

# RESIDENTS' FORUM – 21 February 2018

## MINUTES

**Members Present:** Martin Hughes (Chair); Blossom Shakespeare; William Crilly; Sonia Dobson; Sylvia Donaldson; Lindsey Malcolm; Lloyd Gale-Ward; Eunice Sinyinza; Wendy Jackson; Kevin Brown; Ben Roe; Phil Williams; Geraldine Grant; John Rymell.

**Staff & Board Present:** Matt Phillips, Head of Estates; Tom O'Malley, Business Improvement Manager; Mark Newstead, Director Property Services; Karen Orr, Senior Resident Involvement Officer (minute taker).

**Apologies:** Bill Henderson; Annette Morrison.

### 1. WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

1.1. The chair welcomed all participants, it was noted that all current members were present.

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

2.1 The minutes of 22 November 2017 were agreed as a true and correct record.

2.2 Noted that the communal heating element of the Hammond Court service charge (£46.41) was a mistake. It related to an empty home there and the Estates team had already asked for it to be credited back when residents receive their next Statement of Account.

2.3 **ACTION:** Agreed to bring feedback re an outstanding action from the November minutes - whether Hammond Court have solar panels and if they are being used. The Building Services team to be asked to respond.

### 3. PARKING

3.1 Matt Phillips outlined his paper which set out the current management of 350 parking spaces on about 40 schemes by the contractor CPP. CPP had been contracted five years ago. Six members had experience of parking schemes where they lived. The current contractor issues parking fines which was not as effective as the previous clamping in changing behaviour. However there has been a change in the law so that clamping can no longer be used on Newlon land. The service was designed as a hands off one where the £30 permit cost covered the administration costs.

3.2 Lindsey enquired whether there was any escalation if parking fines were not paid and Matt explained it would be up to CPP. Removal of abandoned vehicles was much more difficult than in the past. New rules mean the contractor does not have the legal right to remove a vehicle which can only be done by the local authority and can be a long drawn out process. Wendy praised Katherine Hodges, Neighbourhood Officer, as being very efficient in removing an abandoned vehicle after three years. Ben's experience when cars parked in front of the bins and CPP were called was that they did not arrive until after the cars had gone. Martin had a similar experience of cars parking in front of bins, bins not being emptied and residents having to pay for emptying through their service charge. Matt suggested this could be another reason to review parking.

3.3 Lloyd had given the Estates team a list of issues about parking at Isobel Place. Residents there felt that they could not resolve these without Newlon's help. Such as permits being

issued without the relevant bay number on it and not being able to order permits online. Matt agreed that the online ordering of permits should work and that this is the sort of thing that the Estates team could take up. He agreed with Lloyd that Newlon could check to see if they could get a better parking contractor. Although the risk is that a better service would cost more. By and large the current system appears to be working, there's good resident satisfaction and only four Stage One complaints had been received last year. Martin wondered if there was anything unusual about Isobel Place. Lloyd answered there was initially no parking scheme but nothing else. Lloyd said the responses he had received from his complaint had not led to a change in service provision and that some were not factually correct.

- 3.4 Martin asked if the parking service could be taken in house with Matt replying it could be explored and there were a number of potential options. He could speak to other Housing Associations to find out what the market was like now and would want residents involved in that. Lloyd identified many problems with bad parking behaviour at Isobel Place such as blocking roads. Martin suggested if parking fines were not working, may need to look at the issue of parking from another angle. He also asked what Newlon could do to change the parking behaviour that was causing problems. Matt acknowledged that Newlon could take action with repeat offenders if they knew who owned the vehicle, but was not always easy to prove. Where CCTV was in place this could help. Newlon had to go through the Council to find out who any car was registered to and this always took some time.
- 3.5 Ben suggested that bollards could be installed where they would improve parking behaviour, such as at Fenton Street. Matt advised that they had been installed on some schemes, but did not always change behaviour. Wendy suggested that residents could manage their own parking but if there were more than say 10 places then CPP should be brought in. Matt acknowledged this could be an option with Martin cautioning that parking could be very contentious amongst residents. Matt raised that a consideration during any discussion of options would be that Newlon has a vested interest. John suggested exploring legal options for immobilising vehicles. Eunice pointed out that residents could not get permits for cars at Hammond Court and had been advised by CPP to contact Newlon and by Newlon to contact CPP. Matt advised that residents should have initial conversations with CPP about parking and permits but if not resolved then to escalate to Newlon. The hands off approach mentioned earlier was just about to day to day parking management. If members wished to raise anything else about parking they could email Matt.
- 3.6 **ACTION:** Agreed that Eunice, Lloyd and Matt would form a group to talk to some parking management companies, explore what parking services are available in the current market and investigate suitable technology. They will bring their findings back to a future Forum meeting for discussion on options and recommendations on possible action.  
**ACTION:** Agreed that Newlon will investigate the current law relating to clamping and if there are any steps that can be used to immobilise vehicles without contravening it.  
**ACTION:** Agreed to explore the possibility of installing bollards at Fenton Street to minimise bad parking behaviour.  
**ACTION:** agreed to investigate why Hammond Court is on CPP's list of schemes but is not managed by them.

#### 4. BUSINESS PLANNING

- 4.1 Tom O'Malley, Business Improvement initiated the discussion with a recap of the Business Plan and progress to date. The ten year plan started in 2012, the year of the London Olympics, with one main objective - to increase the provision of well-managed, affordable housing. There were four aims helping achieve this objective – growth; service; socio-

economics and making it work. In 2017 Newlon were half way through the plan and by then the Cameron and Osborne Government had reduced rents by 1% a year over four years. This meant Newlon had to rethink some of their plans due to reduced income. On services, targets were set to improve and there had been progress on all. Such as 90% of all calls being answered on time compared to 80% in 2012. Wendy questioned the call answering results, explaining that she has sometimes waited 20 minutes for her call to be answered. The target for answering a call within the required number of rings could be met but she questioned how long it took for call centre staff to actually speak to a resident who is put on hold. Tom also pointed out that the number of residents in work had risen, while the percentage of residents claiming Housing Benefit had dropped. He clarified that in this context "resident" meant the lead tenant of a Newlon home. Phil questioned why estates graded good and fair were included in the same statistic as the respective split between these could be significant. Tom explained this was a top line statistic that was reported to the Board.

4.2 The meeting was split into four sub groups and each was asked to agree two issues for Newlon to prioritise. Their feedback was as follows:

- **Group A**

- 1) there should be a quick response to ASB in communal garden areas to keep them in beautiful condition for all residents. The experience of residents living on large complexes such as Hale Village, is that the communal garden areas are clean during the daytime but after the night time can be full of rubbish.
- 2) having a centre for young people who may wander around in communal areas at night time. Think about using volunteers (young and old, perhaps contractors?) and raising funding to achieve this as would be concerned about any impact on the service charge.

- **Group B**

- 1) before Newlon considers developing new homes they should ensure that existing homes are brought up to standard.
- 2) get repairs done right first time and avoid repeat visits. If a repeat visit is needed, it should be the same contractor who originally attended. Look at the BSW contract as they have had this for too long.

- **Group C**

- 1) agree that the service overall, including repairs, has improved in the last 4-5 years. However there were still improvements that could be made to how customer service is run and the logistics. For instance, Newlon are not aware of any appointments that have been made or rebooked by Wates. The easy solution would be for Wates to inform Newlon.
- 2) when residents become vulnerable, Newlon should look at how they communicate with them. The example given was about a resident who was out of work and got into rent arrears. They received a letter stating that if they didn't get up to date in two weeks they would be sent a notice of termination. It was recognised that these may be standard, automatic letters. However most residents don't deliberately get into rent arrears, they are caught in a position and don't know what to do. Newlon should look at their communications when things are going wrong for residents and understand that is the time that they need the greatest help.

- **Group D**

- 1) there is room across the board for customer services to improve and for Newlon to become more understanding that residents are receiving a service that they have paid for. To recognise that when residents ask questions, such as about service charges, it is because they care, not because they want to antagonise staff.
- 2) to improve communal repairs although it was recognised that the portal may help.

4.3 Mark and Tom updated the meeting on the current positions with investment for existing homes, BSW contractors and the resident portal for the website. To round up, Tom informed the Forum that the draft Business Plan would be going to the Board at the end of next month. The Forum's comments would feed into this as would those from staff and from the residents who attended the recent Value for Money focus groups. He would bring the agreed document back to a future Forum meeting.

4.4 **ACTION:** agreed that Tom would feed the Forum's suggestions into his business planning process and bring the agreed Plan back to a future Forum.

## 5. COMMUNAL REPAIRS/WATES ANNUAL REVIEW

5.1 The report on Communal Repairs was introduced by Mark Newstead, with the focus being on the handyman service. About 90% of Newlon homes are flats with communal areas, many of the newer flats are in larger buildings. As a result there are more communal areas and therefore more communal repairs. This is more challenging for Newlon, more so than for other Housing Associations that have more traditional types of homes. Newlon introduced the estate inspection system, then alongside that the handyman service was introduced – both to improve managing and looking after those communal areas. Prior to this communal repairs were not prioritised and there were sometimes problems in describing the repair needed and its location. The inspectors hand held devices and the photos they take of repairs has improved this.

5.2 At the start, there were about 3,200 communal repairs a year being carried out which has now doubled. The reasons for this were - new buildings created as new homes are built; some buildings get a lot of wear and tear; if actively looking for communal repairs will find more and buildings generally getting older. The handyman service currently had three operatives and next financial year this will be increased to four because of the volume of works. A common problem is lights burning out and while repairing these they will also be improved by fitting LED units. This approach of improving while repairing should lead to less repairs. The handyman service has proved successful and cheaper when compared to the cost of general repairs. The service works well and Newlon continues to improve it. At present about 92% of communal repairs are completed on target and Mark said that he would like to see this rise to 95% or more. Extra categories have been created such as estate improvements and logging works onto the cyclical works programme.

5.3 Sylvia raised an example of a communal repair where coving bricks were replaced atop a brick wall and which had been repaired many times. Mark suggested that the estate inspectors should have recognised this as something needing improvement and redesign rather than repair. Phil then asked who residents should contact at Newlon if they have this type of issue. Mark replied that the Estates Team could be asked to consider whether an improvement rather than a repair was needed as they held the improvement budget. However, there was no guarantee that all requests would be carried out as there may be

some constraints, such as health and safety. He added, where requested improvements have not been carried out residents should be given a reason.

- 5.4 Lindsey thought it would be interesting to see how the portal on the website integrated with communal repairs. There would be an opportunity for residents to report them and other residents to give more detail; perhaps have some interaction between the handyman and residents ahead of the repair being carried out. Or for Estates and the handyman to look together at items raised and identify how they will best deal with what's been reported. Mark commented that residents will be able to look at all estate actions and log communal repairs on the portal. However, residents would probably not be able to see what date a repair was due to be dealt with or have a social media type of interaction. As the portal gets used and Newlon receives feedback they will look at improving what it does although will take some time to develop. Then the next step will be to put internal repairs on the portal, although that will be more complicated.
- 5.5 Sonia asked why some responsive repairs are recorded as communal repairs. Mark replied that the estate inspectors were keen and sometimes reported things that were not communal repairs. They did not have the ability to raise repair orders on their apps. However they have been given guidance and can now raise a request for a bigger repair so that the handymen will not be asked to do works outside their scope. About 15-20% of jobs that currently go to the handymen are not for them and Newlon are working on cutting this right down.
- 5.6 Mark also spoke to the report on the Wates Annual Review. Wates had been the main repairs contractor since August 2015 and replaced Breyer. During the procurement process there had been much work done in talking to residents. Newlon reviews all their major suppliers every year, including Wates which was one of the most important. The Wates contract has a dedicated team of 20 operatives who do not work on other Wates contracts. They have their own vans and uniforms and some are co-located at Newlon House, making communications easier. Works are still done on a Schedule of Rates basis although Newlon wanted to move to a price per property basis. Newlon may one day move to a "wholly owned subsidiary" where the repairs service is taken in house, allowing more rigid control and saving on VAT for labour costs. This would be more like a direct labour organisation. Newlon would continue to employ a contractor to manage it for them, to keep the quality and customer focus plus provide a yard, stock, vans and expertise.
- 5.5 Martin asked how many other Housing Associations in London have this structure with Mark replying that wholly owned subsidiaries are growing in London and the country. There are currently six to seven who have gone set these up and probably the same number thinking about it and reflects a trend of taking maintenance in house. The KPI's show that the Wates service is much better than the previous contractor. Wates are a good partner but not perfect and Mark accepted that sometimes appointments are not kept and some repairs take too long. These are all aspects that Newlon want to improve and are working on continuous improvement. The biggest disappointment is that Wates have not done well this year on cyclical decorations and this part of the service will be removed from them next year. On the plus side the voids service is very good, the repairs service is largely good and the handyman service has generally been successful.
- 5.6 Geraldine enquired how often should the communal areas in blocks be decorated. Mark explained that the policy stated at least once every ten years but it depended on the block as some get more wear or tear than others. Sometimes where there is a block with just leaseholders, they are consulted as they pay for the cyclical they decide not to have them done every ten years. Mark acknowledged that there was a back log with the cyclical

programme as it has not worked out using Wates. Also historically Newlon have not done enough communal redecoration and next year will be looking at catching up. There are some older street properties very much in need of redecoration and the estate inspectors were helping collect intelligence.

- 5.7 Lloyd raised the issue of patch painting. Mark thought this was more likely to be the handyperson service and he would prefer that it didn't happen as can look like a patchwork. It highlighted the need to filter better what the estate inspectors report. Noted that some communal walls in blocks are prone to scuffing by bicycles. This appeared to be a mixture of resident behaviour or bad design where it was impossible for bike wheels not to touch walls on the route to bike sheds. Also dry lining communal walls may not be a good design choice. Newlon were now more experienced when designing and building larger blocks.
- 5.8 John raised the issue of street properties which generally don't have double glazing although most blocks do. Mark responded that it depends on what kind of windows and where they are, including if they are in a conservation area. Newlon are spending more each year on planned maintenance and much will be spent on older properties, including upgrading windows. The Board recognises that more investment needs to be put into older properties. A lot of work has been done on checking the condition of Newlon homes. John responded that residents living in street properties pay more for heating if they don't have double glazing and suggested a grant or loan to help those residents. Mark acknowledged that energy efficiency will be poor but Newlon is not in a position to give a grant or loan.

## 5. RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY UPDATE

- 5.1 Noted the next full Forum meeting will be on Wednesday 30 May. Before that the annual strategy and planning meeting will be held at the end of April (at a date to be confirmed), once the Residents' Services Committee have set their agenda for the year.
- 5.2 Members were updated about the development of a "virtual" Panel for residents. All residents will be invited to sign up for the Panel which will give a choice of new (e.g. time limited dialogue on common themes) and existing involvement activities (e.g. mystery shopping) under one roof. Its members will be able to choose what, when and how they are involved. Members were asked to email Karen if they had any views about the new Panel and if they had any ideas for the Panel's name. A review of Resident Liaison Representatives has now been completed. There will be some changes to how the RLR's operate to equalise the number of homes they inspect and how often. In addition, their name has now been changed to Resident Inspectors.
- 5.3 Proposals to change the way shopping vouchers are distributed to the Forum was briefly discussed. There were two options and members agreed that they would prefer the option of a re-loadable voucher card.
- 5.4 **ACTION:** agreed that members would email Karen with any views they had about the creation of a virtual residents' Panel and any ideas for the Panel's name.  
**ACTION:** agreed Karen to implement a change from paper shopping vouchers to a re-loadable card for members.