

# RESIDENTS' FORUM – 19 JULY 2017

## MINUTES

**Members Present:** Martin Hughes (Chair); John Sadeghipoor; Blossom Shakespeare (acting Chair); Sonia Dobson; Lindsey Malcolm; Wendy Jackson; Lloyd Gale-Ward (Vice Chair); John Rymell; Tonu Miah; Geraldine Grant; Africa Alconchel-Guido; Kevin Brown; Ben Roe (Observer)

**Staff & Board Present:** Annette Morrison, Quality Manager; Duncan Lee, Head of Repairs & Maintenance; Stefan St Hilaire- Brown, Head of Building Services; Karen Orr, Senior Resident Involvement Officer (minute taker).

**Apologies:** William Crilly; Phil Williams; Sylvia Donaldson; Bill Henderson, Housing Services Director.

### 1. WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

- 1.1. The chair welcomed all participants. Noted that Rob Page had resigned. Ben Roe was attending as an observer and possible new Forum member. Martin reminded members not to bring up personal issues at the meeting.

### 2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

- 2.1 The minutes of 14 February and 24 May were agreed as a true and correct record.

### 3. MATTERS ARISING AND UPDATE ON ACTION POINTS

- 3.1 None.

### 4. COMPLETED REPAIRS SURVEY APP

- 4.1 Duncan gave some background about the completed repairs survey app which Newlon had been looking at for a while. The Residents' Services Committee (RSC) had requested the Forum were consulted. An external company, Bostock Marketing Group (BMG), has been carrying out repair satisfaction surveys with residents about repairs every quarter. As satisfaction results were up and down, Newlon carried out their own survey straight after some repairs, with better results. This led to the survey app initiative, which will assist in checking customers experience of whether an appointment is kept, repair completed etc.
- 4.2 The survey app will be on hand held devices used by the repairs contractors and will be handed to a representative selection of residents to fill in. The contractors will not see what residents fill in at any time. It will ensure that resident feedback is collected straight away after the repair and not three months later. The current proposal is to roll out the app with Wates, the main repairs contractor, then later with other contractors. Duncan asked for members' comments on the five proposed questions for the survey app, which had been suggested by the repairs working group
- 4.3 Lindsey was concerned about residents being reticent if asked to fill out the survey app by the contractor who had done the repair. In relation to Q4, he suggested that the contractor have a conversation with the resident there and then to resolve any issues on site. As an alternative to the survey app, residents could be asked to give feedback by text. Or if they don't want to do the survey app while the contractor is there, be asked to supply a phone

number or email. Duncan replied residents would be given as much re-assurance as possible that the contractors will not see their feedback. For the suggestion about feedback by phone/email it would have to be done straight away. John R suggested some re-wording of the proposed questions - such as "are all works completed *to your complete satisfaction?*" to link better to the three relevant repairs KPI's. He also suggested that questions 2 & 3 were essentially the same question and Martin agreed. Annette clarified that questions 2 & 4 were necessary - as sometimes residents expected different works to be done than was ordered (for Q2); and if there are different works required some may need an appointment for follow on works (for Q4).

- 4.4** Duncan explained that there was currently no way of measuring these questions other than what Wates tells Newlon, although we are trying to get that interface working. For example, if Wates subsequently changes a repairs appointment that Newlon originally made so that Newlon are informed. Wendy asked if Wates use a survey app with their other clients and what systems do they have. Duncan was not aware of other clients using it. Duncan explained that the questions were not set in stone and some tweaking could be done although it was important they were not complicated.
- 4.5** In Kevin's view, the survey app was a fantastic idea. He also thought that Newlon should have the capability to send residents an email with the same questions as the app. This would give them more time to answer those questions and the opportunity to add additional comments. Duncan replied that this could be looked into but also noted that past repair surveys by text had a very poor response. John R recommended if the email option was used that there should be an explanation why Newlon wanted to collect the feedback and then checked that they were happy with their responses to be sent. Lloyd asked what was happening about feedback for communal repairs and Martin responded something was afoot to address. John R said that the survey app would be much better than past system.
- 4.5** **ACTION:** agreed that Duncan will consider the Forum's views when finalising the completed repair survey app questions.  
**ACTION:** agreed that Duncan will look into the capability to send residents an email with the same questions used in the completed repair survey app if they do not wish to fill it in on the contractors hand held device. Including the ability to add additional comments.  
**POST MEETING ACTION:** Duncan agreed to find out when the app will go live and feedback to the Forum.

## **5. DOOR ENTRY AND CCTV SYSTEMS REPAIRS PROCUREMENT**

- 5.1** Stefan introduced this item and informed members that Newlon are going out to tender for a Door Entry and CCTV systems maintenance and repairs contract. There are currently two contractors. NACD who provide these services for our digital phone based systems which have been installed in newer homes in blocks. Then there is Sygma Security Systems who provide services for analogue systems in older homes – usually in smaller blocks and street properties.
- 5.2** Digital door entry & CCTV systems work through a phone box at the front of a block. So that when a flat number buzzer is pressed by a visitor it makes a call to a number nominated by the resident (usually a mobile) which allows them to talk to the visitor and open the main block door for them. Digital systems are future proofed because as technology evolves, only the software changes and the hardware does not have to be upgraded. For example, through software system upgrades, residents of new homes we are building now will get a picture message of the visitor pressing their flat number buzzer.

- 5.3 Sygma have a dedicated engineer who carries out preventative and reactive work and has built up knowledge of our properties with analogue systems. NACD offer gold, silver and bronze service levels for their systems. The gold service is 40% more than the bronze. Some of our blocks are currently on different levels and part of the tender will be about having one level of service. Martin asked what % of the service charge it would be, as service charges are becoming more of a heated issue for residents. Stefan replied that it will depend on the block or street property. Stefan noted that there has been feedback from residents in some of our blocks that these systems are too expensive. It will therefore be a consideration if residents would be willing to accept a lower level of service for a lower cost.
- 5.4 Lindsey asked about NACD offering a service for their systems which they exclusively maintain and if this meant no other contractor could do this. Stefan explained that the NACD is a closed protocol system. Newlon have written into the current contract that our concierge team can operate and maintain the system. All the parts can be maintained by others but the down time is lost and they would struggle. Generally only NACD can operate their own systems although there are components of the system, such as hardware, that could be taken away from them. Usually it's the door entry hardware that breaks down and not the software. On analogue systems the controls can be changed while the hard wiring is left in. With the NACD digital systems all the SMART elements are happening in the cloud. In response to another question Stefan noted that NACD's performance has been quite good. Also that the monitoring was done in house, not by the contractors, and that will not change.
- 5.5 Lindsey was concerned that Newlon would lose value if NACD only do the software part of the repair and maintenance service needed. Stefan did not think it would be a problem as Newlon were talking to NACD & Sygma plus Delta to understand the detail. Noted that one of the Queensland Road blocks had ongoing issues with the door entry system breaking down. The key concern for residents there was getting a rapid response to resolve. Stefan explained that the Fire Brigade had been going into the block to check fire safety and had over ridden the door entry system, causing these problems. Newlon blocks are secure by design but emergency services can get access. In the event of a fire, the door entry system will activate and automatically open certain internal doors.
- 5.6 John S asked if residents like him, living in a block with an existing door entry system would be getting an upgrade. Stefan explained that it was just about tendering to get the best service at the best price. John said that security was the most important aspect for him and the meeting agreed.
- 5.7 **ACTION:** agreed to consider the comments about cost; having a service that can respond rapidly and provide security.  
**ACTION:** agreed to update the Forum on progress of the door entry and CCTV procurement at a later date.

## 6. FIRE SAFETY AT NEWLON – AFTER GRENFELL

- 6.1 Stefan introduced the Housing Services Directors report about Newlon's approach to fire safety following the fire at Grenfell Towers. Immediately after the fire a review of Newlon buildings was carried out. This found out that Rivers Apartments, a 21 stories block in Cannon Road, had aluminium composite materials (ACM) cladding on it. The Fire Service were then invited to Rivers to carry out a review of fire safety there. As there are lots of active fire systems in Rivers, such as sprinklers and a backup water supply and generator they have classified it as low risk. Together with the builder Galliford Try, Newlon will be

taking off the cladding and looking for a suitable product to replace it. They are currently conducting tests at the Building Research Establishment to find a suitable replacement.

- 6.2** ACM has also been found on five other buildings over 18 metres. Some lower rise buildings at Cannon Road were found to have ACM on their walkways so those panels have been taken off as they were deemed more of a risk. Stefan's team have been busy visiting the 50 Newlon buildings over 18 metres and meeting the Fire Brigade from those boroughs. This involves spending 4-5 hours walking through each buildings with them and checking all parts. As a result a good working relationship has been built up with them. Stefan's team are still meeting the Fire Brigade almost every day to visit buildings and are providing information about the building design and strategies. A review of buildings under 18 metres will also be carried out. The majority of Newlon buildings have a stay put policy in the event of a fire and that has not changed.
- 6.3** Sonia asked about Albemarle Court, Stefan explained that a limited amount of ACM had been found on the external facade. Newlon are waiting for a suitable product to replace this. The Fire Brigade are happy with all the fire safety systems in place there and an extra concierge and patrols have been added. John R asked why cladding was necessary, what is the benefit and why isn't it incorporated into the building structure. Stefan replied that the cladding can protect the external part of buildings; it helps provide thermal insulation; is part of modern construction techniques and can improve how the building looks.
- 6.4** Kevin asked whether service centre staff had received any fire safety training so they know when to escalate calls from residents that are related to fire safety. Stefan replied that service centre staff have been told to send such calls through to his team as a CRM case. Stefan agreed to raise the possibility of delivering this type of training with Matt Phillips. Annette clarified that fire safety issues are recorded on CRM. Ben raised a query about the fire alarms at Fenton Street as residents don't know if they work as it has not been tested.
- 6.5** Noted that residents in affected blocks had received text messages, followed up by letters from Newlon. Martin stated that he was proud of the way Newlon had reacted following the Grenfell fire and the fire safety work they'd carried out.
- 6.6** **ACTION:** agreed that Stefan will raise the suggestion, with the Head of Customer Services, about training service centre staff on fire safety issues. So that they can recognise which queries raised by residents should be escalated to the Newlon team responsible.  
**POST MEETING ACTION:** agreed that the Head of Repairs will investigate testing the fire alarm at Fenton Street.

## **7. SIX MONTHS COMPLAINTS REVIEW**

- 7.1** The six month review of complaints from the beginning of February to the end of June 2017 was discussed. Annette explained that the majority of Stage Zero and Stage 1 complaints are about repairs, then estate issues. Her report provided a breakdown of complaints by tenure type. Newlon are getting more Stage 2's than expected. The table at 2.1 showed the complaint types for these, with ones about latent defects being raised by leaseholders. Blossom and Annette both felt that Stage 2's are not about the same themes all the time. Stage 2's are handled by the Quality Officer.
- 7.2** One of the problems in the present system is that only eight Stage 2 appeals a month can be heard by the Complaints Panel. If more than eight are received it can lead to delays. Some Stage 2 complaints do not get closed off quickly enough after their appeal as they are about difficult issues. There are currently 30 Stage 2's which have been open for longer

than six months for a variety of reasons as summarised in the table at 3.1. Annette meets with the Service Resolution team (who handle Stage 1's) each month about what can be learnt from complaints. Learning is also fed back to Managers.

- 7.3** Martin asked Blossom, a member of the Stage 2 Complaints Panel, whether she thought there had been an improvement in the treatment of complaints. Blossom replied yes but wondered why Stage 2 complaints did not get resolved at Stage 1, but also acknowledged that some are complex. She pinpointed problems with contractors not being able to do a first time fix leading to complaints. Then once residents have raised it as a complaint, Newlon could have done something to resolve it sooner. Martin could see that some improvements on complaints had been made and Annette agreed that Stage Zero's and the turnaround of Stage 2's was better. She added that more needed to be done to head off increasing numbers of Stage 1's by resolving the issue, although it was inevitable that some would go to Stage 2 and the Housing Ombudsman (HO). Most decisions on complaints that go to the HO are found in favour of Newlon.
- 7.4** The HO now have an early resolution approach. Newlon sometimes agree as a one off to supply them with extra information to resolve complaints before a formal HO review. A member talked about their experience of making complaints where they felt the issues were not progressed. They found Newlon very defensive and did not admit mistakes instead of making things right, which was very frustrating for them. In addition, some responses to the complaint had been factually incorrect. Annette acknowledged this was sometimes why residents went to Stage 2 and that incorrect information should not be sent out to complainants. John R commented that Newlon shouldn't just satisfy the customer, they should delight them.
- 7.5** Other members talked about their/their neighbours' experience of raising complaints. Some thought there was no point in complaining. Others only complained because they said the team responsible for the issue would not engage with them. A member had rung the service centre about an ongoing complaint issue and were told they could not be put through to the Estates team to discuss. Another member had two failed appointments with Wates and when they contacted Newlon, were advised that there had been problems with the interface as appointments had not gone into Newlon's system. It was suggested that in cases like this, if Newlon identified something that was going wrong then they should take action to correct and reduce complaints.
- 7.6** A member explained that they only received a document about how to apply for a parking permit where they live after making a complaint. However, they had not received one from the Estates team. Annette confirmed that learning from complaints and what can be done to reduce them is fed back to the relevant manager. Karen reported that the Scrutiny Panel would be looking at repairs and communications about them this year.

**ACTION:** Agreed to investigate if residents are being advised by the service centre that they cannot receive call backs from the Estates team about complaint issues.

**ACTION:** Agreed to investigate if there had been problems with the Wates/Newlon IT interface as appointments had not gone into the Newlon system and if now resolved.

**POST MEETING ACTION:** Agreed to check if all stage 1 complaints were being raised at the contract meeting with Wates and if they were, was this working in resolving issues.

## **8. MYSTERY SHOPPING**

- 8.1** The latest report showing the mystery shopping results for the last two exercises in autumn and spring, was introduced by Annette. These were a mix of phone and email exercises. Results were poorest in spring for the Lettings team and Annette had already discussed with that team Leader. She noted there had been a lot of recent changes in the Service Centre with 4 new team members and staff moving to other teams.
- 8.2** A member reported that had been involved in the mystery shopping and had found the responses they received from staff were excellent. Wendy commented that she found the Service Centre had improved so much and was really good now.

## **9. PERFORMANCE REPORT**

- 9.1** Members discussed performance as shown in their first report since deciding on a balanced score card format for their meetings. In response to a question about there being 133 fire risk assessment actions, Martin clarified that these are individual actions resulting from the all the assessments. Noted that the percentage of complaints resolved at Stage 0 was very poor against the target.

## **10. FEEDBACK FROM & TO THE BOARD/RSC/SCRUTINY PANEL**

- 10.1** Martin gave feedback from the Board, acknowledging that much of their time in the past month had been spent on fire safety. The Board, who are independent, had been very impressed with how Newlon had handled fire safety concerns. Residents' Services Committee had also touched on fire safety issues at their meeting.
- 10.2** Blossom had recently attended and enjoyed the National Tpas (Tenant Participation Advisory Service) Conference with another involved resident. Many other residents and housing organisations from across the country had attended with the conference theme being about engagement and change. An issue that came up often was what were housing organisations doing to support young people as it was hard for them to get housing. One of the workshops was run by Onga Homes, where all Board members were tenants who ran the organisation. Blossom suggested members check out this [link](#) to the workshops.
- 10.3** As the Scrutiny Panel was not meeting until the 26<sup>th</sup> July, there was no feedback.