

JOINT RESIDENTS' FORUM & BOARD – 3 April 2019

MINUTES

Members Present: Martin Hughes (Chair); Lloyd Gale-Ward (Vice Chair); Eunice Sinyinza; Sylvia Donaldson; Blossom Shakespeare; Sonia Dobson; Surjeet Chana; Geraldine Grant; Africa Alconchel-Guido; Ben Roe; John Rymell; William Crilly.

Staff & Board Present: Nicola Bastin; Matt Champion; Sarah Ebanja (Board Chair); Jackie Ballard (Board Vice Chair); Fred Angole; Mike Hinch, Chief Executive; Bill Henderson, Director Housing Services; Graham Watts, Head of Residents Services; Karen Orr, Senior Resident Involvement Officer (minute taker).

Apologies: Phil Williams; Wendy Jackson

1. WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

1.1. Martin welcomed everyone to the first joint meeting of the Forum and Board which aimed to foster each getting to know each other. Participants then introduced themselves.

2. DIGITAL STRATEGY

2.1 Mike gave background to the refreshed Digital Strategy and explained the reasons why Newlon was going digital. Residents expect a digital service as it will lower costs and free up staff where they are actually needed and help with better record keeping, it would also assist our residents in being part of what is now a digital society. Research of our residents had shown that 60% already use digital services in their lives; 20% would quite like to use but may not have regular internet access and need some support. The other 20% don't find using digital services easy and for those we will keep the ways they have contacted us in the past/ways of doing things and will have more time to work with them. Martin noted that he had passed John's comments about the digital strategy to the IT team.

2.2 The strategy had 4 areas of work:

- **Customer service**, reducing cost through self service
- **Back office**, such as paying rent, we can save money through digital automation
- **Employee skills**, staff with right skills and to look at what's coming next digitally
- **Communications**, some of this is about the way we use social media – we don't think it's appropriate for Housing Associations to use. Also about the way we engage with residents digitally.

2.3 Mike then asked several questions and members responded with suggestions:

Comparing Newlon with others that we deal with?

- residents should be able to track repairs on the Newlon portal similar to tracking a parcel delivery. This could cut down on delays experienced and allow them to do other things if they knew the time period for a repairs visit.
- being able to choose weekend appointments (Bill noted these are already in place but there had been some teething problems and some members had experienced this)

What should Newlon be looking to change first?

- service centre advisors should have clear information about all buildings e.g. what type of heating system and who are the providers. Noted that "Property Attributes" on CRM does record this although not the number of lifts a building has.

How can residents help measure progress?

- think about using something similar to the repairs app for other services to get feedback from residents straight away whether they are happy or not. Also get feedback from residents on the digital approach
- most residents have mobile phones, send them a text asking for feedback straight away after a service like many other organisations do e.g. “yes, no, why not?”. If can’t text them then send an email, if can’t email them, send a letter.
- give residents options about how they would like to be contacted
- do mystery shopping digitally
- use the Forum to conduct a pilot on ways of collecting feedback, try it out for a month, and if it works roll it out to other residents

What can Newlon do to support residents?

- digital training for residents, although Bill noted there had been little take up when offered in the past. William commented that there are some old people who are just not able to cope with anything digital and this needs to be recognised.
- support at reception in Newlon House for residents to use computer there for digital communications such as filling in an online form
- installing touch screens in Newlon buildings for residents to use to communicate with Newlon e.g. report a communal repair
- suggested additional section for the digital strategy “3.3 Continuous development of telephone and postal communications for those who **need** it or **want** it.” This means that as telephone and postal communications improve over time, Newlon would keep up with these developments.
- all contractors, sub-contractors, non-CRM staff and all parties that liaise with residents being required to use Newlon CRM as per John’s tabled diagram. This means that contractors and sub-contractors will also be part of the portal.

2.4 Nicola asked how does record keeping really feel, is it much better? Comments from members included that for some complaints, record keeping is an issue; it is better than a year ago; Newlon have the information but something goes wrong; continuity is lacking sometimes.

2.5 Bill said that Newlon would listen to John’s suggestions and come back with an answer although there are some technical difficulties. John pointed out those would be for Wates and not Newlon. Martin suggested that Newlon look at the system used by Genesis.

ACTION: agreed to feedback member’s suggestions into further development of the digital strategy

ACTION: agreed to make clear in the next newsletter the policy on Saturday repairs appointments.

ACTION: agreed that Mike would come to a future Forum and give an update on the digital strategy

ACTION: agreed that the latest Mystery Shopping Report will come to the next Forum

ACTION: agreed to bring John’s detailed comments on the digital strategy presented by Mike, back to a future Forum for debate. Newlon to investigate the CRM system used by Genesis.

3. TOGETHER WITH TENANTS

3.1 Bill introduced this paper. Together with Tenants was an initiative from the National Housing Federation (NHF), which is the trade body for Housing Associations. The NHF had

published this draft plan which sets out proposals to build a stronger relationship with residents and strengthen their voice at Board level. Many other Housing Associations had already signed up to the draft plan as early adopters. The draft plan was open for consultation until 19 April and Newlon would be sending in their feedback.

- 3.2 One of the NHF's suggestions in their draft plan was for a new requirement in their Code of Governance for Housing Association Boards to be accountable to their tenants and residents. Another suggestion was about the adoption of a new charter setting out what tenants and residents can expect from their landlord. The question for our residents was how could they influence what Newlon does? Matt commented that some of the NHF's suggestions are about making Boards accountable to their residents. He then asked if Forum members felt that the Newlon Board are accountable to residents? His view was that the examples the NHF are given are really pedestrian. If landlords wanted to they could be more radical. For example, although not saying it would be right for Newlon, but as moving towards a price per property for repairs, could that not be available to residents to manage their own day to day repairs.
- 3.3 **ACTION:** Agreed Karen to send out more information to members about Together with Tenants and the advisory body that the NHF are setting up (to Geraldine).
ACTION: Agreed there were no objections to the NHF Together with Tenants plan and members agreed in principle to the proposals.
ACTION: Agreed to hold another joint meeting between the Board and Forum, a future date to be arranged perhaps in September or October.

4. RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT

- 4.1 Karen introduced the results of recent interactive workshops that had been held with residents and staff about developing a new Resident Involvement Strategy. These had considered three priorities for the strategy:
- **Co-designing services** - where residents and staff work together to design services, with particular emphasis on repairs.
 - **Enabling people** – where we make sure that our staff and residents have the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed for effective and meaningful resident involvement.
 - **Ways of Involving** – where we make the experience of residents getting involved with us as seamless, easy, and effective as possible by providing choice that suits them.
- 4.2 One general point was there appeared to be no clear picture amongst staff and residents about what resident involvement means. There were also mixed messages from different departments and teams about the benefits and principles of involving residents, some which was quite negative. Martin felt this demonstrated a “them and us divide” between residents and staff. Members gave some examples where they felt that Newlon was not listening to residents. However, they recognised that there had been an improvement in customer service over the years. There was also recognition that contractor's staff can be under the same pressure and that there are sometimes difficult customers.
- 4.3 Nicola pointed out this was Newlon Gold territory which the Board strongly supports and is a priority for Newlon. Suggestions from members to improve resident involvement and services included:

- Introducing a sixty second pause between calls handled by staff in the service centre. As it was appreciated that some staff may be under pressure (including rude/demanding residents)
- Find ways for the Forum to represent the wider tenant body better
- Having a personal objective for staff about resident involvement
- Breaking down the “them and us” divide between residents and staff
- Engaging the staff more
- Changing the culture amongst staff towards residents and resident involvement
- Some of the workshop suggestions could be used as examples if Newlon adopt the Together with Tenants Charter. Having conversations with staff about what this would mean for working at Newlon, like a statement of intent
- Advertise an open invitation for staff to attend a Forum meeting
- Some example are worked up about what happens if Newlon does not listen to and engage residents and the impact on staff jobs
- Resident involvement needs to be brought up the agenda at Newlon so staff understand its importance and give it a higher profile. Use good practice examples from other industries
- Make involvement easy for staff and residents so that structures and processes don't get in the way of the conversation
- Have a sounding board of 100's of residents that staff can use for consultation when they are developing something for their work
- Phone a resident
- Speed dating event for residents and staff to get to know each other & Meet the Directors
- Improve the quality of the written communications from staff to residents
- Residents having video conversations with staff as a way of improving the interaction between them
- Train staff about resident involvement
- Residents shadowing staff in the Service Centre to understand their work

- 4.4 **ACTION:** Agreed to explore Nicola's suggestion to use the solutions from this meeting as examples to develop an action plan on the Together with Tenants paper
ACTION: Agreed to include suggestions above in the new Resident Involvement Strategy
ACTION: Agreed Karen to bring a worked up draft strategy to a future Forum

5. PLANNING FUTURE FORUM MEETINGS

- 5.1 There was a long discussion about planning for future meetings and an appetite to have pro-active agenda items for future meetings whilst also keeping an eye on the RSC's agenda plan for the year. Agendas to be shorter plus have more discussion.
- 5.2 **ACTION:** Karen agreed to send out future Forum dates to all members plus the RSC agenda plan for the year.
ACTION: Agreed to have more pro-active Forum agenda items so members can improve their ability to influence Newlon. Staff to think about engaging member's interest in how they write and present their reports/presentations
ACTION: Agreed that the Forum will plan for the next six months of meetings
ACTION: Agreed to explore the idea of installing touch screens in blocks for messages to residents from us and for them to be able to report things plus explore the idea about residents managing their own day to day repairs at future Forums.
ACTION: Agreed to bring back a worked up proposal about Forum members using Convene to receive and read their papers.