

RESIDENTS' FORUM – 19 August 2020

MINUTES

Members Present: Lloyd Gale-Ward (Chair), Eunice Sinyinza, Sonia Dobson, Ben Roe, John Rymell, Africa Alconchel-Guido, Blossom Shakespeare, Sylvia Donaldson, Sophie Greenfield, Wendy Jackson, Kevin Brown, and Iain Scott.

Staff Present: Bill Henderson, Director Housing Services; Graham Watts, Head of Residents Services (minutes), Rehila Hamid, Head of Procurement.

Apologies: Surjeet Chana, Geraldine Grant.

1. WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

1.1 Lloyd welcomed everyone to second ever 'virtual' Residents' Forum via Zoom.

2. MINUTES AND ACTIONS UPDATE

The minutes of the 20 May 2020 were agreed as a true and correct record. The actions update was also agreed.

3. Procurement presentation.

3.1 Rehila Hamid, Head of Procurement at Newlon provided an overview presentation of how Newlon approaches procurement, some of the recent changes (including a new Procurement Procedure), as well as some of the ways that residents have been or could be involved in designing, selecting or monitoring contracts as part of the procurement process.

3.2 Rehila noted the recent cleaning contract which benefited from resident input into frequency and levels of cleaning service. This led to a better designed contract with improved value for money (and a savings of over £500,000).

3.3 Some upcoming contracts are being tendered, including Concierge and Grounds Maintenance Services. Surveys are being designed to gather resident feedback on service levels, and types of service.

3.4 For selection or design of contracts, and even monitoring, we may seek resident experts who could be part of a Procurement Panel. John, Wendy, Sylvia, and Iain expressed interest in taking part. Other Forum members are welcome.

3.5 Another upcoming contract that will be requiring resident input is the Wates contract review. Following the request of the Forum and the recent Scrutiny Panel report, we will be setting up a Repairs Panel (once the new Sr Resident

Involvement Officer is in place) which can include Forum members to help provide input into the design as well as social impact elements of the Wates contract.

- 3.6 It was noted that deliveries and packages are an issue relating to the Concierge service and the Forum wondered how this will be addressed in the new contract. Bill noted that this is a contentious and challenging issue but one that we do need to address (including how we manage fire safety relating to packages, storage and collection, etc).
- 3.7 Sophie asked about Fire Wardens who don't seem to 'look up'. Bill noted that they should do and that they are trained to provide 24 hour watch, call the fire brigade and liaise directly with them should there be an issue (but he is happy to raise with the service provider to address any failings).
- 3.8 John noted that CO2 detectors are working well in his building, and Ben noted that fire systems in his building are completely out with batteries low or devices missing. It was noted that these issues should be reported through Service Centre as well.

The Forum received the update on Procurement and improving resident involvement in contract design, selection and monitoring. The Forum thanked Rehila for her presentation.

Actions:

- ***Graham to ask Judith to send test links for upcoming Concierge and Grounds Maintenance contract surveys to the Forum for their input and edits.***
- ***Graham to reach out to interested residents on the Forum and include them in upcoming procurement exercises.***
- ***Graham to set up Repairs Panel once new Sr Resident Involvement Officer is in place (currently recruiting for this role).***
- ***Bill to note to fire warden service specific issues noted at Hornsey Street.***

4. Update on Resident Involvement Strategy

- 4.1 The Forum received an update on the Resident Involvement Strategy.
- 4.2 The report provided an update on the actions within our Resident Involvement Strategy (2019-2022). The Strategy ensures we give residents a clear voice throughout Newlon while being agile and dynamic in responding to evolving expectations, including the considerable changes we have seen across the social housing sector. Some of these changes came about as a result of the tragic Grenfell Tower fire in 2017 and the subsequent Social Housing Green Paper in 2018 (and imminent White Paper). Our Strategy puts in place actions that respond to an increased focus on resident involvement that includes a

stronger emphasis on improving the relationship between residents and their landlords.

4.3 Although we are not where we would like to be, we should also note that this past year had some significant challenges including resourcing issues and the obvious challenges created by the Covid-19 crisis. In spite of this, we have managed to achieve a 'Fair' level of success (3 out of 5) in terms of progressing the Actions in our Strategy, including some positive and negatives:

- We've worked hard to demonstrate across the organisation the importance and impact of resident involvement. Notably we have seen positive outcomes with and support from the Estates, Service Centre, and Procurement teams.
- We have put a focus on involving residents at strategic 'pinch points', including communications, leadership and governance (including having two new Resident Board members), procurement, and employment.
- We have not achieved some key actions within the Strategy such as the Resident Think Tank, or the updating of our Resident Involvement Policy.
- We have also not promoted internal Newlon roles to residents consistently or effectively, and can do better at including residents on relevant interview panels.
- Although we updated the Procurement Policy to include a better focus on resident involvement in contract design and selection, we have failed to follow this policy in some areas of the organisation.
- Overall, our involvement work seeks to build on and strengthen our positive actions and strengthen the foundation of good practice while also identifying areas where we can improve.

The Forum received the Resident Involvement Strategy update and directed staff to continue to implement the actions and embed resident involvement across the organisation.

5. Spring Mystery Shopping report

5.1 The Forum received an overview of the results from Newlon's Spring 2020 Mystery Shop exercise. The report summarised the feedback from 19 Mystery Shoppers who undertook 54 enquiries (or 'tests') to determine how Newlon staff are performing against the 2-ten (responsiveness) standard.

5.2 It was noted that the spring 2020 Mystery Shop exercise was undertaken during the Coronavirus crisis. The fact that we had such positive engagement demonstrates the dedication of our residents (and indeed our staff) in terms of supporting Newlon to continue to improve communication and services, even during such a difficult time.

- 5.3 Although we are not where we want to be, we were pleased that in this recent exercise 67% of responses tested exceeded or met the 2-ten standard, an increase of 17% compared to our Winter 2020 exercise.
- 5.4 While Shoppers found interactions with our advisors and officers helpful, prompt, professional and to the point, this report highlights the importance of staff taking greater responsibility in responding to one another in order to answer residents' enquiries.
- 5.5 We see a need for staff to respond faster to emails internally to ensure that the staff member passing on the message can turn around a response to a resident within the 2-ten standard. Blossom noted that she sees challenges where departments or teams are not talking to each other or responding quickly or efficiently to get an answer and that there is a delay as a result.
- 5.6 Although there has been some improvement, there is a continuing need for clear guidelines concerning the checking of 'group' email inboxes.
- 5.7 Lloyd asked if the ratio of tests matches the ratio of areas of communication from residents across teams. Bill noted that generally it does and that most contact comes through the Housing Services Department where we have the most direct contact with residents. Ideally, residents should be able to get most information themselves, directly (from the website or other self-serve options). The next level is that we respond as quickly and directly as possible (from our front line). Finally, if there is a more complex request, we should get the information back as quickly as we can.
- 5.8 Blossom noted that it is still nice to speak with someone on the phone to describe the problem or challenge you are dealing with.
- 5.9 Bill noted that we will be consulting on our Customer Service strategy which will look at the different channels of communication.

The Forum received the report and directed staff to implement the solutions as noted above with the goal of improving responsiveness and increasing resident satisfaction.

Actions:

- ***Forum to receive an update on the Customer Service Strategy which is being consulted on in the coming months.***

6. Feedback from and to: the Board/Residents' Services Committee (RSC)/ Resident Panels

- 6.1 Blossom noted that the majority of Newlon staff have been working from home and that the offices are mainly closed to the public.

- 6.2 A new Chair of Newlon will be recruited in the coming month or so to replace Sarah Ebanja. Lloyd will be part of that selection panel, a nod to the Resident Involvement Strategy as we put more resident engagement and input into action.
- 6.3 A lot of excellent Covid support work going on at Newlon. Also, Outward is deserving of particular praise for their front line work, and overcoming challenges such as the PPE issue in order to ensure staff are safe and residents are supported throughout the Covid-19 crisis. Outward have also managed to find financial stability of late.
- 6.4 Employment issues and the economic impact of Covid-19 will be hitting Newlon residents quite hard in the coming months. It has been good that Newlon has provided resident support and Income support links. Blossom noted that for residents facing financial difficulties, they shouldn't wait but should contact Newlon directly.
- 6.5 Complaints have escalated somewhat, but the panel and staff are getting through them. There is a new Complaints Code coming soon.
- 6.6 Service Improvements that have come as a result of Covid-19 (such as more flexible working arrangements and digital solutions) are being put in place and evaluated.

7. AOB

- 7.1 Africa noted that a new focus on cycling is one of the massive changes coming out of the Covid-19 crisis, with many more kilometres of bike lanes being developed.
- Vouchers are available from the government for cycling.
 - There is a potential for a positive social and environmental impact within our communities and Newlon has a role to play. Is there a possibility to provide more bike parking?
 - Bill noted that new builds are generally okay in this area, but that hallways and some restrictions on existing buildings pose a challenge. He is looking into more bike parking, including at Barnsbury Estate.
- 7.2 Ben asked if Newlon can help do its part for the environment by helping promote recycling with residents. It was noted that different Councils have different approaches, but that we could differentiate and perhaps put a poster campaign in place.
- 7.3 Eunice noted that her Residents' Group is finding it hard to keep momentum and wondered about how they might find support to coordinate community needs or responses to Newlon, particularly around issues such as ASB. Graham noted that we are looking at how we streamline and better support Residents' Groups and Associations and that this will be part of the tasks of the new Sr Resident Involvement Officer.

Actions:

- ***Graham and Resident Services to look into a poster campaign around recycling to be promoted across Newlon buildings and communities.***
- ***Graham to work with new Sr Resident Involvement Officer to streamline and improve support for Resident Groups and Associations.***
- ***Newlon (perhaps Business Development and Estates) to look at ways of improving our overall approach to cycling and supporting storage or other ways of supporting cycling with residents.***