

RESIDENTS' FORUM – 26 September 2017

MINUTES

Members Present: Martin Hughes (Chair); Blossom Shakespeare; William Crilly; Sonia Dobson; Sylvia Donaldson; Eunice Sinyinza; Wendy Jackson; Africa Alconchel-Guido; Ben Roe

Staff & Board Present: Bill Henderson, Housing Services Director; Annette Morrison, Quality Manager; Graham Watts, Community Services Manager; Imran Yasin, Interim Head of Procurement; Karen Orr, Senior Resident Involvement Officer (minute taker).

Apologies: John Sadeghipoor; Lindsey Malcolm; Phil Williams; Lloyd Gale-Ward; John Rymell; Kevin Brown; Geraldine Grant.

1. WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

1.1. The chair welcomed all participants and introduced Imran.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING, MATTERS ARISING, ACTION POINTS UPDATE

2.1 The minutes of 19 July were agreed as a true and correct record.

2.2 **ACTION:** Agreed that Karen will email members the update for points four and six when available.

3. COMMUNITY SERVICES REVIEW

3.1 The review was introduced by Graham, the Community Services Manager. The Community Services (CS) team was created after Newlon Fusion's services were taken back in house. Their three main work areas include welfare benefits advice & inclusion; employment and community facilities. CS services are external to providing housing services and it was to Newlon's credit that it still continues to focus on these in the current economic climate. In contrast, some Housing Associations were cutting back. After a discussion about this, Graham also commented that his team's work was about dealing with people, making sure their social and financial well-being is cared for so they will be better residents as a result.

3.2 It had been a good year so far for the CS team and halfway through most targets were being met. The team was well on its way to achieving its end of year outcomes, especially in their key areas. Martin noted that the yearly target for helping residents into work or apprenticeships had already been achieved. Graham replied that the work in this area would continue for the rest of the year. Sonia commented that she had personally benefitted from the support of the CS team and their employment services as she had been helped into work. The roll out of Universal Credit was affecting Newlon residents, with some feeling more stress with emotional and mental health issues coming to the fore.

3.3 Graham outlined the social value from his team's work and Africa asked what was the methodology used. He explained it was known as the social return on investment model and was one that was internationally recognised. Bill added that the CS team are now concentrating on work that has the most effect for residents. This work helps residents prioritise paying their rent. If residents getting Universal Credit (UC) do not pay their rent, then after eight weeks Newlon can ask for alternative payment arrangements – direct

payment of rent to Newlon. Although payment of rent by residents on UC has been going well at Newlon.

- 3.4** Martin noted that CS team were doing well in renting out the two community centres. Graham added that not all Housing Association have centres now but Newlon had decided to keep a focus on them. Wendy thought that the CS team concentrated on large estates like the Barnsbury. But for boroughs like Enfield there were a lot of street properties and not many blocks. Graham explained that although Newlon does not have a centre in all boroughs, they try and work with other service providers to make inclusive and promote the work that they do. He also pointed out that in terms of his team's employment and benefit advice work – the service is equal and residents from any borough can come to the team to access. Martin brought this item to a close by stating the work of the CS team was all looking good.

4. PROCUREMENT AND INVOLVEMENT

- 4.1** Imran Yasin, the Interim Head of Procurement brought the Forum up to date with procurement at Newlon with his presentation. In November last year, Nadja Ragjelj, then Head of Procurement, had initiated a discussion with members and said she would return once the Procurement Plan had been developed to ask their views on what and how they and other residents could be involved.
- 4.2** Imran then outlined the four stages of the procurement process and the need to involve residents. Planning and preparing resident involvement for each procurement would be part of the first stage. Awarding a contract was a regulated process and similar to the recruitment of staff where a job description and person specification is needed. There were many areas where residents could potentially be involved - such as service levels or standards. Options for how residents could get involved were surveys; workshops; presentations and evaluation. For the first options there would be more residents involved and less for the last ones. Also those residents involved in scoring (the evaluation) would need to represent a wider view and not just their own.
- 4.3** Procurements coming up were door entry and CCTV which Stefan had spoken about at the last Forum. Then there was individual heating systems, TV and aerial systems and lastly cleaning. Imran asked members for their views. Wendy had experience of interviewing a previous repairs contractor which included site visits. Martin asked if the European Union procurement rules would still apply after Brexit with Imran replying that the UK had actually added more than required by the EU rules e.g. such as advertising tenders nationally. Eunice, William and Sonia were interested in being involved in the cleaning contract. Eunice asked why all residents don't have a say in service contracts such as cleaning, especially when some estates pay more than others. Imran explained there were currently several cleaning contractors with different service levels. But there has been resident feedback that they want one cleaning contractor with the same standard across Newlon. This will be considered for the next cleaning procurement.
- 4.4** Bill explained some of Newlon's thinking behind the current cleaning service being packaged into smaller contracts when it was procured in 2014/15. Since then some had performed better than others and some were more expensive which affected service charges. Newlon has been struggling with getting a better service from those not performing so well although one has started performing a bit better. Martin and Wendy asked about retrofitting modern door entry systems into street properties. Annette clarified that there were different standards for different types of blocks. Also, when the Head of

Building Services, Stefan, came to the last Forum he had explained there would not be retrofitting so that all blocks had a door entry with video system.

- 4.5** For the upcoming cleaning procurement Bill noted that Newlon will go back to basics, talk to the Forum, other residents groups, and individual residents and be more methodical in their approach. Africa was concerned about the cleaning company where she lives. Their workers had low pay and she was horrified Newlon employed this company. Wendy noted that she never sees the same cleaners. Bill agreed that there are ethical considerations to think about like paying the minimum wage. These examples were the sort of issues that Newlon wanted to talk to residents about. There had been little discussion with residents last time and Newlon had learnt from that.
- 4.5** Imran proposed different levels of resident involvement during these procurements - workshops, surveys, presentations and evaluation. He would bring the results of these back to another Forum. Members agreed to feedback their views and Karen would collate for Imran. Sonia suggested members also talk to their neighbours and feed their views in.
- 4.6** **ACTION:** agreed Imran will involve Eunice, William and Sonia on the cleaning contract procurement.
ACTION: agreed members will feedback their views about the resident involvement proposals for future procurements.

5. RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY UPDATE

- 5.1** Karen consulted members for their views and ideas about initial plans to review and update the Resident Involvement (RI) Strategy. The review takes place every three years and is a specific expectation of the Regulator – the Homes and Community Agency. It was proposed to consult residents and staff for their individual and collective views (as members of their residents' group or staff team). A joint resident/staff group would be set up to take this forward.
- 5.2** In discussion, Martin noted that Steve Hitchens, the previous RSC Chair had always been keen for Forum members to meet outside of Newlon House and visit residents elsewhere. William did not think this was a good idea. Wendy asked how many members present were also involved in local groups. Eunice talked about her involvement in a local group in Edmonton. Recently, along with other residents she had door knocked neighbours about filling in a survey and as a result got to know them better. Sonia suggested the chairs of local groups could be invited to attend a Forum, local groups could also feed into it. Martin was in favour of inviting speakers and observers from other groups.
- 5.3** Although it was early days, thoughts on what the new strategic aims could cover, included:
- increasing digital involvement
 - improving mechanisms for feedback to residents
 - developing more ways to engage residents outside of meetings and gather wider views and opinions
 - improving mechanisms to judge how residents have influenced Newlon
- 5.4** Members were informed that local resident groups now had a route to make a collective complaint within the existing complaints process. Three members recently left the Forum and another three were recruited in their place. Planning has started to set up a digital group of involved residents from all parts of the resident involvement structure to feed into

the impact assessment process. Members stated they would prefer this was a group that met face to face.

5.5 ACTION: agreed that Karen will invite Ben, Sonia, Wendy, Blossom, Sylvia and Eunice to take part in a joint resident/staff working group to oversee the review and development of a new strategy with the help of the RI team. The group will be time limited and have the power to make recommendations.

ACTION: agreed that the impact assessment group for involved residents will be one that meets face to face and in real time.

6. ENERGY SAVING & SUSTAINABILITY

6.1 Bill talked to his paper about Energy Efficiency and Sustainability. Explaining that there are three main ways that Newlon tries to be energy efficient, these are separate from green initiatives although they often overlap. His paper concentrated on the former. The first is that Newlon builds very energy efficient buildings with particularly high levels of insulation and low energy loss. On many recent larger schemes, Councils have insisted upon the use of Combined Heat and Power (CHP) systems. An initiative which might be good for the environment but is not always financially beneficial to residents.

6.2 Secondly, Newlon improve the insulation in their existing homes although it is difficult to do so in listed buildings and they can't do as much as they would like, like install new efficient heating systems. Thirdly, in Newlon's management of residents' homes they fit energy efficient lightbulbs such as LED's. In communal areas Newlon sometimes replace lamps with LED's as it costs more over time if they don't – so spending now to save later.

6.3 Newlon can also assist residents in giving them advice about energy efficiency as there are many changes they could make about the way they live that could reduce their energy consumption. Newlon used to do more of this type of work when Fusion existed. They still could do more through Community Services, but this would mean some other work would have to be dropped. Or Newlon could just do more publicity.

6.4 Africa asked if Newlon have considered installing solar panels with feed in tariffs on residents' homes. Bill responded that Newlon would take the lead on this if residents wanted us to. However on most street properties it would not be possible. Newlon had looked at solar panels and feed in tariffs, although it's generally not beneficial to residents directly. Wendy suggested getting residents involved in coming up with the ideas and feeding them up to Newlon, such as fitting more efficient key meters.

6.5 ACTION: agreed Bill to speak to Graham Watts, the Community Services Manager, to look into solar panels and also raise within Newlon.

ACTION: agreed Wendy, Ben and Africa to meet up and discuss possible ideas around energy efficiency and sustainability to feed back to Newlon. Karen to arrange.

7. PERFORMANCE – BALANCED SCORECARD

7.1 The scorecard showed that performance for the contact centre was not so good over this period including for August when there are less calls. This was due to staff being promoted, creating vacancies and other staffing issues. Ben commented that when he calls the service centre, it's always very busy. Bill acknowledged that residents may give up holding on and redial.

7.2 Voids and arrears were performing well. Martin asked about the average number of days to complete a repair which was showing a red status and downward trend. Annette then looked at the detailed information for this KPI held online. The comments there, cited issues with contractors which were being investigated. Agreed that the Forum would be provided with the outcome of this investigation. Wendy was impressed with the KPI for lift available/down time showing a performance of 99.59% for the period.

7.3 ACTION: Agreed to provide the Forum with the outcome of Newlon's investigation into why the average number of days to complete a repair KPI was performing poorly.

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

8.1 Martin said the Board was meeting tomorrow night and will feedback to the next Forum.

8.2 The proposed completed repair survey app discussed at the last Forum went down well at Residents Services Committee (RSC). They have taken on board the Forum's views such as residents getting the questions by email & not all residents being comfortable with the operative asking them to fill in. For the latter they discussed a possible solution, where a resident fills in their answers to the questions then the screen goes blank and cannot be seen by the operative. Other residents on the RSC also bought into this.

8.3 John R was not at this meeting to give verbal feedback from the Scrutiny Panel. Written feedback was available to the Forum in the Resident Involvement Report for this meeting.