

Newlon News



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Welcome to the summer edition of Newlon news.

As we progress through the Government's roadmap we remain hopeful that things will remain on track for an end to restrictions in the near future.

We are pleased to report that we continue to be able to offer nearly all services as normal, subject to COVID-secure guidelines. For the latest updates on services and support we can provide please visit www.newlon.org.uk/residents/coronavirus-information-on-services.

Please remember to allow access for safety checks

If we contact you about an important safety check including a gas or electrical safety check, please make sure you allow us access as required. These checks will be carried out following COVID-secure best practice and are vital for ensuring your safety and that of neighbouring residents. In some cases these checks are mandatory legal requirements and we will be forced to take action if we cannot gain access to carry them out.

Office opening arrangements

At the time of writing our Head Office remains closed in line with Government guidance for people to work from home where possible. Although we do not know what the Government will decide in terms of changes to social distancing or testing requirements for attending a workplace as restrictions are lifted we are planning for a partial return to office working during the summer. We are hoping that more staff will regularly be back in the office from the autumn and it is likely that we will start to re-open the office to visitors from this point. Once we re-open, visiting the office is likely to be on an appointment only basis.

The latest information on the impact of coronavirus on services can be found on our website at www.newlon.org.uk/residents/coronavirus-information-on-services, along with information on how we can provide support or signpost you to support services if you are struggling to cope. Information on how you contact us and office opening arrangements can be found at www.newlon.org.uk/contact-us.

For residents on the Barnsbury Estate we are extending opening hours for the Estate Office to 9 a.m. – 1 p.m., Monday-Friday from the 1st June.



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Residents' Forum

update from the Chair



Lloyd Gale-Ward, Chair

The Residents' Forum is a group of residents who meet every three months to look at Newlon's work and monitor performance.

The Residents' Forum met via Zoom for its May meeting.

Matthew, the Assistant Director of Housing presented the Residents' Service Strategy and sought feedback from the Forum on how best to fulfil service requests from residents. Possible ideas included automated voice recognition type systems that may make use of bot or artificial intelligence technologies. Plans are to start with relatively simple and small processes at first, review their effectiveness as pilot schemes and build from there. The Forum welcomed the proposals; members felt that whichever tools were used the staffing for and reliability of responses should be consistent.

Graham and Emma from the Resident Services Team updated us on the great work they have been carrying out in relation to resident involvement activities. They have been busy revamping the way scrutiny of Newlon services is carried out and are setting up the Think Tank which will seek to obtain residents' views quickly on key issues. Over 200 residents have already agreed to take part in providing light touch feedback – thank you!

Mystery Shopping (where residents essentially test staff responses) has seen a rising trend in positive staff responsiveness. This is good news, as there had been a dip a year ago. The rise appears to be linked to a concerted effort among senior management to improve resident satisfaction – if the great work and attitude of the Resident Services Team filters out to other teams the trend should continue, so watch this space.

Changes to the Forum constitution were also approved. The aim is to make it clear how long existing members can remain on the Forum, and provide clear routes for new members to join. The Forum looks forward to inviting prospective new members to observe future meetings.

A report drawn from input and experiences of members of the Resident Repairs Group was presented to the Forum. The report highlighted key trends where improvements could be made and recommendations to assist with the realisation of the improvements.

It was very encouraging to have Symon, the acting Property Services Director, and two representatives from Wates (the main repairs contractor) at the meeting to hear first-hand about some of the difficulties experienced by residents. And to hear from them how committed they are to improving things and firmly putting residents at the heart of the services provided.

Finally a reminder that if you are experiencing financial difficulties relating to, but not exclusive to, cladding or COVID-19 you can contact Newlon in order to access help and support.



Getting involved – what is the difference between a residents' association and residents' group?

A residents' association or a more informal residents' group is one way to represent the views of people living in your block, estate or street. It brings together people who share common concerns and who choose to work together to resolve them.

But what is the difference between a residents' association and a group? And what is the benefit or downside of one over the other?

Residents' associations are widely recognised, have clear structures and responsibilities, regular meetings and a committee to drive the work of the association. Roles are clear, which can be helpful if you like or need structure. On the other hand, they can take time to set up and run and are process driven and rather less spontaneous, which some people don't like. Keeping residents involved can take effort and perseverance. As a residents' association you may be able to access funding to run projects and keep ticking over, which is a positive.

Informal residents' groups do need to have a set of rules known as terms of reference, though they take less time to set up and can agree task and/or location based coordinators instead of a committee. This does mean that there is no overall leader like a chairperson or recognised structure so there is less of a hierarchy, which some people prefer. They can be freeing with more energy, or can lack cohesion and lead to inertia, it just depends on the people involved. People tend to come and go more with informal groups. A residents' group can later develop into a residents' association, if it wants to.

Either way, they are a commitment, which should reflect the wider concerns and views of your neighbourhood and should not be used for voicing a personal issue or complaint. It's really important to reflect where you live and try and involve everyone if you are thinking of setting up a group. Newlon won't offer you support or endorse you if you don't give everyone the opportunity to take part when you are setting up an association or group.

You can read more about residents' experiences of setting up a group in the article by Jeannie Lowen from the Norton Folgate Community Group on page 5.

About Resident Services

Newlon's Resident Services team runs a range of services, projects and activities to support Newlon residents. The team's aim is to help residents stabilise in their homes and to build strong communities.

You can email us at community.services@newlon.org.uk or call on 020 7033 4605.

Interested in getting involved?

Are you considering a residents' association or group for your block, estate or street?

Contact getinvolved@newlon.org.uk and the Resident Involvement team will be in touch.

Resident Services here for you

Newlon's Resident Services team provides a variety of key services to support Newlon residents and to help build strong communities.



- **Welfare and financial inclusion** – supporting residents facing financial hardship by giving advice, making applications for benefits and referring them to external services.
- **Employment support and guidance** – helping residents find jobs, apprenticeships or training. This service also benefits from the support of Newlon's partners who help us achieve our goals.
- **Community facilities** – providing local halls and spaces for residents to take part in health and wellbeing programmes and other community activities. The two main spaces are the Barnsbury Community Centre in Islington and Lascar Wharf in Tower Hamlets, although the team works across all boroughs where Newlon has homes.
- **Training courses and personal development** – assisting residents to access a range of training courses both online and in person, many of which are free.

During the last year we have provided support and advice for 120 welfare benefits cases, secured £166,000 in welfare and other benefits for residents and provided employment support for 139 residents.

We've recently launched a short video providing an overview of what our Resident Services team does to support residents to thrive. You can watch this at – www.youtube.com/watch?v=xfGekliuMZA&t=7s.

Email community.services@newlon.org.uk or call **020 7033 4605** if you need additional advice or support. For more information visit – www.newlon.org.uk/residents/resident-services.

Supporting vulnerable residents impacted by COVID-19

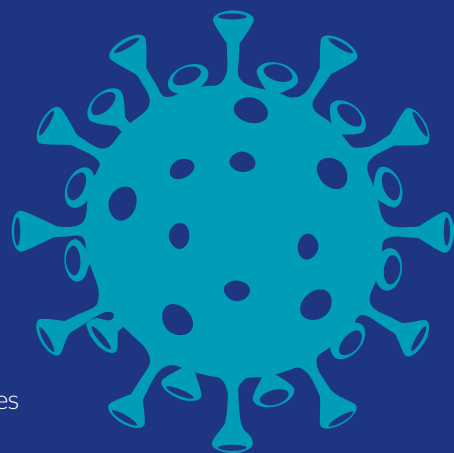
Newlon's Resident Services team is here to support residents during this difficult period, as we continue to respond to the impact of the coronavirus.

We know that in times like this it is more important than ever to support our residents, particularly those who are vulnerable. The wellbeing of our residents and the health of our communities are our priorities, and this approach continues to guide us as we respond to the crisis.

We are making sure our essential services are still available to residents, whilst closely following government and NHS coronavirus guidance to keep the public safe.

For more information on how we're supporting residents, please go to: www.newlon.org.uk/resident-services-help.

You can also find up to date information and guidance on financial support for those affected by COVID-19 at www.newlon.org.uk/financial-support-coronavirus.



A voice for the community

By Jeannie Lowen, Newlon resident

A residents' group can be an extremely powerful resource and of great benefit to improving your neighbourhood.

To establish a group all you need is a small band of people willing to be involved. There may already be a few residents who are engaged in local activities improving the neighbourhood.

If you do not have a community voice, local decisions could be made both without your consensus and disregarding any benefit to your neighbourhood. The requirements of your community sometimes may be at odds with other more vocal and organised local groups; this is something we found was happening in our area. You can also work together with other organisations, adding weight and strength to the needs of local people. The group serves as a contact point for individuals and can work on concerns that are outside of Newlon's remit but affect the community.

When we set up our group there were a lot of local issues, including major planning applications and antisocial behaviour. As individuals, residents had been engaged in attempts to get our viewpoints included. There were already some local residents' groups in the area but a large number of Newlon tenants were not well represented there. Other parties had a voice in respect to issues, and as existing community groups they had access to funding which benefited their residents and to which we were not eligible because we were not a formally organised group.

Once we were formally organised, we were then able to represent our community. This enabled us to engage and work with organisations to resolve problems that affected residents here. One such success was in drawing attention to drug dealing and use in the doorways of a property development on our doorstep. Our group was able to negotiate with the developer as we represented a large set of people; this carried a lot of weight, rather than being just a solitary voice. As a result of this the developer arranged to carry out hourly security patrols with a zero-tolerance policy to anyone loitering in the doorways.

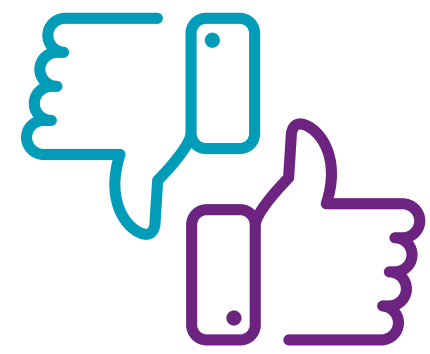


Once you have a small party of residents interested in organising a group, Newlon's Resident Involvement team will help in the set-up and guide you through the process.

An initial survey will be sent to all residents. This is to ensure that a representative percentage of residents back the initiative. At first some people may be wary as it is an unknown activity. We knocked on doors and spoke to neighbours, reassuring them that they only need be involved if they wished and having the group would be a useful tool for the community. By doing this we managed to get almost half of all households to complete the survey. Almost everyone we spoke to thought it was a good idea and agreed to us forming.

Once you are organised it takes very little effort to run the group. You'll see the best of people as you work together towards a common goal. In our community having the group has been extremely beneficial and we are stronger for it.

Complaints – improving our performance



As mentioned in the update from the Residents' Forum, Newlon is working hard to reduce the number of complaints we receive and to make sure we deal with those we do get successfully.

One important part of this is learning from the complaints we receive. This involves identifying which areas receive the most complaints, reviewing what we have done well or poorly when dealing with individual complaints and using data to pick up on any patterns.

We are working with members of the Residents' Complaints Panel to identify the main areas which contribute to complaints. This is done by reviewing individual complaints learning identified at Complaints meetings with contractors and Newlon staff, as well as from Ombudsman findings.

Although we have recently changed from using a Residents' Panel to review stage 2 complaints to allow us to handle more complaints within the required timescales the Panel members are still actively working with us to review complaints performance and to help us apply learning.

Since we have introduced the new process we have reviewed 31 Stage 2 complaints in this way, 80% have been responded to within 20 working days, with an average response time of 19.6 days. We are still working to improve this performance, but it represents a step forward compared to the time required to arrange, hold and feedback from panel sessions.

We are also running a project group led by the Housing Services Director to review complaints performance and understand learnings. Coupled with the work with the Resident Complaints Panel members the following list shows the main themes that we have identified where we need to improve.

Going forward our focus will be to work with residents, staff and contractors to improve in these areas in particular and we will report back on progress in future newsletters.

Learning from complaints – key areas for improvement

- Checking the quality of repairs and works that have been done for Stage 2 Complaints – the process for inspections and taking photos to show works completed needs to be reviewed.
- Where a Works Order is required or a job needs to be passed to another contractor, or where the initial works carried out have not been successful, and new works are required, target timescales for decision making and passing on need to be agreed. The bigger picture needs to be considered in terms of length of time taken to fix the issue. This also needs to apply to deciding which team are managing works.
- Ensure key information is provided to the resident by the contractor before the operative leaves, or after a job is completed. We need to provide a better process to make sure residents are clear what is happening next.
- Where multiple contractor visits take place without any resolution, we need to set up a better system for identifying repeat issues.
- Our approach to roof and leaks repair management needs to be improved.
- We need to improve management of no access – there is a policy/process that should be followed to ensure all contractors report access issues promptly.
- The quality and format of letters needs to be reviewed to ensure the right balance of detail and understanding of residents' issues.
- Works that are not managed via our Dynamics database need to be case managed by surveyors in a way that means when there is a change of staff it is clear where the works have got to, to ensure more effective management and communication with residents.
- Maintaining communication with residents in relation to fire safety remedial works, offering mitigation such as the offer to sublet where possible.
- Where white goods provided by Newlon are out of service for an extended period this can be referred to the Resident Services team who can issue food vouchers through the Tenants' Emergency Fund or alternatively the resident could be supplied with a mini-oven.
- Review and formalise the process for keeping residents updated on communal repairs, including understanding the appropriate level of frequency of contact and ensuring quality of information.



mynewlon the quick and convenient way to access services

Our online self-service portal 'My Newlon' allows you to report issues, pay rent and download statements at a time that is convenient for you. If you live on an estate or in one of our larger blocks, you'll also be able to find information about your building, including recent estate inspections.

You can access My Newlon via the homepage of our website at www.newlon.org.uk or going to <https://my.newlon.org.uk>.

Updates to policies and procedures

We have recently updated a number of our policies and procedures including those for complaints and compensation, as well as introducing a new reasonable adjustments policy.

The changes to our complaints and compensation policies and procedures have been made to make sure they continue to meet the new complaints code issued last year by the Housing Ombudsman and to help improve services.

We have also introduced a reasonable adjustments policy. This provides an overview of the steps we should make to ensure we provide equal access to services for disabled people.

You can find the complaints policy and procedure and the reasonable adjustments policy on our website at www.newlon.org.uk/residents/making-a-complaint.





Making the most of automation - know your tenancy reference number

We are working on trialling a range of automated enquiry handling to help speed up responses to requests to our Service Centre.

The aim is to save you from waiting in a queue to speak to an adviser when you contact us. We are gradually planning to introduce this approach for common requests and enquiries which can successfully be actioned or booked without needing to speak to a member of staff as they are straightforward processes.

When you call us the automated option may be one of the menu choices you are offered for specific service areas. It will involve confirming information to a chat bot similar to the approach used by many banks and utilities companies.

We are at the early stages of introducing this technology and as we roll it out you will always have the option to speak to a member of staff if you prefer.

If you are comfortable with automation, picking this option when it is available, should reduce the time you need to spend contacting us. For security purposes you will need to be able to quote your tenancy reference number during an automated transaction. You can find this on your rent statement, or it is usually included in any personal correspondence from Newlon.

If the use of automation proves successful knowing your tenancy reference number or being able to access it quickly will be really useful.

Achieving value with our communal utility supplies

Newlon Housing Trust and Access Homes are looking to secure the best utility rates for communal gas and electricity supplies, and have appointed the Monarch Partnership who specialise in these types of contracts to assist us. Our existing contracts expire on 29th September 2021.

This is for the supply to communal areas only and will not affect individual utility contracts within your property for your own electric or gas supply.

To secure the most competitive price we anticipate we will need to enter into a contract for a period longer than 12 months. The law requires us to consult with you before entering into such a contract.

Due to the nature of the utilities market and the fact that the price fluctuates daily, it is impossible for us to formally consult with you in the usual way and achieve the most competitive price. Newlon and Access, have therefore applied to the First-tier Tribunal Property

Chamber (Residential Property) for dispensation from the consultation requirements contained in Section 20ZA of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985.

Residents who contribute to these costs will be sent a communication with details of how you can access a copy of the application, once it has been issued by the Tribunal, along with details of the process that will be followed, during which time you will have an opportunity to make representations.

Should you have any questions concerning the above, please contact us at the following email address utilities@newlon.org.uk.



Shirley's recipe for success

Newlon resident and Tottenham mum of five Shirley Boateng is achieving mouth-watering success with Simply Shirley's Jollof Paste. A game changing product that allows everyone to cook Jollof Rice, West Africa's well-loved rice dish like a pro within 35 minutes without compromising on the authentic taste and flavour.

Starting out a business during a pandemic posed many challenges but Shirley and her team stayed focused and have been rewarded. Simply Shirley's Jollof Paste was a finalist in the World Food Innovation Awards 2020 held at the ExCel Centre London and is now being stocked in SPAR as well as 900 stores nationwide.

It is versatile, including vegan and halal friendly flavours and can be used to marinate dishes, add to stir-fries, or make pasta sauces, stews, casseroles and much more, in fact it will give any dish a twist, getting your taste buds dancing.

Shirley says "Jollof Rice is a well-loved dish, from the sub-Saharan of West Africa. It's a spicy flavoursome tomato stew, cooked together with rice and seasoned broth. The stew is everything and the most important part of the cooking process, if the taste is not right it's not Jollof Rice. The cooking

process usually takes hours for a very well marinated Jollof Rice, this is the challenge that many face. I thought if I could make a paste that could do more than just make Jollof Rice and meet the needs of those who desire to make it with no hassle, it would be a winner."

As the business grows, Shirley wants to be in a position to give back to her local community in Tottenham and beyond, to train, coach, mentor and to support other women who want to start their own business to dream big. Her message to anyone, especially mothers with children wanting to start a business is simply "if you have a passion, go for it!"

Simply Shirley's Jollof Paste can also be purchased online at www.simplyshirleys.com.



Fire safety remedial works update

Building Safety Fund bids

For a number of our blocks where remedial fire safety works are required we have made bids for funding from the Government's £5.1 billion Building Safety Fund. If these bids are successful this will help to protect leaseholders from the potential costs for completing the required works in our tallest and highest priority buildings.

In common with nearly all other building owners until recently Newlon had not received any updates on the progress of our bids. However, we have now managed to meet with the new team responsible for overseeing the bidding process at the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

They have reassured us that our bid submissions have been received and are compliant and have therefore progressed to the next stage towards funding consideration. The bids for different blocks are at varying stages in this process and there is also a slightly different approach for some of the larger value submissions.

Although we cannot provide a definite update at this point we are pleased that the submissions are being actively worked through by the MHCLG and are cautiously optimistic that this will mean a positive outcome.

We will update residents further on a block by block basis as and when we receive news from the Government.

Subletting for residents affected by fire safety issues

We realise that this is a very difficult period for leaseholders and shared owners who would like to move but are unable to do so because of fire safety related issues.

One practical way we can support people in these circumstances is to offer the opportunity to sublet their home, even if they are not a 100% leaseholder. Initially, we had limited this option to those affected buildings where it was clear that remedial fire safety works would be required. However, we have now extended this to include buildings affected in other ways. For example, if you live in a building where either intrusive fire safety inspections have not yet been carried out or you are waiting for a form EWS1 and this is not likely to be available in the near future, you can now apply to sublet if you have been trying to sell your home and are unable to do so.

Information on how to apply to sublet can be found online at www.newlon.org.uk/residents/home-owners/subletting.

Update on form EWS1

EWS1 is a standardised fire safety compliance form developed by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) for use by lenders and valuers.

For an EWS1 to be completed it requires sign off by a suitably qualified specialist as well as intrusive fire safety investigations to be carried out in line with Government guidance.

There are only a limited number of suitably qualified specialists nationally and a very large number of buildings which require an EWS1. This means that where one is required it can take a long time to be completed and Newlon, in common with other building owners, does not have direct control over these timelines.

In March, following work with the Government, RICS introduced an update to guidelines with the aim of freeing up parts of the property market by making it clearer which buildings do and do not require an EWS1.

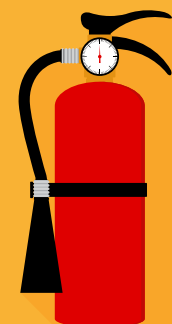
Form EWS1 was originally only intended for buildings over 18 metres (usually six storeys and above) in height. Over time some smaller buildings between 4-6 storeys have come into scope due to their construction and the types of cladding material used on them. More information about this can be found on RICS website and we have included a brief summary at www.newlon.org.uk/fire-safety.

Where an EWS1 is not required according to the RICS guidance a valuer or lender needs to provide a full explanation as to why they have exceptionally requested one.

Newlon's position is that we will not provide an EWS1 in a situation where it is not required. This is due to the timescales and cost involved in obtaining one and because there are many buildings which require one where residents have already waited for a significant period of time.

Contacting us about fire safety

If you have any queries relating to fire safety you can contact us by emailing firesafety@newlon.org.uk, if the issue is more urgent please call our Service Centre on **020 7613 8080** or in an emergency please always call 999.



The secret history of our streets



Horseferry Road and Limehouse

We provide more than 8,000 homes, ranging from new build developments to 18th century street properties. Many have fascinating histories. Here we continue our regular feature exploring some of these stories.

Very few areas of London have seen as much change during the past 100 years as Limehouse. Once at the heart of London's bustling docklands and connected to a global shipping network the area has been changed almost beyond recognition by bombing during WW2 and subsequent slum clearance, the decline of the docks and the regeneration of the area as a commercial, financial and retail hub centred around Canary Wharf. Despite this if you wander down Narrow Street and onto the Thames Path it remains one of the few areas where you can get a genuine sense of what pre-Victorian London was like.

Adjoining Narrow Street and just a few minutes from the river is 40 Horseferry Road, Newlon's first ever purpose-built Shared Ownership scheme, which was completed in the early 1990s. When the site was acquired it was a depot for refuse vehicles adrift in an area suffering severe deprivation. Since then there has been extensive neighbourhood renewal and even elements of gentrification, especially close to the river. Nevertheless Limehouse continues to harbour pockets of poverty.

Horseferry Road is named after the ferry which ran between Rotherhithe and Limehouse. It was not hauled by horses, but was large enough to carry them as well as carts and carriages. The ferry was worked by chains resting on the river bed. It is not clear when it dropped out of use but it is still clearly marked on maps of the area from the 1850s.

Limehouse takes its name from the lime kilns that operated from the mid-14th century, converting Kentish chalk into quicklime for London's building industry. From the late 16th century the area developed ship building and traders sprung up to supply provisions for voyages. In 1661 Samuel Pepys recorded a trip to lime kilns at the jetty just along from The Grapes pub in Narrow Street.

The most successful merchants erected fine houses on Narrow Street, especially in the early 18th century, some of which still stand today. In 1730 Nicholas Hawksmoor built the distinctive St Anne's church, just south of Commercial Road, which has the highest church clock in London.

London's oldest canal, the Limehouse Cut, was constructed around 1770 to link the River Lea at Bow with the Thames, saving a journey around the Isle of Dogs. Limehouse basin was opened to serve this traffic in 1820. Following the decline of the docks the basin was closed to commercial shipping in 1969.

With the growth of its docks, Limehouse was one of the first areas of London to acquire an immigrant population and became London's first Chinatown. Today this is reflected in some of the local street names including Amoy Place, Canton Street and Pekin Street.

You can find a vast amount of information about the history of the area online, but it is possibly no substitute for taking a walk from Limehouse Basin, down Narrow Street and along the Thames Path.

Take a break at Nutley Edge



Looking for a peaceful good value getaway – why not choose Nutley Edge?

Nutley Edge belongs to Outward, Newlon's care and support partner, a charity that supports vulnerable people in north and east London. Any profits they make go to providing better care and support services, so your stay will benefit some of London's most vulnerable people.

Since April 12th you can once more book the well-appointed holiday cottages for a break with other members of your household or support bubble.

Nutley Edge sits in eleven acres of rolling countryside on the edge of the Ashdown Forest in East Sussex, located just

an hour from London by train and easy to get to by car. You can pick from a number of cottages, including the 17th century Old Farmhouse, which sleeps up to eight. In addition there are glamping tents kitted out with a double bed and two single camping mats with sleeping bags, with access to compostable toilets and individual fire pits. There are good rates for Newlon residents. Measures have been put in place to ensure COVID-secure guidelines are followed. To learn more about Nutley Edge and book your stay please visit their website at nutleyedge.org.uk or call **01825 712 377**.

Be environmentally friendly by getting your newsletters digitally

We can send our newsletters digitally to your email address. This is both faster and more environmentally friendly. If you want to receive them digitally rather than in hard copy then please get in touch at newsletters@newlon.org.uk

Write for your newsletter

Do you have an idea for an article for this newsletter? We welcome articles from residents of all ages. If we publish it we will send you £20 in vouchers of your choice! Send your article idea to newsletters@newlon.org.uk

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