

RESIDENTS' FORUM – 30 NOVEMBER 2016

DRAFT MINUTES

Members Present: Martin Hughes (chair); Sylvia Donaldson; Sonia Dobson; Lloyd Gale-Ward (vice-chair); Wendy Jackson; Tonu Miah; Ruth Cadby; Geraldine Grant; Eunice Sinyinza; Blossom Shakespeare.

Staff & Board Present: Steve Hitchins, Board Member; Bill Henderson, Housing Services Director; Nadja Rajgelj, Head of Procurement; Annette Morrison, Quality Manager; Karen Orr, Senior Resident Involvement Officer (minute taker).

Apologies: John Sadeghipoor; William Crilly; Lindsey Malcolm; John Rymell; Rob Page; Phil Williams.

1. WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

1.1. The chair welcomed all participants who then introduced themselves.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

2.1 The minutes of 27 September were agreed as a true and correct record.

2.2 Agreed for future minutes to remove the reference to clicking onto the meeting's papers.

3. MATTERS ARISING AND UPDATE ON ACTION POINTS

3.1 Agreed to keep the first action open until Newlon can come back with a definite answer. Martin commented that it would be very useful if this action could be implemented.

3.2 The rest of the actions and their updates from the meeting of 27 September were noted.

3.3 **ACTION:** Agreed to keep the first action (about sending texts re communal repairs and outages to the correct residents in a block) open until Newlon replies with a definite answer.

4. INVOLVING RESIDENTS IN PROCUREMENT

4.1 Nadja Rajgelj, the Head of Procurement presented this item. She outlined why involving residents in procurement (the buying of goods, works and services by Newlon) was important. It can improve service delivery as residents are at the delivery end and so are in a better position to see how they can be improved. Satisfaction can also be improved and better value for money achieved. Although for the latter, it is sometimes hard to prove that reduced costs are the direct result of involving residents, unless a specific idea from them has been costed.

4.2 Nadja also spoke about Amicus Horizon, a peer Housing Association. In 2015 the University of Westminster published a report about the benefits of involving Amicus residents, including in procurement. Two procurement projects were analysed in this report. The first – a new contract for boiler replacements, involved residents in the specification

and the questions for contractors and savings of 30% were achieved. The second, involved residents in the grounds maintenance contract, where they drew up a Contractor Code of Conduct.

- 4.3** Next, Nadja outlined the considerations when involving residents. The biggest consideration was the time commitment of residents. Some procurement exercises are very long and have two stages so involving residents means that forward planning is needed. There are also the external regulations that Newlon must follow and which mean they need to train residents about these processes. Such as ensuring that the scoring criteria are applied consistently and what can be taken into account when scoring. Newlon would not expect residents to be able to evaluate the technical elements of a tender, more the elements related to service delivery. Other considerations are confidentiality; conflict of interest and code of conduct.
- 4.4** Newlon's procurement procedures sets out two types of involvement. For example, where residents are consulted by survey or invited to a focus group to give their opinions. Then there is direct involvement, like residents helping set questions for suppliers or suggesting relevant key performance indicators or evaluating tender submissions. This type of involvement requires a big time commitment from residents. Nadja commented that it would be more relevant to involve residents in procurement about services/works that affect them such as cleaning; repairs etc.
- 4.5** Three key success factors for involving residents were suggested by Nadja. Again, the time commitment needed from them; forward planning to ensure they had enough notice and a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities so that they understood the process and expectations. There were also challenges to involving residents. For instance, how do Newlon decide whether the residents' views they get from a consultation are representative of the wider resident body? Sonia asked about the lift contract and Nadja acknowledged that this had dragged on as there were quite a few issues. However a lift contractor had now been appointed for five years.
- 4.6** Martin thought that some residents would be nervous of getting involved in procurement and asked if training would be given. Nadja replied that Newlon were developing a high level plan of procurement for the next 12-18 months. This would be ready by February/ March 2017 and would help decide what residents could be involved in (which the Forum could have a say about); then whether to consult or directly involve and then provide the training needed. Ruth questioned how many procurements would Nadja be doing in a year. Nadja explained that procurement is devolved to the teams and her role is to guide them through the process and the consultation. She is also responsible for the overall plans. In response to Martin asking about the effect of the UK leaving the European Union, Nadja explained that Public Contracts Regulations were now English Law. Ruth, Wendy and Geraldine all volunteered to be involved in future procurement projects.
- 4.7** **ACTION:** Agreed to consider Ruth, Wendy and Geraldine for involvement in future procurement projects – in line with the resident involvement plan agreed for each project.
- ACTION:** Agreed that Nadja will return to a future Forum when the Procurement Plan has been developed and ask their views on what and how they and other residents could be involved.

5. WHAT RESIDENTS CARE ABOUT

- 5.1** Bill Henderson, Housing Services Director, led the Forum through his presentation, looking at different sources of information. The three top service request from residents were

repairs; rent and complaints. Then looking at what residents call us the most about, apart from repairs, the top request for April to September 2015 was “can I buy my home?” Bill noted that this was during the time the Government said they would extend the Right to Buy to Housing Association residents. During the same period the next top request was about transfers, however Newlon only transferred 12 residents last year. Looking at a later list for December 2015 to May 2016, residents called Newlon the most about vulnerability. During this time Newlon had written to vulnerable residents.

- 5.2** Two surveys of Newlon residents from 2011 and 2013 were then discussed. In both of these, repairs came out on top. Bill commented that repairs was the most important thing that Newlon did and they need to get it right. There had been some change in the relative position of Value for Money (VfM) between the surveys as the percentage dropped in the 2013 one. Although leaseholders regard VfM as very important they recognise private rents are very high now and know that social rents are good value. Dealing with anti-social behaviour was further down the list, not because residents didn't think it was important but because most didn't experience it. Claiming welfare benefits and paying rent became increasingly important to residents from 2011 to 2013 during the time of welfare benefits reform.
- 5.3** Research by Ipsos MORI about what makes residents happy with their landlord was carried out in 15 London Boroughs in 2008. Bill noted this was old data, but still relevant. Repairs was again at the top, with rents coming second. Looking into complaints at Newlon, repairs were most complained about followed by customer care. Some of the common complaint themes were about Newlon not doing what they said they would, delays and expectations (occasionally where something is expected of Newlon that they don't actually do).
- 5.4** Bill asked members if they agreed with the above as Newlon would be writing its business plan soon and it would be good to have their views on what it should focus on. Martin asked if what residents care about the most has always been in that order - repairs and rents. Bill and Annette confirmed that repairs had always been residents' top priority. Martin commented that communication could be improved, although residents not getting the right answer could be misconstrued as staff being rude. He added, that Newlon needed to manage residents' expectations, tell them up front and avoid confrontation. There followed a discussion about repairs in new, newer and older homes with Bill noting that dampness and cold can be a real problem in the latter.
- 5.5** Ruth brought up financial incentives for down-sizing that had been on the list of what residents call Newlon about. She asked if this could be something that Newlon would consider to release bigger homes for families. Bill answered that Newlon had offered incentives and recognised it would have to be a good offer to encourage the resident down-sizing. However they don't get many requests. Martin asked if the policy where all new homes nominations are given to the Local Authority and not existing residents will ever change. Bill answered that there will be a small change in Government guidance. However Newlon get funding to build new homes and house people the Local Authorities have prioritised as being in the greatest need.
- 5.6** Bill asked whether the fact that many residents called about a particular issue made it the most important one. Many residents contacted Newlon about buying their own home, but in fact most could not afford it. He posited that the top issue of repairs and maintenance identified through the surveys was a better indicator of what was most important. Rather than the number of calls made by residents about an issue. Lloyd added, that he regularly experienced Newlon not doing what they said they would and thought this was also an

important issue. Bill concluded by saying that Newlon were trying to promise less, but do it better and stop creating variations. Standardising what Newlon does like this will mean that they can handle things consistently and reliably. Noted that the BMG survey results show an increase in resident satisfaction.

5.7 ACTION: Agreed that the priorities discussed be reflected in the business plan.

6. TRANSFERS

6.1 Bill proposed a change to how Newlon handle transfers, subject to the Forum's views. In 2015/16 there were 227 general needs lettings and of those only seven were transfers and five were decants. Local Authorities get all the nominations for new build homes and Newlon get 75% nominations of relets. Wendy asked if residents who are decanted are moved back into their home once the works have been completed. Bill explained that Newlon offer a move back, but most decanted residents don't take this up. There were also 474 residents on Newlon's transfer waiting list which is operated on a points system. The longest time on the waiting list has been 28 years. As a result more residents on the waiting list rehouse themselves than are rehoused by Newlon.

6.2 Transfer are not a legal obligation and can be a lot of work for little result. Accepting residents on the list can offer false hope. Martin noted there is a website called Home Swappers where residents can arrange their own mutual exchanges and that Newlon promote this route. The proposed new transfers system involves ending the current transfer list; only taking residents with the highest priority who have a medical need or where Newlon need to do works. The highest priorities would be where residents must move and the judgement would be made independently.

6.3 Martin questioned how Newlon would define which residents must move and Bill explained that there would be a written definition. The new system would take away the judgement from staff. Residents already on the list could be consulted about what they thought about the proposals. Newlon would probably receive a lot of complaints. TONU commented that Newlon should address overcrowding especially in Tower Hamlets. Lloyd wondered if the space in Newlon homes could be modified. Bill replied that Newlon were concerned about overcrowding but there were not enough homes in London.

6.4 ACTION: Forum members agreed in principle with the proposed new transfer system.

7. RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY UPDATE

7.1 Members discussed the proposal to schedule quarterly Forum instead of the current bi-monthly meetings and start them at 6pm. Some members were concerned about getting away from their workplaces in time. Noted that some would prefer an earlier rather than a later meeting start. Agreed to trial for a year and then review.

7.2 Karen reported that a review of Resident Liaison Representatives (RLR's) was taking place. Recruitment had been successful and there were now about 41 RLR's although not all were active. The results of the review would be reported back to the Forum. Resident satisfaction for the "listening and acting" question asked by BMG was steadily moving up. Karen acknowledged that residents could be responding to this and thinking about their last contact with Newlon rather than resident involvement per se.

7.3 ACTION: Agreed to change the number and scheduling of Forum meetings to better align with those of the Scrutiny Panel and Residents' Services Committees (RSC) and facilitate effective feedback. Specifically, to hold four quarterly meeting a year plus an additional annual planning and strategy one. Forum meetings will take place after Scrutiny Panel ones and before those of the RSC. This new scheduling will be reviewed after the first year. Karen will draft a schedule of meetings for 2017 and send out to members.

ACTION: Agreed to report back on the RLR review once it was concluded.

ACTION: Agreed that it was up to the Concierge and Estate Inspection Service how they met the demand from RLR's to inspect outside of usual office hours as this flexibility was written into their contract. To request that Sonia attend inspections outside of office hours.

8. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS, INCLUDING DEFECTS

8.1 Rent arrears remain low. There are still some issues in the service centre but call answering had improved. More residents were continuing to move onto the internet. The Q Buster statistics had been included in the papers for the first time. Martin commented that the % of residents satisfied with complaints handling was looking good. Bill commented that we get better satisfaction results if residents are surveyed on the phone and by someone independent.

9. FEEDBACK FROM & TO THE BOARD/RSC/SCRUTINY PANEL

9.1 Ruth reported back on the Scrutiny Panel held on 10 November which had looked at the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (E, D & I) Audit. Members had received a very good and detailed report to consider. The general finding was that Newlon was generally doing okay on E, D & I but could do better. For example in the words that staff use and in providing on line training. Newlon was doing very well in the diversity of their staff.

9.2 Steve reported that it had been suggested at the last Residents Services Committee (RSC) that the new Chair of Scrutiny attend the next one in March. Lloyd gave feedback from the last RSC he had attended and informed members that Newlon is looking at getting more detailed comments from residents who reply to the BMG surveys. The aim is to find out the underlying reasons for residents' dissatisfaction.

9.3 Steve spoke to members about a recommendation from the Remuneration and Audit (R & A) Committee. The Newlon Board has one resident member, Martin. By happy circumstance, Martin is also the Chair of the Forum. The R & A Committee would like to formally make the Forum Board member the Chair of the Forum as it is now. That would mean being Chair of the Forum would become part of the job description for the resident Board member. So when Martin's term on the Board ends, his replacement would also chair the Forum.

9.2 ACTION: Agreed to invite the Scrutiny Chair to the March RSC.

ACTION: Agreed the R & A Committee's recommendation that the resident Board member will also be Chair of the Forum as part of their role.