

RESIDENTS' FORUM MINUTES 27 June 2019

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; Kevin Brown; John Rymell; Wendy Jackson.

Staff Present: Bill Henderson, Director Housing Services; Graham Watts, Head of Residents Services; Karen Orr, Senior Resident Involvement Officer (minute taker).

Apologies: Phil Williams; William Crilly

1. WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

1.1. Martin welcomed everyone.

2. MINUTES

2.1 The minutes of the 3 April were agreed as a true and correct record.

3. RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY

3.1 Karen introduced the draft Resident Involvement Strategy, Newlon's plans for involving residents from 2019 to 2022. Outlining the workshops that had been held with residents and staff to consult them about the original proposals. There were a number of factors that had influenced the strategy such as the Government's Green Paper and the focus on landlord's properties being residents' homes and its importance in the sustainability of their tenancies and well-being. Additional factors were other related strategies and plans at Newlon. Including supporting them main corporate objectives such as improving services.

3.2 The meeting then discussed the strategy's action plan and priorities over the next three years, with suggestions for changes and improvements. The actions were largely generic but would include much of the detail suggested at the workshops when implemented.

3.3 Bill acknowledged there was sometimes resistance from staff so the Board and the Directors should be encouraging more openness and working together with residents. Eunice agreed that staff and residents would benefit from working together and since she had been a member of the Forum she had a better view about how Newlon operates. John observed that staff actions affected residents' lives so that it really mattered to get things right. Wendy noted that she had attended the smoothie bike event to promote resident involvement to staff and met so many of them which she found really helpful.

- 3.4 The action plan had a tick for increasing resident membership on the Board as this had already been achieved. It was then announced that Blossom and Lloyd had been the successful candidates and they were congratulated. Bill commented that they were both now a part of the Board's important decision making role. Martin explained that this meant he would also be stepping down from the Board and as the Forum's Chair. Lloyd would then step into the job of Forum Chair as it had to be filled by a resident Board member. There would be an event for all Forum members to celebrate Martin's time as chair and everyone would receive an invitation.
- 3.5 Members gave Martin a vote of thanks for all his years' service as Forum Chair.
- 3.6 **ACTION:** It was agreed:
- to bring forward action 2-C1 about breaking down barriers between staff/residents
 - consider bringing forward the setting up of a Procurement Panel of residents
 - to find out when the Repairs and Maintenance Procurement starts
 - to share the list of upcoming procurements with the Forum
 - that members will feed any further comments about the strategy and action plan back to Karen

4. REVIEWING THE FORUM'S CONSTITUTION

- 4.1 The proposals for reviewing the Constitution were introduced.
- 4.2 Karen explained that Forum membership was an issue that had been raised at the resident involvement workshops. Other residents felt that there should be a fairer system of recruiting members and more opportunities to become a member. The current Constitution did not have a time limit for membership and there were places for 21 members which was probably too many to be an effective group. There followed a long discussion with differing views expressed by members.
- 4.3 Africa felt that a formal recruitment process would not work and she may not have become a member if she had had to apply. Bill pointed out that it was hard for everyone to contribute in large groups so size is important and noted Forum attendance was good. Blossom knew other residents who wanted to join. John felt to become better representatives, there should be formal applications, suitably promoted with an effective voting system allowing all residents the opportunity to vote. Membership to be for three years so each year one third of members would be up for election and members could be re-elected.
- 4.4 Wendy raised the problem of encouraging residents to vote. Lloyd added that the Isobel Place Residents' Association considered a similar formal system of recruitment but decided against it as it could have excluded some residents

because it may have put up barriers for them. Blossom stated she would not have become a member if there had been such a system in place when she joined. Other members felt the same. There was then a vote to see if members were in favour of a more formal method of recruitment, with only one member in favour. Africa was in favour of looking at a different format for the Forum, with more representation, perhaps something like citizen assemblies. Wendy suggested having 18 members and a majority of members agreed this. There was also agreement for a probation period for new members.

- 4.5 Kevin then suggested an event for potential new members to meet current members. There was some agreement for a “soft” formal process but with caveats so agreed to consult members after the meeting about the proposals. Also about how to stagger the membership terms and length of membership. Noted that a formal process should not exclude residents who may be dyslexic or not good at writing and Karen would support such applicants.

ACTION: Agreed membership of the Forum to be reduced to 18 members.

ACTION: Agreed there would be a recruitment to bring membership up to 18, and potential applicants would be invited to an event with current members.

ACTION: Agreed that new members would serve a probation period.

ACTION: Agreed to consult members outside of the meeting with options around terms and a formal system for recruitment.

ACTION: Agreed once a year to hold an open Forum for other residents.

5. MYSTERY SHOPPING REPORT

- 5.1 Graham introduced the report about the March mystery shopping exercise and Quality Audits. One of Newlon goals is to improve standards and satisfaction. Mystery shoppers are trained to mystery shop Newlon services to check performance on key service standards, such as always dealing with the query. There are 3-4 mystery shops a year carried out by 13 mystery shoppers using different scenarios. The findings from the latest mystery shop were good, they showed that Newlon are meeting standards. e.g. 91% replied within the standard of 2 working days, compared with the last mystery shopping exercise at 87%.

- 5.2 Most staff were following the knowledge based articles, information held in CRM (Newlon’s database) that tell staff what to do. There was a slight under performance in some areas. Table 3 in 1.8 showed a text in response to a query about a barbecue was sent to all residents and this could have been done better. Any areas that need improvement are dealt with by the relevant team. Bill mentioned the disappointment for him about the barbecue text was in its tone and added it could have been conveyed with a degree of civility. Martin asked whether such messages are just sent out by individual officers, Bill said yes but there needed to be corporate standards. Kevin asked if such messages going to a whole block are checked. Bill did not think so and added that they should be. Graham commented that Newlon would be working corporately to improve written communications.

- 5.3 Blossom read out an example of a text that she had received that was not clear what it was about. Lloyd commented that Newlon used “the Trust” to describe themselves but he had never heard anyone describe Newlon in this way. Graham suggested that a Glossary of Terms would be a good idea. Bill posited that it was down to the organisation to set the standards and sometimes people are not good at both talking to people and writing to them. He also suggested that the Forum could help Newlon come up with some rules and tips for staff about how to write to residents. Kevin suggested that a manager or someone with the right skill set should check anything going out to large numbers of residents. Bill agreed.
- 5.4 Ben raised the issue of not all residents receiving texts from Newlon and how could they ensure that residents update their phone numbers when they change mobiles. Bill replied that Newlon is moving to self-service through the portal so residents will be able to update their phone numbers and other personal details. Graham noted that he would continue to bring mystery shop reports to the Forum.
- 5.5 **ACTION:** Agreed members of the Forum to help Newlon draft rules and tips for staff on writing to residents using an appropriate tone and style.

6. PERFORMANCE REPORT

- 6.1 Bill went through the performance scorecard for Housing and Property Services, focussing on those areas where it was less good. Complaints resolved at stage 0 was slightly down, but not significantly, as there had been staff shortages in the service resolution team. An additional staff member is being appointed. ASB is also bit down, he has concerns about how it is handled. What expectations residents have versus what Newlon can do is different. There are 30-40 cases per month ranging from serious to trivial. The number of days to complete a repair is higher than the Board would like. The other area where Newlon look less good is fire risk actions overdue, which is high but has come down significantly. Bill agreed with Martin’s comment that it will continue to remain high for some time as Newlon is assessing fire risks in buildings in much more detail. As a result, they are discovering that lots of building materials have plastic in them, although nothing really major and measures have been put in place. Such as at Coppermill Heights, where there are two fire wardens walking around the building 24 hours a day in case of fire. Bill explained the fire risk actions were regarded as overdue until they are completed. However, Newlon mitigates them by taking other action, such as the fire wardens. There continues to be a lot of work done by Newlon on fire safety and a lot of money spent.
- 6.2 John was unhappy with the 56% of residents satisfied with the ability of staff to deal with their query quickly. Also satisfaction with repairs at 51% was very

low. People explained the factors related to this. The survey asks residents about the repairs service and not their last repair. However there is now a repairs satisfaction app that is presented to residents immediately after their repair. Using this method, satisfaction has increased to the 90%'s. Bill confirmed that contractors only get paid once, despite the number of visits they make to complete a repair. Martin added that Newlon is moving towards a price per property system for repairs which will encourage contractors to get them right first time. John reminded the meeting about his idea for a single communication system between Newlon, contractors and residents.

- 6.3 **ACTION:** Agreed to invite Duncan Lee, the Head of Repairs and Maintenance to a future meeting for a constructive discussion, including proposals around price per property.