University of Occupational Therapy.

Breyer also cover other areas such as apprenticeships and community projects.

NEXT STEPS

Ewan gave an explanation of the next steps:

- Minutes of the meeting would be written up
- Minutes to be forwarded to Staff and Panel to ensure they are accurate
- Panel to be supported to write a brief report directly from the minutes with recommendations and / or actions arising in order to help improve the service or give an endorsement of current service activity
- Report is forwarded to Breyer and Duncan Lee to see
- Report is seen at Newlon's Resident Services Committee (sub group of the Board) and at The Residents' Forum

It is currently proposed that the Panel will next meet BSW the gas contractors to scrutinise this service and return to Breyer for the meeting after that to follow up on issues arising from this meeting.

Neil thanked the panel and suggested that as the panel develops it could not only look at the short term issues but also work towards other more long term goals, and work towards a Charter of Aspirations for the service.

The Panel thanked Breyer for their time and effort.

Appendix 2: Notes / comments from Breyer on the recommendations

Recommendations:	<p>That the job completion statistics are checked for accuracy before being seen by the Panel.</p> <p>Comment – <i>Refers to the inaccuracies of the data provided by Duncan Lee (DL). I would suggest a Crystal Report that mirrors the reporting protocols used by NHT to enable checking and confirmation prior to the meetings.</i></p> <p>That ideally there is one methodology used for the completion statistics presented to the Panel and where this is not possible that a clear explanation of the different methodologies used are included on the sheets.</p> <p>Comment – <i>Crystal reporting as detailed above would negate this requirement.</i></p> <p>That Newlon monitors the new system of recording emergency jobs to see if it improves the statistics for rate of jobs completed within timescale and that this is re-assessed at the next Scrutiny Panel meeting with Breyer.</p> <p>Comment – <i>Action for DL however NHT's new job raising and recording protocols should ensure Breyer Group Limited (BGL) and NHT figures are in accord and accurate.</i></p> <p>That Breyer supply the verbatim or qualitative feedback from residents for future Panel meetings.</p> <p>Comment – <i>Results from telecom surveys to be presented to the next meeting.</i></p> <p>Newlon to consider explaining and promoting the new Service Centre, the changes to call handling, call monitoring and the improved handling of repairs to residents as a positive development.</p> <p>Comment – <i>Action for NHT</i></p>
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