

Mystery Shopping Report

Spring 2025

1. Background

- This Mystery Shopping exercise tested our responsiveness to residents' queries across the
 organisation. There were 40 email enquiries and 5 telephone enquiries (a total of 45 overall)
 tests carried out by 15 Newlon Mystery Shoppers.
- Mystery shoppers were given training prior to this exercise and now have a deeper understanding as to how the exercises are used to improve our services to residents.
 The way Mystery shoppers undertake the exercise was also streamlined.

Our rating system

• Gold: Fully meets the 2-ten standard.

A full response provided within 2 working days, or acknowledgement within 2 working days, followed by a full response within 10 working days.

- Silver: Partially meets the 2-ten standard.
 - Although no acknowledgement within initial 2 working days, a full response within 10 working days.
- Bronze: Does not meet the 2-ten standard.
 - Personal acknowledgement within 2 working days but no full response within 10 working days. Late acknowledgement or full response outside of 10 working days.
- No reply: Does not meet the 2-ten standard.
 - We thoroughly overhauled and reviewed the questions and scenarios to provide a baseline for deliverables key to Trust Newlon (post July 2022), asking our Mystery Shoppers to review responses to see if they offered **respect**, **warmth and empathy**, alongside our existing questions around professionalism and whether residents felt valued.

2. Summary

- 95% of email enquiries (38) were responded to effectively and met the full, Gold level standard.
- 2.5% enquiries (1) met the Silver level partially meeting 2-10 standard.
- 2.5% enquiries (1) did not meet the 2-ten standard (Bronze level).
- 0% email enquiries (0) were not responded to (No reply).
- 90% of enquiries responded to provided the required information or answered the question
 a slight decrease of 7% from the last report.
- 32 times it was mentioned that they thought the response was professional.
- 20 times it was mentioned that they felt the response was respectful.
- 18 times it was mentioned that they felt the response was friendly.

- 5 times it was mentioned that they felt the response was empathetic.
- Unprofessional was used twice; unempathetic was used three times.
- Overall value score for emails has risen to 8.43 (from 7.29 in Winter 24/25). This is the highest level it has been and, overall, the highest score to date.

However, it should be noted that whilst 90% of the responses that received a reply provided the required information and answered the question, it is a decrease of 7% from the previous report.

Following on from the previous report, a refresher training session was undertaken both of existing and new mystery shoppers. The training was undertaken over two sessions to make it easy for shoppers to attend. The training went very well with shoppers providing good feedback. This has largely eradicated inconsistencies involving the start dates, completing the surveys and courses of actions to follow based on certain scenarios. Nonetheless, it must be added that initially, two scenarios that were deemed to be 'no replies' had been responded to, and this was discovered in the checks made during the collation and analysis of the results.

3. Results

This results of this report highlight that all scenarios were responded to - the last time this occurred was in the Spring of 2022 - and all Teams involved deserve congratulations for this. The level of Gold responses has risen from 84% to 95% in the process. One scenario (2.5%) was a Silver response; this was because there was no auto-reply received by the shopper. This can be easily resolved by reminding the relevant Team (BSV). One response received a Bronze rating because the reply was outside of the Newlon 2-10 period; the response was received on Day 12. The overall value score increased to its highest level, 8.43 out of 10, since they were first introduced in Winter 2022/23. This score also marks a significant increase from 7.29 in the previous report.

The number of shoppers determining the tone of the email response they received was very positive, however, was slightly lower than in the previous report: 80% professional (down from 89%); 50% respectful (66% last report); empathetic 12.5% (down from 16%); however, there was a rise in responses that were interpreted as friendly (45% from 37%). Overall, however, it shows the level of positive change brought about by Trust Newlon since 2022.

3.1. Results - responses to email enquiries:

Overarching results: Timeframe	2 working days / Gold level	10 working days / Silver level	Late replies / Bronze level	No reply
Spring 2022	84%	2%	14%	0%
Autumn 2022	77%	9%	8%	6%
Winter 2022/2023	79%	6%	13%	2%
Spring 2023	71%	5%	12%	11%
Autumn 2023	62%	24%	7%	7%
Autumn 2024	92%	0%	3%	5%
Winter 2024/25	84%	0%	0%	16%
Spring 2025	95%	2.5%	2.5%	0%

There is evidence of cross-team working, which is pleasing to see. There are instances of replies being moved on quickly from the Service Centre to the relevant departments. One of the queries that was meant to be passed on from the Service Centre to the Asset Management Team was answered in full by the Service Centre, which also shows how Service Centre staff are doing their best in taking responsibility to resolve queries on the spot without forwarding them on, and have the knowledge to deal with day to day Asset Management queries.

Team results	Email enquiries	Gold	Silver	Bronze	No reply
Property Services					
Asset Management	2	2			
Special Projects	2	2			
Building Services	4	3	1		
Fire Safety	3	3			
Subtotal = 11	11	10	1	-	-
Housing Services					
Barnsbury Office	2	2			1
Neighbourhoods	4	4			
Financial Inclusion	4	4			
Income Recovery	2	2			
Homes and Lettings	4	4			
Service Centre	1	1			
Repairs	2	2			
Service Charge	2	2			
Service Resolution	1	1			
Investigations	2	1		1	
Subtotal = 24	24	23	-	1	-
Other teams					
Resident Sales	1	1			
Sales	2	2			
BD BEST	1	1			
STIR	1	1			
Subtotal = 5	5	5	-	-	-
Total	40	38	1	1	-

3.1. Analysis of telephone responses:

We had five telephone enquiries, and all connected successfully. Call waiting times and hold times were reportedly very low with shoppers pleasantly surprised at how quickly the calls were answered – this continues the trend found in the last report which highlighted a significant improvement in call waiting times. Mystery shoppers carried out telephone testing on the Service Centre (Repairs and general enquiries) and Income Recovery.

Telephone calls overall	
Total calls connected	5
Put on hold before speaking to the advisor	4
Were you given the Queue Buster option?	5/5
Did you take the option?	1
How long did it take for someone to reply back?	5 minutes
Calls being put on hold during the call	1

Quality of telephone calls	Yes
Did the advisor deal with the issues raised in the call?	5/5
Did the advisor listen to what you had to say?	5/5
Did they provide answers to all your questions?	5/5
Did the advisor give their name?	5/5

How would you describe your encounter?

All of the comments around the phone calls was very positive with shoppers saying their issue was dealt with, they felt listened to (5/5), that their name was asked (4/5 times) and a name given by the advisor (5/5) and that the query was answered within their remit (5/5). Overall, all shoppers were satisfied with the response received. Three people were on hold during the call, (less than 30 seconds, 2 minutes and 5 minutes), and they were all satisfied their query was answered.

However, one Shopper noted that whilst waiting to be connected to the Service Centre, after 4 minutes there was an error and buzzing sound on the phone. The Shopper stated they had to hang up and call back thereby compromising their place in the queue as a result. The Shopper also commented that this was not the first time the issue had occurred but would sometimes occur over the previous years. The issue was said to be more frustrating in the past when call waiting times were longer, and when this occurred, one would have to hang up and redial, finding their way to the back of the queue. Although the issue is less frustrating now, as call waiting times are lower, this still needs to be looked into in case it is occurring to other residents, too.

4. Conclusions

Where we've done well:

- All queries were responded to. This is the first time in three years there have been zero 'no replies'.
- The average value rating scored by residents is the highest it has been in a Mystery Shopping report: 8.43 / 10 since value scores were introduced in Winter 2022/23.
- By responding swiftly we have seen our value scores rise; Shoppers who receive a swift response feel respected and valued.
- Nonetheless, it is not just the speed of the response that makes a difference: staff who gave a
 full, carefully constructed reply received 10/10 scores from residents. A record 17 replies
 received were 10/10 replies (see Section 7).

- Shoppers' overall impression of their email response was that their requests were handled
 professionally by the officer or advisor. They felt that we answered their questions, provided
 relevant information, and it was to the point.
- All the telephone enquiries were very positive of the Service Centre and the Income Team.
- Just one email responded to was said to have contained errors in spelling, punctuation, or grammar, however, this was acknowledged by the Shopper to be very picky (missing a bracket and missing a comma). That reply received a 10/10 response overall as the reply was deemed to be excellent.
- No emails were said to contain abbreviations or acronyms without stating the full meaning this is an improvement from the previous report (2 emails).

Where improvement is required

- Some Shoppers commented that responses felt short or rushed and were therefore felt to be unprofessional or unempathetic and this reflected in their overall score.
- Some shoppers stated that the response did not contain a name.
- One Shopper phoning in reported hearing a buzzing sound prior to being connected and they
 had to hang up and re-dial, compromising their place in the queue. As it was not the first time
 the Shopper stated this had occurred, follow-up will be needed to ensure this is not a
 widespread occurrence.
- Two Teams did not have auto-replies activated and this led to one of the scenarios earning a Silver rating instead of Gold.

5. Managers' feedback

Managers have overall welcomed the positive results of this report stating they would cascade the findings to their respective teams. Whilst positive about the overall results, and the overall Gold rating for their team, the Sales Team mentioned their dismay with the relatively low value scores achieved and have taken on board the comments by Shoppers. As a result, their next Team meeting will discuss proper email sign offs with a name and role as well as putting more effort into the quality of the replies given to residents.

6. Staff singled out for praise

10/10 replies - Sheju Miah (twice), Davina Thomas-Dillon (twice), Osborn Boateng, Bee Soudi,
 Demi Akinrowo, Philip McDougall, Josh Mofolo, Lavina Leigh, Soumaya Guechchati, Antonia
 Cover, Katherine Hodge, Shakila Ahmed, Rahat Chowdhury, Katazyna Kozlowska, Zohura Karim.

7. Recommendations and actions

Recommendation	Action	Team / Person	Expected Rectification Date	RAG rating
Some email addresses did not have auto-responses i.e. BSV and RPW Team.	Reminder to Teams re: auto- reply.	BSV + RPW Team Managers		In progress
We need to work on moving away from signing just a first name with no job title, or a department without a name. Teams need to be frequently reminded regarding email signoffs so that new staff are on-boarded and Newlon achieves consistency across the business.	Follow the guidelines for email sign-offs. New staff onboarding, regular reminders.	All Managers		In progress
Having raised the value score, professionalism and empathy skills, we now need to work on listening skills and tone so that email responses do not sound rushed, short or contain errors.	Check for mistakes before sending using built in tools, re-read for tone, check with a colleague if unsure. Do not send an email immediately if you are unsure; leave it for a few minutes and reread	All Managers to remind staff		In progress
Re: phone call buzzing sound/call being dropped prior to connection - determine whether it is possible to ascertain whether this is a wider issue affecting many residents or something that affects just one person.	Contact with IT / Puzzel to find details of call and whether it is a singular or wider issue.	IT / administrator for Puzzel		Completed