

# RESIDENTS' FORUM – 25 July 2018

## MINUTES

**Members Present:** Lloyd Gale-Ward (Chair); Blossom Shakespeare; William Crilly; Sonia Dobson; Sylvia Donaldson; Wendy Jackson; Ben Roe; Kevin Brown; Geraldine Grant; John Rymell; Africa Alconchel-Guido.

**Staff & Board Present:** Bill Henderson, Director Housing Services; David Rankin, Enforcement Officer; Jill Goodwill, Human Project Manager (Observer); Karen Orr, Senior Resident Involvement Officer (minute taker).

**Apologies:** Martin Hughes; Phil Williams; Eunice Sinyinza; Annette Morrison; Lindsey Malcolm.

### 1. WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

1.1. Lloyd stood in for Martin as Chair in his absence. He welcomed all participants and apologies were noted.

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

2.1 The minutes of 30 May were agreed as a true and correct record.

2.2 The actions still in progress and waiting to be completed were noted. Karen apologised for the delay in implementing the change to a reloadable vouchers card for members.

2.3 During discussion about the % of calls answered KPI (Key Performance Indicator) Bill questioned whether it was the best KPI as it was hard to answer both calls and emails well. Lloyd pointed out that if a resident called Newlon they would get an answer but if they sent an email it would take longer. Bill agreed and pointed out that more emails could be dealt with if less calls were answered. But there would be some issues and vulnerable residents may be better dealt with by phone. This issue of priorities will need to be dealt with corporately.

2.4 The report on the Hammond Court leak highlighted the length of time it had taken to resolve. Blossom thought that it would have been better for one staff member to deal with this. Bill agreed and added that someone senior at Newlon should have taken responsibility. There also was a role for the estate inspectors to raise outstanding issues like that. Blossom then suggested, that when Newlon have a big job, a Forum member could check to see if it had been done. Bill said that he would be happy to have some element of resident involvement in signing off communal works and Newlon could look into this. Geraldine also suggested residents receive an email asking about their satisfaction after repairs have been completed. Bill commented that an "app" is in development, noting that it will also be on the agenda for the October meeting. Blossom and Geraldine both thought an email about repair satisfaction would be better.

2.5 **ACTION:** agreed to add to the agenda item about Communal Repairs at the October meeting, the possible introduction of resident involvement into signing off communal repairs.

### 3. ENFORCEMENT TEAM UPDATE

- 3.1 Bill introduced David Rankin – Enforcement Officer, who updated members on the work of the Enforcement team. David explained the team consisted of a team leader and two officers who dealt with a huge variety of different complaints about ASB and in some cases tenancy fraud. Based on resident satisfaction surveys they get a good response about the service. Much of his time is spent in managing expectations. Such as advising what is everyday household noise that residents should be tolerant of as opposed to a statutory noise nuisance. For the former, residents are advised to be tolerant and that Newlon will not step in. For the latter, residents are advised to contact the statutory agencies such as the noise pollution team or the Police to put a stop to the nuisance. If needed those agencies will issue noise abatement notices or prosecutions. Bill acknowledged that noise can be a problem in older street properties with little sound proofing. Newlon try to design out these issues, so now don't put kitchens above bedrooms. There are also six month starter tenancies where resident's behaviour is monitored and they know this from the beginning.
- 3.2 Residents are provided with considerable information about what Newlon can and cannot do in different cases. For example, if a neighbour is fighting with their partner, the first course of action should be to call the Police and not Newlon. Once residents have the right information they follow that advice in most cases and the outcomes are acceptable. Other areas the team deal with include vandalism and young people loitering especially during summer. Some residents feel intimidated if they see groups of young people even if they don't pose a threat. If reported to enforcement they will engage with the household, speak to the parents and advise them their children could be cited in a complaint. In reply to Sylvia's query about dealing with gangs on estates, David commented that he does deal with gangs to varying degrees and the difference with them is they have a motive for their actions. However he often has to deal with cases that are about people's perceptions of young people.
- 3.3 In response to a comment about smelling cannabis, Bill remarked that it was a growing problem nationwide but not high on the police agenda and powers to enforce are limited. David added the police are not really interested unless supplying is involved. Enforcement do engage with the households where they are aware of the perpetrators' addresses so residents should report it to them if they encounter. There were also a number of other actions that could be taken such as better signage in communal areas although some residents do argue they are using it in their own home.
- 3.4 Newlon have to take these types of complaints on board and David has contacted numerous households and seen an improvement as a result. From John's point of view, the problem was about the effect on neighbours who smell the cannabis. Bill said the likelihood of getting possession or an injunction are not high so Newlon approaches this issue through other means, for example with tact and diplomacy. Newlon do try to engage the police but there is not such a close co-operative relationship as there used to be. Blossom suggested an article in the newsletter and Bill agreed, saying David or the team leader could write and that it would have to be carefully phrased. Also that David does spend a lot of time trying to encourage neighbourliness amongst residents and for them to realise the impact of their actions. John asked if Newlon have access to mediation. Bill explained that it's a service that Newlon buys in. David added that some cases go too far and are beyond mediation.
- 3.5 **ACTION:** Agreed that something should go in Newlon News about respecting your neighbours with regards to cigarette and cannabis smoke. It would have to be carefully worded to make clear not about the action but the annoyance it may cause residents' neighbours.

## 4. COMPLAINTS

- 4.1 Bill spoke to the Quality Manager's paper about complaints. The largest topic of complaints was repairs, which did not mean that the service was bad however if anything went wrong a complaint was more likely to be received. There were a lot of repairs completed and only a small number go wrong. Over the past 6 to 12 months most complaints had been about the heating contractors, who used to be really good but are not now. Other sources include outstanding complaints that can take some time due to repairs dragging on. Recent complaint trends include bike and post box thefts. Sometimes there is organised bike theft and residents understandably feel aggrieved if Newlon provided the storage. In these cases it can be difficult getting hold of CCTV of these thefts and then getting it to the police. Such as incidents where the police have said they didn't receive the CCTV which Newlon did provide to them.
- 4.2 Based on her long standing experience as a Complaints Panel member, Blossom reflected that she sees the same type of complaint coming to the Panel at different times. In addition she felt that the quality of current kitchen replacements is not as good as replacements put in 10-15 years ago. Bill noted that Newlon do have a standard kitchen specification which should be reasonably good and would expect newer properties to have better quality kitchens. He did understand that residents would be annoyed if they were told their kitchen would be replaced in five years if they perceive their kitchen is very old and falling apart. In reply, Blossom suggested that the state of kitchens should be taken on their own merit. William noted that one of his neighbours had his kitchen measured for replacement but nothing had happened. Lloyd raised the part of the report about learning from complaints and wanted to check that the learning about issuing FB keys to residents had been rolled out across Newlon. Bill confirmed that he had double checked this point and it has.
- 4.3 Newlon's experience of building new homes where mistakes have made and learnt from - is that they can be remedied in the next new homes built in two to three years' time. John suggested that when residents are promised timescales for work to be done or about information that they should be rigorously upheld if not bettered. Blossom also suggested, based on her experience of complaints, that if a contractor visits a resident about a repair but cannot do the work on that day then they should tell Newlon as often they do not return. Bill accepted that should not happen and said that Newlon could come back and report further on it in October. In addition, this was more of an issue about sub-contractors rather than the main repairs contractor. Bill added that broadly speaking contractors don't get paid if they don't do the work; some work is complicated; some contractors are disorganised and better co-ordination was needed.
- 4.4 Sylvia asked if there some way to let residents know about communal repairs, her example being when she found six men in the communal hallway taking the ceilings down, checking the cables for fire protection. However, no residents had been informed, Bill agreed this should not have happened. John's suggestion was that when the order for communal works is on put CRM then the residents affected should be automatically informed by text (or other method) about the date and time of the works and what they are. Karen mentioned the bespoke Learning from Complaints form that the Complaints Panel had helped to develop and which was being piloted for six months. Blossom pointed out that it would be better if the form was received by the Panel with the appeals papers so they can start filling it out then. The Panel have agreed to implement this change during the pilot. She thought the form would make a difference to Newlon learning from complaints.

- 4.5 Lloyd said he will be interested in seeing the improvements in learning from complaints when Complaints comes back to the Forum in six months' time. He asked if the learning from complaints work was tied into the business improvement team pointing out that processes may not be changed as a result. Bill replied that there was some tying in with business improvement but not as much as should be. Adding that it was very much down to the individual Director and managers involved. He also acknowledged that by the time a repairs complaint gets to the Panel it would be better if the repairs they are complaining about have been done. Africa queried what kind of maladministration the Housing Ombudsman found in the cases that had been escalated to them. Bill informed that one had been about ASB and he had not agreed with the Ombudsman's findings in this case. Another had been about a car parking issue.
- 4.6 **ACTION:** Agreed to come back to the Forum in October and report further on the issue of contractors being unable to complete repairs on the day of their visit; ensuring that they then advise Newlon that a return visit is needed and that the return visit takes place.

## 5. PERFORMANCE REPORT – HOUSING AND PROPERTY SERVICES

- 5.1 The focus of the discussion about performance was on the key performance indicators (KPI) with a red status – below target. Fire Safety was now very important following the Grenfell fire last year and Newlon were taking a stricter view on it. This has resulted in Newlon having to do more and more work to make buildings completely safe which is soaking up a lot of money which would otherwise be spent on kitchens and bathrooms. Which was an area of concern for Bill. It looked like there were 850 Fire Risk Actions overdue, some of which were serious and some not. Ben suggested that some information about this should go to residents to explain with Bill agreeing it could go in the next newsletter. Sonia asked if residents in new buildings, such as Hale Village, could have access to other communal areas and exits in case of fire. Bill explained that in some buildings if the fire alarm is activated it already works like that and agreed to check for all new buildings. Sonia then suggested that residents living in those buildings would need to be made aware of these other means of escape which Bill agreed. Sylvia raised the fire doors at Connaught Grange which do not open outwards as they should.
- 5.2 The downward trend of satisfaction with the ability of staff to do their job was highlighted by Lloyd. Bill explained that this had gone up with leaseholders and down with tenants but overall it was down. It had been a difficult time for the Service Centre with many new staff settling in and getting trained which can take about three to six months. Bill responded to Kevin's query agreeing that there had also been a high turnover of staff as it was an entry level role that could be very demanding. For Newlon the question was how do staff deal with a resident on the phone in a friendly, helpful and efficient way within a certain time frame? Water safety actions were explained as tasks such as checking shared tanks in buildings, chlorinating them, flushing parts of plumbing systems and checking there are no dead pigeons in the water tanks.
- 5.3 **ACTION:** Agreed to include an article in the autumn newsletter explaining about the fire safety work costing more and having a knock on effect on other programmes such as cyclical decorations.  
**ACTION:** Agreed Bill will check that in the event of a fire, the system in all new buildings opens other doors to allow residents access to other communal areas and exits. In addition, that residents living in those buildings would need to be made aware of these other means of escape.

**ACTION:** Agreed to check the doors at Connaught Grange that go onto the fire escape as they do not open outwards. If it is a requirement to provide outward opening doors then Newlon will pay for their replacement.

## 6. RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT UPDATE

- 6.1 Karen introduced the new Code of Conduct for involved residents at Newlon. Involved residents were defined as someone with significant involvement with Newlon over a period of time – which included members of the Forum. The Code was based on the model code from the National Housing Federation. Africa queried one of the Code's main principles which stated "You must not do or say anything that may bring Newlon's name into disrepute including on social networking sites". She thought that Forum members should be able to challenge Newlon. She was concerned that a member could not say anything about Newlon without it being construed as bringing into disrepute. Bill clarified that it would have to be a statement that was awful for it be construed that way. He would be disappointed if a member chose to say anything negative about Newlon that they had not first raised with the organisation, but had not come across an example with an involved resident. It was okay to be constructively critical and challenging of Newlon. Blossom's view was that if a member felt that strongly about Newlon then they should not serve on the Forum. Agreed after discussion that the meaning of "bring into disrepute" should be clearly defined. Africa offered to help in the drafting of this.
- 6.2 John asked why members must pass enquiries from the media back to Newlon. Karen clarified this was included in the section about confidentiality and part of Forum members role about handling information they receive. Geraldine gave an update about the planned Star Awards happening in the same year as Newlon's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, provisionally taking place on Friday 23 November. She had been doing some research into a possible film maker for the event. The planning group were also looking into getting a female presenter. A majority of members agreed they would prefer this event to take place on a Friday because of their other commitments including work. Karen encouraged members to nominate either themselves or other residents for a Star Award through the link on the website. Members could also request a paper nomination form.
- 6.3 Blossom, Kevin and John all gave feedback on the training they had recently attended about digital engagement. They had enjoyed this and come up with some ideas to refresh the Newlon website which they did not find as user friendly as other landlords. John agreed to feed these ideas back so they could be forwarded to the Head of Communications. John also to provide information for the Resident Involvement update at the next meeting about the training. Members agreed to the alternative suggestion to nominate one member to take on the role of looking at the detailed KPI data in Pentana (the software Newlon use to enter and track KPI performance over time) before each meeting. John was nominated to take on this role.
- 6.4 Members agreed they would like to have the ability to make a conference or skype video call if they are unable to attend a Forum meeting in person.
- 6.5 **ACTION:** Agreed that the wording in the Code of Conduct about bringing Newlon into disrepute is defined to make it clear in what circumstances it would apply. Africa to help.  
**ACTION:** Agreed to feed back to the Star Awards planning group that a majority of members preferred a Friday for the event to take place.  
**ACTION:** Agreed to the suggestion that one Forum member is nominated to take on the role of looking at the detailed KPI data in Pentana.

**ACTION:** Agreed that John Rymell is the Forum member who will be provided with access to Pentana. At meetings they will then raise any questions about performance on behalf of all members. Karen to arrange with Business Improvement.

**ACTION:** Agreed John to feedback suggestions for improving the Newlon website to Karen so they can be forwarded to the Head of Communications.

**ACTION:** Agreed to provide facilities for members to make a conference or skype video call into a meeting if they are unable to attend a Forum meeting in person. Members to request well in advance.

**ACTION:** Agreed to hold a Christmas social for Forum members, possibly in December.

## **7. FEEDBACK FROM AND TO THE BOARD/RESIDENTS' SERVICES COMMITTEE**

- 7.1 Feedback about the In Depth Assessment (IDA) carried out by the Regulator of Social Housing on Newlon was provided by Bill. They said Newlon was fine and well run although they gave financial viability a regrade. This was due to Newlon being a developing housing association with associated risk. The Annual Accounts for 2017-18 went through showing Newlon was financially sound and healthy. Health and Safety is dominating Newlon's work to a certain extent, a change from a few years ago.

## **8. NEXT MEETING**

- 8.1 It was noted that the next meeting will be held on Wednesday 31 October, the last meeting of the year and that it will be Halloween.