

RESIDENTS' FORUM – 19 February, 2020

MINUTES

Members Present: Lloyd Gale-Ward (Chair); Blossom Shakespeare; Sonia Dobson; Geraldine Grant; Ben Roe; John Rymell; Wendy Jackson; Sylvia Donaldson; Surjeet Chana; Africa Alconchel-Guido; & Iain Scott.

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

Guest Presenter: Victoria Carey-Duff, Chair, Scrutiny Panel.

Apologies: Eunice Sinyinza; Kevin Brown; Sophie Greenfield.

1. WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

1.1 Lloyd welcomed everyone and introductions were made around the table.

2. MINUTES AND ACTIONS UPDATE

2.1 The minutes of the 27 November were agreed as a true and correct record. The actions update was deferred until the next meeting. **Action: John P and Graham.**

3. MYSTERY SHOPPING REPORT.

3.1 Graham spoke about the latest Mystery Shopping Report. He pointed out that the 25 mystery shoppers were given scenarios to contact Newlon, and were testing not only the 2 ten response times but also the quality of the response. He noted that the latest figures were not as good as the ones from the Spring 2019 Mystery shop; but this was because other teams (specifically Property Services) were brought into the exercise for the first time in addition to Housing teams and the poor results indicated there is much work to do. Senior managers will now work with their teams to bring about improvement.

3.2 Several questions followed from the presentation:-

- John and Iain said a computer generated reminder should be displayed when the 2 day target to reply to an email is imminent.
- Sonia wanted to know whether patterns are picked up when several residents report a repair in the same block.
- Wendy reported that her last 3 calls to service centre resulted in 10 minute waits. Also that the speaker does not appear to be speaking into the mouth piece, and she has to prompt them to do so. Wendy also wanted to know who is responsible for keeping departments up to date with latest information.
- Ben is always told he is number 1 in the queue but still has a long wait before his call is answered.
- John found it irritating to be constantly told that his call had to wait because the service centre was “exceptionally busy.” He also thought that shared email inboxes diluted responsibility unless there was an iron protocol in place.

- Surjeet had positive experiences with the service centre and always found them polite and helpful.
- Lloyd noted that following the results in the latest MS report, “drastic action” would be taken. He wanted to know what this action was.
- Geraldine wanted to know what action is taken when there is a drop in performance
- Africa wanted to know whether staff training was adequate.
- Blossom wanted to know what is happening to those e mails that had no response. She said that she is also aware that sometimes an acknowledgement goes out but no further response. Shared inboxes required good communication and teams to speak to each other.

3.3 Graham and Bill responded to the above points.

- Graham said that group emails could work better - as the Income Team have demonstrated with their approach to managing their shared inbox. This team ensures there is a team member to reply should other team members be absent. A colour coding system operates well in other teams. We need to see which teams are doing well and which teams are failing and introduce best practice to all teams. We would need to go back to those emails that were missed, but often events had overtaken them. It is not easy for our systems to detect a pattern when different residents report a repair in the same block but issues would be picked up when the contractor visits. Graham noted that Senior Managers and the Business Improvement team are reviewing this.
- Bill said the Service Centre has had issues lately and he is aware that people have had difficulty getting through. He will pass on comments about the need to speak clearly into mouthpiece. **Action: Bill.**
- Graham commented that the MS survey showed shortcomings and the best action was to admit there was a problem and to address it. The task now is to re-embed the 2-ten standard, and this would be brought about by the Newlon Gold Passport, which puts the focus on resident involvement. (The eight observers at tonight’s meeting were present because one of the exercises in the passport is to attend a resident meeting.) More training would also be on the agenda, and Senior Managers will ensure that staff were given updates on Fire Safety and other knowledge based articles. Bill said some of the emails that had no reply were very straight-forward and training was not always the issue. Getting the ethos right and ‘getting people to care’ were equally important.

4. SCRUTINY PANEL REPORT

4.1 Graham and Victoria introduced the Scrutiny Report, “Communications within Newlon’s Repair Service”. Victoria outlined that evidence had been collected from a variety of different sources over the past year and that the evidence collected was listed in the report, along with the recommendations. Graham said that resident scrutiny was an effective method to drive up standards. A one day resident scrutiny training course has been set for Monday 23rd March, 2020 (9.45am to 4pm). **Action: John P will send more details to forum members.**

4.2 The Forum welcomed the report and made some observations

- The Wates Resident Liaison Officer role was working well and should have been retained
- It is understandable that a repair may sometimes get missed as Service Centre is under great pressure.
- When a resident sends a photo of the repair, the contractor should see it.
- Wates should be informed that they have to use the Newlon Dynamics system to keep track of the repair, and money should not be wasted on an interface system. Sub-contractors should use the system too.
- On occasions the contractor claims a visit took place, but this is disputed by the resident. This needs to be resolved.
- When management give their response to the Scrutiny Report, a resident sub-committee should be set up or a follow-up report given to the Forum. **Action: Graham and Victoria.**
- Compliments were given to the new cleaners, Smarter Services. **Action: Bill.**

Bill said that there was already a limited interface system in place, but Mark and Duncan from Property Services were not in the room and he did not want to speak on their behalf. Bill said there would be a 'management response' to the report, and feedback would also be sought from Wates.

5. SERVICE STANDARDS REPORT.

5.1 Graham spoke about Newlon's Service Standards, and sought the views of the Forum.

- Residents want an issue resolved. Getting a full reply within 10 working days often does not resolve the problem. Some issues cannot be resolved within the 10 days, but it would be good to be kept informed as to progress.
- The word "always" should be deleted from the standard, and perhaps "always aim" should be inserted.

Bill agreed that explanation should not be a substitute for action. Any further thoughts on standards should be given to Graham which will be reported onwards to the Residents' Services Committee of the Board and taken forward by staff. **Action: Graham and Annette.**

6. PERFORMANCE REPORT.

John R introduced the Performance Report. He said he was still waiting for some responses from Newlon and that is the reason for gaps in the report. The repairs satisfaction had risen to 99.51% and this seems very high, in view of information in other reports. Lifts being out of order was a concern and the affect it has on residents. Information of whether the out of order lift was in a 5, 10 or 15 storey block would be relevant as the higher the building, the greater the distress to residents. Feedback from specific Newlon teams and staff needs to be provided on specific requests from John R. **Action: Graham and John P.**

7. FEEDBACK FROM RSC

Lloyd and Blossom spoke about the financial challenges for Newlon as resolving Fire Safety issues has put a squeeze on other areas of spending. New kitchens and bathroom work has been delayed as well as cyclical work. Blossom pointed out that patchwork roof repair is not cost effective but Bill said there are financial challenges and this has delayed things like cyclical or wider scale repairs. Bill also said it could take 3-4 years for fire safety works to be taken out of the system. Bill said he would put something about cyclical works in the next newsletter. **Action: Bill and Communications team.**

Ben thought money was sometimes being wasted, as a very flimsy bollard was replaced near his home with a similar one, and broke again within 2 weeks.

Sylvia thought communal fire doors on her landings were not fit for purpose as they open inwards. Bill said fire doors may soon have to be checked every quarter and he will raise the point about inward opening doors. **Action: Bill.**

8. AOB

- A vote will be taken at the next meeting to ask whether forum members wish to change the starting time of the Forum. **Action: Graham and John P.**
- Graham suggested moving the date of the meeting from 26 April, 2020 to a date in May, 2020. Graham to circulate proposed dates and will ensure this new date is in Forum members' diaries. **Action: Graham and John P.**
- Ben thought the new self service portal was very good.
- Sonia was informed that there would be a choice of colours when internal decorating takes place.

Appendix B:

RESIDENTS' FORUM – 27 November, 2019

Approved MINUTES

Members Present: Lloyd Gale-Ward (Chair); Eunice Sinyinza; Blossom Shakespeare; Sonia Dobson; Geraldine Grant; Ben Roe; Kevin Brown; John Rymell; Wendy Jackson; Sylvia Donaldson; Surjeet Chana; Africa Alconchel-Guido; Sophie Greenfield & Iain Scott - observers.

Staff Present: Bill Henderson, Director Housing Services; Graham Watts, Head of Residents Services; Duncan Lee, Head of Repairs; Symon Sentain, Assistant Director Property Services; Angela Wereko-Anderson, Service Resolution Manager; Karen Orr, Senior Resident Involvement Officer (minute taker).

Apologies: none

1. WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

- 1.1. Lloyd welcomed everyone and introductions were made around the table. Sophie and Iain were attending as potential Forum members. Symon and Angela were staff observers.
- 1.2. Noted that Phil Williams had resigned as a Forum member.

2. MINUTES & ACTIONS UPDATE

- 2.1. The minutes of the 19 September were agreed as a true and correct record.

3. REPAIRS UPDATE

- 3.1. **Communal Repairs** - Duncan Lee, Head of Repairs and Maintenance, introduced his report and explained that repairs includes day to day and communal repairs. It addressed a number of issues previously brought up by the Forum. Communal repairs are raised by the Estate Inspectors and logged on an app that Wates operatives work directly from. This means that the Service Centre does not have to raise the jobs themselves. From 1 April to 31 October 2019, 2170 communal repair jobs had been raised for the handymen and 95% done within 10.5 days. The handymen do everything they can but some jobs need to be raised by the service centre.
- 3.2. The highest % of handymen jobs were for the electricians to change communal lights. But over the summer there had been problems with the supply of lights from Fern Howard, the manufacturer, resulting in some delays. John asked if lights are moved around to make sure there is some degree of lighting where there are ones that need replacing. Duncan replied that something would be done for emergencies where there was no communal and natural lighting.
- 3.3. **Repairs App** - the Forum were aware of the repairs satisfaction app as they had previously been involved in discussions, before its introduction. Duncan covered the use of the app from April to October 2019. When residents are asked if they would like to respond to the app survey by email 13% opted for this but then more than 95% did not complete the survey. John asked if those residents are sent an email immediately. Duncan replied yes, adding that it is automatically generated through Wates. He clarified that PH Jones, the gas contractor, does not currently use the repairs satisfaction app although there were plans for them to do so in future. Ben noted that the PH Jones operative who did his gas safety

check had filled in something on a PDA so he was questioning if Wates also fill in the app survey themselves - instead of asking the resident. He was concerned that residents who have a repair may not know about the app and asked if Newlon get in touch with the resident after the operative has visited.

- 3.4 Duncan explained that his team have been doing random audits of about 5% of residents who have been visited by an operative to fix a repair and where a completed app survey was received for them. The audit checks that the resident actually filled out the app survey themselves. There are four months of random audit results which he is about to analyse and he hoped that it did not show residents weren't given the app to fill in. The app survey was not sent to residents by text as Duncan did not think they were effective and this had been discussed before at the Forum.
- 3.5 Blossom pointed out that if the repair was not fixed the first time then the resident's would not know if they were satisfied until the visit when it was completed. Duncan explained that if a resident said that the repair was not completed, they didn't get asked the satisfaction question until it is. Wendy raised that the out of hours repairs service not giving a gas heating/hot water option when residents call. It was agreed to look into this, as Duncan's understanding was that a gas repairs option was included. Iain raised the issue of how would a resident know if their repair has been completed which led to the idea of efficacy inspectors checking repairs from an informed standpoint. Blossom followed up by reminding the meeting that she had raised this at the Forum before when she suggested using resident volunteers to check completed repairs and their quality.
- 3.6 John added that a resident may not know if the repair has been completed until a few weeks later when they discover if it works. There was a discussion about linking the app survey results to complaints (if the complaint is about a repair, it could be considered a survey result). Lloyd noted that Mark Newstead, Property Services Director, said at the last Residents' Service Committee meeting that in future, Newlon would look at responses to the repairs app survey in relation to complaints. Wendy gave praise for the call handling at PH Jones, saying they were very good, Bill agreed this would be passed on to them.
- 3.7 Of the repairs app surveys completed, over 95% of those residents stated they were satisfied with the completed repair. Duncan acknowledged this figure seemed extremely high compared to the previous phone surveys and he would be looking into the data as some of it doesn't tie up. He would have expected the results to be more in the 80%'s. It was possible that some residents skip some of the survey questions which causes a default satisfaction result to be recorded. Iain stated that was a flaw in the app and the default should start at neutral. John offered to help Duncan analyse the data.
- 3.8 **Wates Repair Contract** - Wates were appointed in August 2015 on a 5 + 5 contract, meaning there was an option to extend it for a further five years after the first five years. Wates's performance has been good so Property Services are looking at recommending to the Board about extending the contract. Duncan said this was an opportunity to review Wates and the Forum would be welcome to be involved in this, as part of a wider consultation with residents. For example, are the current KPI's still relevant? Or attending workshops – day long sessions where residents could just drop in. John recommended that Wates, or any contractor working with Newlon must be required to exclusively use our CRM for all their communications/diaries/notes. All repairs interactions would be open and transparent and residents would be able to go online to see the progress of their own or communal repairs. If Newlon and Wates continue to use different systems this would cause big problems.

- 3.9 Lloyd asked if this could be considered by Newlon. Duncan did not think so because contractors' own systems are also used to pay their suppliers etc and he was not aware that Newlon's CRM could do this. Contractors need a system to meet their own requirements. Bill commented that he understood John's suggestion, it seemed sensible to him, also noting that it had been raised several times before. Africa raised the issue of privacy of residents' data if CRM is shared with contractors. Duncan thought that it would have to be built in such a way that sensitive data would not be shared.
- 3.10 **DIY Workshops** – the previous DIY decorating workshop had been very successful. Duncan's report had a list of potential repair topics, which were residents' responsibility, for future DIY workshops. Wendy suggested being taught how to adjust kitchen cabinet doors. Duncan clarified that maintaining internal smoke alarms was about checking the back-up battery on a mains run alarm. Sophie asked why Newlon do not provide curtain rails as standard and Duncan replied this fell within residents' responsibilities. Sophie recounted she had been told by a gas engineer that the boilers in her home was the cheapest. She wondered about the sustainability of gas boilers in residents' homes. Bill stated that Newlon currently follow the law in installing boilers but will be moving away from that in future.
- 3.11 **Residents managing their own repairs** – the Forum had raised a question previously about whether residents could manage their own repairs if price per property comes in at Newlon. The answer was no as the average price per property would only be about £300 and how would big repairs, say costing £6,000, get done? Other reasons it would not be possible included Health and Safety and skills set issues.
3. **ACTION:** Duncan agreed to look into issue of lifts at 9 Hornsey Street continually breaking down with Stefan St Hilaire-Brown, Head of Building Services.
ACTION: Duncan agreed to look into whether residents are given a gas option when they call the out of hours repairs service.
ACTION: agreed that Property Services should respond to the outstanding Forum suggestion about using resident volunteers to check completed repairs and their quality.
ACTION: agreed to pass on a compliment to PH Jones about their call handling service.
ACTION: agreed to ask Newlon to consider having a contractual requirement for the repairs contractor to use Newlon's CRM so that all interactions between all parties involved in repairs, including residents, would be open and transparent.
ACTION: agreed to add adjusting kitchen cabinet doors for inclusion in a DIY workshop.
4. **LETTINGS AND TENANCY POLICY AND PROCEDURE**
- 4.1 The report about Lettings and Tenancies was presented by Bill. Newlon's policy and procedure outlined how they run tenancies and what rules they apply. He noted that Newlon follow Government policy in deciding rent levels so Newlon rents are a lot lower than the private sector. In response to a question, Bill clarified that the Government very rarely say to put up rents and in fact most social rents are going down.
5. **MYSTERY SHOPPING**
- 5.1 Graham outlined highlights from the latest mystery shopping results in what he called a serious, but interesting report. Mystery shopping is carried out three times a year with a pool of about 25 residents involved. They carry out tasks checking service quality and that Newlon are following their procedures and answering questions. The latest exercise did not go as well as previous ones which was a concern but some solutions have been identified. The tasks involved phoning and emailed staff. Results showed that meeting the 2:10 standard dropped from 91% to 45%. The reason for this was that the testing had been extended to other teams and other email inboxes. We found these inboxes were not

getting checked as often as they should be. There were also four non responses to emails sent by mystery shoppers. Performance dropped back to the same levels as in 2017.

- 5.2 The Property Services teams are now being tested and the culture there has been maybe to hand things back to Housing Services. This has also come up in our Complaints and Scrutiny Panels. Newlon have realised, that if something is passed from one team to another, is handled by more people, then it is more likely it will be dropped. Some of the

6. RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY UPDATE

- 6.1 Karen reported progress on the implementation of the new Resident Involvement strategy. Two residents had recently taken part in recruitment panels for new staff and asked Forum members who have experience of being involved in recruitment to come forward. Wendy, Africa, Ben, Blossom and John all put themselves forward.
- 6.2 Three key procurements were coming up next year for residents – Concierge and Estate Inspection Service; Door Entry and Grounds Maintenance. Wendy volunteered for the latter. She also questioned why the contractors cut the grass during wet weather. Bill suggested that something could be included in the new contract about not cutting the grass during wet weather. Noted that there is a specification for every estate or block that sets out what the grounds maintenance contractors are expected to do.
- 6.3 Members were reminded about the Forum's joint 20th Anniversary/Xmas party on 2 December. Agreed to the suggestion to extend an invitation to all service centre staff as members use that service the most. Members also acknowledged the improvements they have noticed in the service.
- 6.4 After a suggestion from the Residents' Forum last year Newlon piloted a potential new parking contractor, Parking Control Management or PCM, at Isobel Place. The Estates Team have been happy with the pilot and are now expanding their service over all estates with parking restrictions. Lloyd fed back that PCM were better although still a few issues. Such as, once a vehicle has been ticketed many times, they don't get any more. Then the bad parking behaviour returns by the vehicle's driver. However it was recognised that it can take some time for the legal process in such cases to be completed – often over a year. Bill added that abandoned vehicles could also be dealt with, but it was not a quick or easy process. Lloyd said that Newlon have worked with Haringey Council to remove abandoned vehicles.
- 6.5 Following up on the Community Led Housing topic at the last Forum, an article has been put in the Winter newsletter and posters will be put up on estate/block noticeboards to see if any residents, including Forum members, were interested in getting a group together to explore this idea.
6. **ACTION:** agreed that Wendy, Africa, Ben, Blossom and John would be included in the pool of residents with relevant skills who wish to be involved in staff recruitment.
ACTION: agreed that Wendy will be invited to take part in the grounds maintenance procurement.
ACTION: agreed to inform the procurement team and contract manager
ACTION: agreed to invite all service centre staff to the joint 20th Anniversary/Xmas party.

7. PERFORMANCE REPORT

- 7.1 John provided an update on the KPIs and noted some of the areas of concern.