



safety first

Residents' Review 2019- 2020



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Mike Hinch
Group Chief Executive

A message from Newlon's Chief Executive

Welcome to our Annual Report for 2019-2020.

We have chosen to focus on safety as the main theme as so much of what we do has recently been dominated by health and safety related issues.

The coronavirus pandemic has had a major impact on the way we delivered our services. Although we adapted quickly and most services have now returned to normal, I want to take this opportunity to thank residents for their patience during this difficult period.

I know that many of you are key workers and have been at the forefront of supporting people impacted by coronavirus and maintaining the critical services we all rely on – we appreciate the hard work you have done.

Newlon residents are also among the most diverse groups in the country and we are fully aware that BAME communities have been amongst those most severely impacted by this

crisis. Fortunately, although coronavirus has touched all of us in some way, sometimes tragically, we have had very few reports of serious issues for our residents.

As an organisation we are also very conscious of the issues raised for our residents and staff by the Black Lives Matter movement and we share the desire for real changes that bring a better future.

We know that many people have been economically hit, so our Resident Involvement and Income teams have worked closely with residents in need of support. We only evict residents as a last resort, and no-one has been evicted from a Newlon home due to issues caused by coronavirus.

At the start of March we set up an outreach programme to make contact with all of our most vulnerable residents, to offer support and signpost to available services. We are pleased to have contacted over 700 people between March and May as part of this programme.

Fire safety is another major area of work we are focussed on. Since the tragedy of the Grenfell fire the Government has been issuing guidance to building owners. This requires us to review the cladding materials, external insulation and fire stopping at our housing, prioritising taller buildings.

This requires a programme of investigations to be carried out by independent experts and, where issues arise, carry out works to rectify them. We have set up a special project team to oversee this and have invested millions of pounds in additional fire safety measures.

We realise that this is a period of concern for many of our leaseholders and Shared Owners. The actions of lenders in response to Government guidance is often making it difficult for people to staircase, or sell their homes if they want to move.

This is a complex national issue which does not just affect Newlon, so we are involved in lobbying efforts with the wider social housing sector to try and improve the situation.

Although it may be of little consolation if you are unable to sell your home or staircase we are in a relatively good position. We are progressing steadily through our programme of inspections, have fewer taller buildings than many other city based landlords and housing associations and remedial works are onsite or have already been completed in a number of places. It will take time to get through this and we appreciate your cooperation.

Despite these challenges, we remain committed to one of our core missions - building new affordable homes in London. In doing this we aim to regenerate communities and provide much needed housing for local people. We have set a target to build an average of more than 200 homes a year up until 2023 and 300 a year after that.

This report aims to provide a clear, transparent overview of how we performed in providing services to our residents over the past year. If you have any questions please send them to residentsreview@newlon.org.uk.

Regards,
Mike Hinch

1. Chase Farm development.
2. Covid-secure cleaning.

3. Exterior of City North
4. New Resident Board Members, Lloyd and Blossom.

Our performance

We want to provide residents with good quality services that are value for money but we have to find a balance between what we spend on day-to-day services like repairs, what we commit to major building improvement works, what projects we fund to help residents sustain their tenancies and what we invest in building new homes for future generations. The table below shows how we judge the impact of those decisions to measure our success. You can see how our performance against last year's target, the targets that have been set for next year and how our recent performance compares to previous years.

	17/18	18/19	19/20	19/20 Target	20/21 Target	Comment
Customer Services						
% of residents satisfied with the overall service	73%	74%	75%	75%	76%	During the year staff attended a series of customer service training events and, in addition to overall satisfaction, we also saw improvements in satisfaction with staff helpfulness and the ability of staff to deal with queries efficiently, as well as an increase in the percentage of residents saying their query was dealt with the first time they called. We compare overall satisfaction with other housing associations and Newlon's is exactly in line with the average rating in London.
Repairs completed in target time	96%	95%	96%	95%	95%	Our main repairs contractor, Wates, has continued to perform in line with expectations. This year we will be working with them to try and simplify the repairs reporting process and improve communication around the progress of repairs.
Repairs completed first time	95%	91%	93%	93%	93%	
Property Standards						
% of residents satisfied with the condition of their home	69%	69%	72%	70%	72%	More residents are satisfied with the condition of their home than before. This is because we have developed almost 500 new homes over the past 3 years and we have sold some of our less desirable properties so we can reinvest the proceeds into improving other homes.
% Estates in good or fair condition	97%	95%	94%	96%	98%	Most of our estates are in a good of fair condition, but we failed to meet our target last year. Where estates do not meet standards, we work out what improvements are needed and make money available to make the changes as soon as practically possible.
Empowering Residents						
£ of additional income secured for residents	£95,000	£145,000	£144,000	£90,000	£92,500	Our Resident Services team provides advice on income and benefits. They have helped residents to bring more stability to their household by maximising their income, claiming the support they are entitled to and securing work and training opportunities.
Number of households benefitting from more stability	27	49	238	175	200	
New Supply						
Number of new homes completed	69	175	232	240	193	We have a target to build an average of more than 200 homes a year up until 2023 and 300 each following year. Although we narrowly missed our target this year, when compared to other London housing associations Newlon continues to be one of the leading developers of new affordable homes in London.

We compare our performance with other London housing associations. We have published some of what we think are the most important measures below but you can find more comparison reports in the Value for Money section of our website.

		Newlon	London Average
% of residents satisfied with the overall service	We interviewed over 400 residents of Newlon rented homes in 2019/20 using a standard question that is used by housing associations so we can compare results.	75%	75%
New homes completed as a % of existing homes	This is a measure that housing associations use to compare their contribution of new homes on a 'pound for pound' basis.	3.1%	1.5%
Overall cost per home managed	This is a measure used by the housing regulator to help understand how efficient housing associations are. It is worked out by taking all our running costs divided by the number of homes we manage.	£5,167	£5,665
% Rent Collected	This is the percentage of all the rent that was due last year that we managed to collect.	99.70%	99.95%
% Rent Arrears	This is the overall amount of rent we are owed by current tenants as a percentage of our total annual rent charges. Higher arrears means more household debt and that can mean that tenancies are less stable.	3.27%	3.56%

A focus on complaints

We aim to provide the best service we can, so take the complaints we receive seriously. We try to resolve them as quickly as possible and ensure residents are satisfied with how they are being handled.

Residents were less satisfied with complaint handling last year than in previous years and we also saw an increase in the overall number of complaints. We are looking closely at the main causes of these complaints and will make changes where we think they have not been dealt with properly.

The Housing Ombudsman Service, the independent regulator that oversees complaints about housing, has issued new guidelines for housing associations, and our Board will be checking that the way we handle complaints meets these.

Our complaints procedure

If a resident raises an issue with our service we have a specialist team who will aim to resolve it as quickly as possible. However, if they are not satisfied and wish to make a formal complaint we manage it as follows:

- It will first be logged as a 'stage one' complaint, and our Service Resolution Team will respond to it within 10 working days.
- If the resident is unhappy with the response they can appeal within 28 days. These 'stage two' complaints will then be reviewed by a Complaints Panel, which will include other Newlon residents.
- If the resident is still unhappy with our response after stage two, they can contact the independent Housing Ombudsman Service

Last year

- We received 550 stage one complaints
- We answered 90% on time
- 85% of residents were happy with how their complaint was handled
- The most complained about issues were relating to repairs, which accounted for the majority of stage one complaints each month.
- The second most complained about area was to do with estates, including cleaning and gardening.

Aims for next year

We have set clear goals going forward in order to ensure we resolve complaints as efficiently and effectively as we can.

- 50% fewer stage two complaints.
- Resolve all complaints, including the most complex, within 6 months.

It is also important that we learn lessons so we avoid problems in the future. For instance, one area we receive complaints about is where contractors are not making sufficient effort to gain access to properties, and therefore there are delays to works. Therefore we are focusing on ensuring our contractors are thorough in their attempts to gain access, and these are properly reported and recorded. We are also reviewing our antisocial behaviour policy so we are clearer with residents about what help we can offer, and what action we can and cannot take.

Supporting residents through difficult times



Although the majority of our residents are financially secure, some face difficulties as a result of issues such as welfare benefit cuts, job losses and changes in personal circumstances.

1.



To tackle this we have a dedicated Resident Services team who provide employment support, assistance in claiming benefits and financial advice. Over the past year hundreds of our residents have benefited from these services.

Employment and training

Newlon's Step Forward employment programme tackles barriers into work and provides access to many training and job opportunities. It also provides valuable work placements, advice and referrals. In addition it has a wider value, with savings to Newlon through reduced training, recruitment and support costs.

We are pleased that our work placement scheme was runner up in the Guardian Public Service Awards in 2019.

As the job market slowed, we shifted our focus to upskilling residents through our online training provider, Learning Curve.

Many of those signed on to our employment programme end up working for us. We are proud that 17% of our staff are Newlon residents. We also have two residents on our Board. Putting residents at the heart of our organisation in this way has had a positive impact on our customer service and working culture.

1. Step Forward employment programme.
2. Newlon Jobs Fair.

Financial support

This has been a challenging time for some of our residents, particularly with the shift towards Universal Credit. We have had hundreds of new Universal Credit cases this past year, including an increasing number of new and complex welfare benefits issues as a result of coronavirus.

The Resident Services team helps Newlon residents through these difficult financial times by providing direct support or referrals to specialist agencies. Our experienced in-house benefits advisor has helped residents claim thousands of pounds in benefits they are due, helping hundreds of residents to stabilise and thrive in their homes.

We have also set up an in-home support programme for residents who would like help with technology and are moving onto Universal Credit.

In addition we have a hardship and tenant emergency fund, generously supported by SPH Friends, an external charity, as well as from donations from our contractors. This fund supports the most vulnerable Newlon households with grants to pay for furniture or kitchen items, or with support for groceries or utility bills. In 2019/20, we distributed £40,000 in funds to 100 households.

We were also approved once again for the BBC Children in Need Emergency Essentials Programme, which supports young people living in extreme poverty, distributing a further £3,490 to six families, including 14 children.

Where we feel residents may need further help we provide referrals to established key programmes. This includes the LEAP Energy Programme which provides energy saving advice and home visits. We also offer referrals to debt advice organisations such as Step Change and Capitalise.

If you would like employment advice or help with finances please book an appointment by calling **020 7033 4605** or emailing community.services@newlon.org.uk.



122

residents registered for employment services



38

got into work



60

had training to improve their skills



9

secured work placement opportunities



£144,000

in benefits secured for residents

Involving residents to improve our services



Our residents help us to provide effective services and improve satisfaction by engaging with us through a wide range of involvement activities. These include forums, mystery shopping, readers' panels, estate inspections, newsletter contributions, procurement, feedback surveys, as well as dozens of residents' groups.

The direct involvement of residents in scrutinising the services we provide helps to ensure that we are accountable and transparent in how we review performance. It also allows us to make improvements and design services based on their input. We appreciate the challenge and learning opportunities this help brings.

We are pleased that resident satisfaction has risen from 74% to 75% within one year, to its highest level, and we have more residents engaged than ever before, including at strategic levels such as the Board.

Below are some other key areas residents have been involved with us over the past year.

Resident inspections

We currently support over 45 Resident Inspectors who regularly check their buildings and report back to help ensure standards of repairs and cleaning are upheld. This has proven popular and something we are keen to continue.

Mystery shopping

We have over 25 mystery shoppers who undertake three mystery shops per year. Mystery shopping provides a snapshot of how residents' queries are being handled, including responsiveness, professionalism, and overall communication standards. The results are used to identify areas of weakness we can focus on.

Following some disappointing results earlier in the year we have seen improvements, with teams putting in place more effective communication processes, such as coordinated management of shared email inboxes.



Although we are not where we want to be, we were pleased that in the most recent mystery shopping exercise 67% of responses tested met our service standard, an increase of 17% compared to the previous one.

Value for money

Involving residents has also helped us to secure better value contracts. For example, resident input helped us shape a new cleaning contract that provided good value - reducing the contract price by over £500,000.

But we can improve further, and there have been key contracts where we should have engaged more with residents. It is also important that when we award large contracts to private businesses they show a commitment to the community, such as by creating employment and apprenticeship opportunities for Newlon residents. In the last year we have worked with residents to strengthen our contracts in this way, and make sure our partners are as committed as we are.

Complaints Panel

Our resident-led Complaints Panel independently reviews and resolves residents' complaints. This past year they produced reports to highlight challenges and suggest solutions. These solutions are being put in place, with a focus on resolving the core issue of a complaint as quickly as possible, and more effective ways of resolving complaints at the early stages. We are aware of the need to make our complaints process faster and this is a priority for the current year.

Forums, Boards and committees

Our Residents' Forum meets four times per year and makes recommendations about how to improve the way we work. We are grateful to this dedicated a group of 15 involved residents for their commitment.

This past year we also recruited more Resident Board members. Although we were looking for one, the quality of applications was very high. As a result we hired two talented residents to our Board - Lloyd Gale-Ward and Blossom Shakespeare. In addition we have five residents on our Residents' Services Committee, which oversees performance of our key services, including organisational performance indicators.

Innovative ways to get involved

We work closely with our residents to find out new, easier ways they can get involved, and the impact of the coronavirus accelerated these changes. This included setting up our first ever virtual Residents' Forum meeting.

1,441

residents took part in resident involvement activities

1,089

residents responded to surveys and consultations to help shape our services

150

residents took part in conferences and training

25

residents were active mystery shoppers

2

residents were recruited to the Newlon Board



1. Residents' Forum meeting.
2. Members of Residents' Forum.
3. Resident Inspector on estate visit.



Safe homes and decent standards

A focus on fire safety

Over the course of the past year we have started to make genuine progress in our programme of fire safety works in response to Government guidance following the Grenfell Tower fire. The safety of our residents, staff and contractors is our main priority and Newlon has set up a specialist team to lead investigations into the fire safety of our buildings and oversee delivery of any remedial works required. In line with Government advice we have been prioritising investigations to buildings over 18 metres in height or where external cladding materials have been used.

Where we have found that works are required we have introduced active safety measures. These include appointing 24/7 fire warden patrols and making smart use of technology such as thermal imaging cameras, to maintain residents' safety until works are completed. In the past year we have spent over £5 million on additional safety measures such as fire wardens and carrying out remedial works. To date we have not passed any costs back to residents and our aim as far as possible is to avoid recharging leaseholders, although this cannot be guaranteed.

We have appointed specialist retained fire safety engineers so that any remedial works can be checked before they

are undertaken and after completion to ensure they meet the required criteria. This has also helped us to obtain EWS1 form – a standardised fire safety compliance certificate for taller buildings sometimes required by lenders if residents are selling, staircasing or re-mortgaging their homes – against a national background of long delays.

Newlon has approximately 50 buildings over 18 metres and we are progressing steadily through our programme of investigations and undertaking any works required. Although this is a complex issue which will require works for several years we are in a relatively good position as we have fewer impacted buildings than many larger housing associations and are progressing steadily through our programme.

Remedial fire safety works were completed at Oakleigh Court in Hackney and Fenton Street in Tower Hamlets, where we re-clad the exterior of the block with new non-combustible materials.

Works are progressing towards completion at Rivers Apartments, our 22 storey block in Tottenham and at the neighbouring lower rise blocks. We are also onsite at Albemarle Court at Hale Village. In the Arsenal Regeneration Area works are being specified at Caledonian Road, Hornsey Street and Queensland Road and are onsite at the Ashburton Triangle. In each case the work required varies according to the issues

found, which either relate to the cladding and materials used in the buildings' construction or to issues with internal and external fire stopping. Any works that can be completed quickly such as internal fire stopping issues have already been carried out.

Electrical, water and lift safety

In parallel with our increasing investment on fire safety works we have been carrying out an increased programme of electrical safety works and are maintaining our ongoing programme of water safety checks and lift inspections. During the first stages of the lockdown we were able to source new specialist contractors at short notice to carry out regular safety inspections of our lifts when the original contractor withdrew this service.

Good quality estates

We carry out regular estate inspections to ensure they are in a good condition and pick up problems, such as communal repair issues. Estate Inspectors are joined on some of their visits by residents, who check that inspections are picking up the things that matter most to you and that the gradings given are fair and transparent.

Most estates still meet the expected standards but we failed to meet our target last year, with 94% of estates classed as being in a good or fair condition against a target of 96%. Where estates do not meet our standards, we work out what improvements are needed and make money available to make the changes as soon as possible.

We also aim to tackle instances of ASB, such as noise nuisance and vandalism, as quickly as possible. Last year over 99% of reports of ASB were responded to within target times and 83% of residents were happy with how they were handled.

We appreciate how frustrating it can be when something needs fixing, which is why we invest in our repairs service to ensure people's homes are maintained to a decent standard. Last year we spent £10.7m on repairs and maintenance.

Value for money is also important to us, so we worked hard to bring overall costs down by £468,000 last year.



100% of properties have a valid fire risk assessment



94% of estates in a good or fair condition



77% of communal repairs completed by first inspection

Cleaning costs down by

£600,000



Bulk rubbish costs down by

£84,000



1. Estate Inspector at work.

2. Fire safety works.



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Newlon Housing Trust is a charitable housing association

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