

RESIDENTS' FORUM – 20 MAY 2020

MINUTES

Members Present: Lloyd Gale-Ward (Chair); Eunice Sinyinza, Sonia Dobson; Geraldine Grant; Ben Roe; John Rymell; 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).

Apologies: Blossom Shakespeare, Wendy Jackson, Surjeet Chana, Sylvia Donaldson.

1. WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

1.1 Lloyd welcomed everyone to the first Resident Forum held by Zoom.

2. MINUTES AND ACTIONS UPDATE

2.1 The minutes of the 19 February 2020 were agreed as a true and correct record. The actions update was also agreed.

3. CONTRACTS AND REPAIRS UPDATE

3.1 Graham updated the Forum on the Wates maintenance contract. Initially, the contract was for 5 years, plus a 5 year possible extension. The initial 5 years is almost up, but due to the Coronavirus outbreak, it would be difficult to review the contract at this present time. The Wates contract review deadline and (start of any changes to the contract) has therefore been extended. Therefore the contract will be extended from August 2020 but any changes we would like to see wouldn't be implemented until April 2021, which will give the Forum an opportunity to have an input into its renewal, and discuss how it can be monitored and improved.

3.2 Forum wanted to see an improvement in the way the Newlon and Wates computer systems talk to each other and a strong suggestion that Wates should use our CRM system for greater clarity, consistency and transparency. Also had concerns on whether a repair was a "first time fix", as this is often not known until some weeks later; nor might the resident be in a position to judge whether it is a first time fix. For instance, the re-wiring of a fuse box may look okay but an experienced person would know that it is not a first time fix. Similarly, guttering repairs are often not shown as adequate until heavy rain arrives. Photographs of jobs would be helpful but external auditing of repairs would throw more light as to the quality of repair and maintenance jobs.

3.3 Concern was expressed that there may be an imposition of low wages in order to win a contract (in general terms, not only with the Wates contract).

- 3.4 Bill said it was necessary to structure things correctly and ask the right questions to achieve high levels of satisfaction. In the case of the cleaning contract, TUPE rights and the new contractor may determine some of the costs and wages. But in launching the new cleaning contract we asked residents how often they wanted their building cleaned, and this has led to high satisfaction amongst residents and staff. Subjective evidence and analysing the complaints would also give a good indication of whether high standards are being achieved on repairs and maintenance.
- 3.5 Graham said Newlon would take concerns back and come up with a plan to review the Wates repairs contract and provide a timeline on how to address this and engage with interested Forum members and other key residents and staff. **ACTION: GRAHAM AND JOHN**

4. SPECIAL REPORT. SUPPORTING RESIDENTS DURING CORONAVIRUS

- 4.1 Graham gave an update on the support offered to residents during the Coronavirus pandemic It Included
- Over 700 household contacted in the first two months - mainly elderly / vulnerable residents to check on their well-being and experience of lockdown.
 - A Tenant Emergency Fund and a Hardship Fund established to offer help and offer assistance.
 - Working in partnership with local authorities to offer practical help – with shopping etc. – especially for those that are self-isolating.
 - Digital service expanded and knowledge based articles provided to staff.
- 4.2 The Forum thought this was very positive and a great deal has been achieved in a short space of time and it would be good to see the above in Newlon's next newsletter. A concern was raised about the impact of furlough and unemployment on rent arrears. Bill said Income Team were dealing with arrears cases sympathetically and Newlon's Business Plan would be updated.

5. SCRUTINY REPORT

- 5.1 John P outlined the management response to the Resident Scrutiny Report. Each of the 8 recommendations were reviewed separately and several comments were received.
- Sub-contractors themselves should update the CRM / Dynamics system with full details of the repair, so that all parts of the organisation could see the progress of it.
 - Why was the interface between Newlon and Wates System so limited?
 - What system could be put in place to establish an independent audit of repairs?
- 5.2 John P said that it might not always be easy to get sub-contractors to do a job, especially if they are in high demand, and logging into our systems might be

off-putting. Bill said Newlon have a contractual agreement with Wates, but not with sub-contractors. Bill also pointed out that many of the recommendations overlap and often relate to the Wates contract. The Forum felt that a Repairs Review Group should be established, which could look at the response to the scrutiny report in more detail, and also the Wates contract. **ACTION: JOHN.**

6. PERFORMANCE REPORT

6.1 Bill gave an update on performance during Coronavirus pandemic. Most services are operating as previously, but there has been a drop in demand for services and volume of telephone calls received is down. Most staff are working from home and only emergency repairs are being carried out. Rent arrears are likely to rise and income from community halls has almost ceased. Safety issues are being prioritised and consultation with residents on services, will continue as before.

6.2 Forum stated they were impressed by Newlon's response and how it has adapted well to the new situation.

7. FEEDBACK FROM RSC

7.1 Lloyd gave feedback from Board Meeting. He was impressed by the stress testing going on within Newlon and with the projected financial models to ensure that Newlon remains a viable and stable business. Bill said Newlon was steady and safe and keeping organisation afloat is the top priority. Lloyd also reported that Newlon's approach to domestic violence was very professional.

8. AOB

- Panel thought it was great to get together for this first virtual meeting.
- Concern was expressed that repair materials are not always sourced at the cheapest price by contractors. Bill replied that Newlon has fixed prices with its contractors and if they paid over the odds it has no effect on Newlon.
- Praise was given for how much Newlon is doing for its residents.
- Agenda was quite heavy for a two hour meeting, especially when listening on the phone. Maybe some reports could be placed in the pack, but not presented, and questions taken, if there are any. **ACTION: GRAHAM AND JOHN**
- Main gate at Hammond Court was broken by a resident. Bill is aware of it. **ACTION: BILL**
- Start time of meeting should be consulted upon. **ACTION: JOHN**