



ONGO HOMES BOARD MEETING

ONGO HOMES LTD (FCA Mutuals Registration No 7639) (the Association)

Held at 2.00pm on Wednesday 17 May 2023

Board Room, Ongo House, High Street, Scunthorpe, DN15 6AT and via MS Teams

MINUTES

Present:

Group Common Board: Bob Walder (Chair), Steve Hepworth, Paul Warburton, John Wright (Teams), Rachel Cook (Teams), Melvin Kenyon (Senior Independent Director) (Teams), Michael Finister-Smith (Teams), Paula Gouldthorpe (Teams), Natalie Cresswell, Helen Lennon (Teams), Gerraint Oakley, Kacper Merta (Teams)

Officers: Jo Sugden, Karen Cowan, Fiona Ruddick (Minutes), Ashley Harrison, Pete Stones, Emma Atkinson

Apologies: None

Absence: None

Also Present: Ahmad Khozad (Trainee) (Teams), Lisa Whelan (Trainee) (Teams)

Time meeting opened: 2.00pm

Quorum: It was reported that proper notice of the Meeting had been given in accordance with the Rules of Ongo Homes.

Declarations of Interest: No declarations of interest were made.

1. **Agenda item 3: Minutes of Previous Meetings & Matters Arising**

The minutes from the meetings held on 28 March 2023 were agreed as a true and accurate record for the Ongo Homes Board and will be signed by the Chair.

2. **Agenda item 4: Action List**

Updates on the action list were noted as per the meeting pack and all actions had been completed.

3. **Agenda item 5: Chief Executive's Update**

Summary: A presentation was given which delivered a high level overview of sector specific issues for the Board to consider.

Discussion points/questions:

- Areas covered included key housing policies and political issues.

- A recent change in political representation at the local elections may see an impact on the route to devolution in Greater Lincolnshire.
- The renters reform bill could have an impact on how Ongo Homes operates.
- Ongo Homes has reviewed its stance around contact with tenants and identified those who have not made any contact in the last 12 months. The properties where gas is disconnected (43) are being followed up with welfare visits and where appropriate support given.
- The Housing Ombudsman is offering increasing amounts of compensation to tenants.
- There is money available to councils to redevelop city centres and increase footfall .
- The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) will be reviewed as part of the corporate plan refresh. The Performance Team have been tasked with reviewing how information is presented to the Board. A proposal is to have a separate performance item, rather than include within the management accounts. Members agreed with this. Ashley Harrison asked if any Member had any feedback on the type of data they wanted to see, to contact him direct so it could be considered.
- The project to create an interactive performance dashboard for Board has now started and should be rolled out over the course of the next few months.

Agreed: Board received the update from the Chief Executive and discussed issues that had arisen from it.

4. **Agenda item 6: Fire Safety**

Summary: A presentation was given to Board by Emma Atkinson, Ongo's Building Compliance Manager. This followed a feature in Inside Housing that covered Ongo Homes' policy on fires and it has an evacuation procedure.

Discussion points/questions:

- Emma Atkinson delivered a presentation to the Board. Some of the slides had reading content and this has now been made available via Convene for Board to read at their leisure.
- Board thanked Emma for her presentation that was well received and asked some questions.
- A Member queried why there was always only one outstanding fire risk action. It was explained this was because all other actions were completed within the timescales required. Board only received information on overdue/outstanding actions. The information is available for all actions if Board wanted to see this level of detail.
- The frequency of fire risk assessments is annual for high rise with another assessment having been completed in the last few days.
- Two Ongo Homes staff have been trained in fire door assessment. They assess the internal communal fire doors as part of their daily walkdown of the buildings. Resident flat front doors are assessed by external contractors.
- A tender has been started for the entirety of fire safety works. If a new company wins this work, that might result in different actions being identified.
- Ongo Homes stance is evacuate when the fire alarm sounds. Myos House is slightly different as that is a dementia scheme, but it is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

- The scheme at Lincoln Court is being reviewed and their fire alarm zoning may be changed so it only goes off in the appropriate zone – currently all the zones sound at once. Due to the layout of the building, it is potentially a long way from one end to the other, so any danger could be a distance away so may not necessarily require a full evacuation of the building.
- It was explained by Emma Atkinson that a lot of work has been done and millions of pounds spent by Ongo over the last five years to get to the current position of compliance.

Agreed: Board received the presentation on fire safety and took the opportunity to ask questions as recorded above.

Review delivery of the overall strategy and financial plan

5. Agenda Item 7: Business Plan 2023/24 – Base Plan, Sensitivity Analysis and Stress Testing.

Summary: At the March 2023 Board meeting a business plan, sensitivity analysis and stress testing was presented. This plan has been reviewed against the 2022/23 financial year closing position with minor modifications made for variances in that position against the forecasts included. The business plan now presented incorporates these changes and presents a final base plan including details of the effects of these final reconciling adjustments.

Discussion points/questions:

- The next Financial Forecast Return (FFR) for the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) will be on the new group structure.
- A Member shared their experience of submitting a FFR following a group structure change and the RSH had been very interested in subsidiary performance.
- There is some work to finalise to get the new group structure fully set up around gift aid.
- The land at Kingsway is expected to be sold in the next few months, following approval of the planning permission.
- The shared ownership sales slippage relates to slippage of those sales currently being processed.

Ongo Homes Agreed: Board approved the final business plan based final year end position for 2022/23, and the update to the new Ongo Group Structure.

6. Agenda Item 8: Managements Accounts and Performance

Summary: This report presents the abridged management accounts of Ongo Homes, and full management accounts of Ongo Partnership (the entity) and the Ongo Group providing information on financial performance for the period ended 28 February.

Discussion points/questions:

- It was reported that Ongo Roofing (trading as Ashbridge Roofing) have had difficulty relating to one contractual problem. The decision was taken to account for the loss of that money.
- The golden rules all need reviewing as things have changed since they were first set.



- In the performance appendix, a Member queried the year to date data for *% of those engaged with employment support activities who are tenants and household members*. The information provided says N/A – this will be investigated and reported back. **Action 3/23**
- It was asked how much of the hardship fund was used to help tenants pay their rent. A Member felt this was like Ongo Homes giving money to itself. Some of the hardship fund had been used in this way. The breakdown of how it was spent would be shared. **Action 4/23**
- Local contractors have been brought on board to help with the backlog of outstanding repairs. They have been very effective. Equans are a larger national contractor who should be starting imminently. They have a team of operatives and once mobile, should make a big impact into the outstanding repairs. 800 jobs have been completed in the last two months by contractors. This also covers damp and mould repairs.
- Demand for repairs continues to increase and this is sector wide.
- Damp and mould cases are slowing down, as would be expected at this time of year. When more data is available that can identify any specific trends, this will be shared with Board although there are no strong trends identified. There are some issues around the fabric of buildings e.g., gutters not being fixed that are being addressed.
- Sickness absence has risen and there have been several mental health absences. These have been from personal issues that have impacted the individual's ability to be at work rather than work related stress. Most of these cases have now been resolved with either the staff member returning to work or leaving the organisation. On the back of a request from the Audit committee, there is going to be a review of this undertaken by our internal auditors.

Agreed: Management Accounts:

The Board

- Noted the contents of the report and associated information and approved the management accounts of Ongo Homes for March 2023.
- Noted the red status of one financial golden rule, and the red status of four business plan stress test indicators and continues to consider the impact of sustained high inflation on future costs and rent settlements.
- Considered the March 2023 performance data.
- Noted the contents of this report and associated information and approved the management accounts of Ongo Partnership (the entity and group) for March 2023.

Performance:

- Noted the proposed upcoming changes to the way in which performance data is presented.

Governance

7. Agenda Item 9: Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Update

Summary: The diversity profiles of Board members, staff and tenants were identified at 31 March 2023. These have been compared against the latest North Lincolnshire and Yorkshire and Humber Census data sets from 2021. An update is provided on the Board EDI Roadmap.



Discussion points/questions:

- The report focuses on diversity profiles at Board level. The Board now has good cultural and age representation, there is further work to be done on visual representation (BME). Disability is represented but not as widely as the tenant base.
- A Member queried whether comparing to North Lincolnshire was still appropriate as the tenant base was further spread. Karen Cowan accepted this was something that needed to be reviewed.
- There was discussion between Members around the need to ensure the appropriate skills for the Board were acquired, and not just focusing on diversity for the sake of it. This was balanced with the need for diversity of thought, brought by having different representational groups.
- For the Leadership Team, it was acknowledged we do not represent our tenant or our wider colleague base. The Chair asked Ahmad Kohzad and Lisa Whelan how they were finding the board trainee programme. They both said they were enjoying it and Lisa found having the HDN workshops covering theory and then observing these meetings seeing it in practice was really useful. Ahmad found it very useful and was learning from different views expressed at these meetings.

Agreed: The Board

- Debated the contents of this report and recommended that an action to target under-representation of disability is added to the Board EDI Roadmap.
- Acknowledged the progress that has been made in tackling the previous under-representation of individuals from ethnically diverse communities; with this area now being represented at Board level.
- Considered progress made against the Board's EDI roadmap, raising challenges and agreeing any changes or focus required to actions, priorities or progress within the roadmap going forward.

8. Agenda Item 10: The Customer Voice

Summary: The report provided an overview of the different ways the customer voice was heard and considered within Ongo.

Discussion points/questions:

- Karen Cowan reported that TPAS have awarded Ongo Homes the Exemplar accreditation. This is awarded to organisations who have received the TPAS accreditation at least three times previously and demonstrate a long-term commitment to engagement.
- The retirement schemes are now being visited regularly. These used to have a lot of customer engagement, but Covid stopped all that. It has been recognised it was a long time before any engagement work re-started in those schemes. Previous tenants who were heavily involved then had a different way of life and are not as keen to be involved now.
- Melvin Kenyon explained in his role as Senior Independent Director he tries to attend at least the first hour of the Community Voice meetings. He felt there had been a marked improvement in the engagement and input at that forum. At a recent meeting he had seen



information on how augmented reality is being used in the customer centre and thought this could be a useful future topic for the Board.

- A Member commented they enjoyed reading this report and thought it was well presented. They asked if enough support was put into areas outside of North Lincolnshire.
- Karen Cowan explained there had been various Ongo days held in Lincoln and Doncaster and various routes to customer engagement had been offered to tenants there.
- A Member said it was great to see all the ways that tenants could be involved. He felt communication was key and it was agreed this was, especially honest communication.
- When demand increased Ongo Homes did not have sufficient resource to cope with that either in the customer centre or repairs team. This has been addressed now although it does take a while for new staff to be fully trained.
- Steve Hepworth opened some invitations to Board to come and see the way Ongo Homes works:
 - Fire drills planned for the high-rise buildings that Board can come and observe
 - Facebook live event on 25 May at 5pm where tenants can ask questions of the Chief Executive
 - Ongo Carnival on 2 August

Agreed: Board determined the report provided assurance it needs in relation to how the customer voice is facilitated and utilised.

9. **Agenda Item 11: Health and Safety**

Summary: Ongo has a duty of care to all stakeholders, including our employees, customers, and contractors. We have a legal obligation to comply with various Health and Safety legislation and regulation, with serious consequences if we fail to do so.

Discussion points/questions:

- A Member asked the difference between undesirable circumstance and unexplained events. This will be looked into and reported back. **Action 6/23**
- It was asked if there had been an increase in false alarms from the additional carbon monoxide detectors now fitted in properties. There had not been.

Ongo Homes Agreed: Board confirmed it is satisfied with the management of Health, Safety and wellbeing arrangements set out in the report and approved the annual review of the Health and Safety Policy.

10. **Agenda Item 12: Governance Update**

Summary: This report aims to provide an update on any recent regulatory judgements and gradings to ensure Board are fully aware of any recent changes in the sector, including any other updates from the Regulator. It also covers other areas of governance which requires board approval or discussion.

Discussion points/questions:



- The new 2023 Rent Standard had been assessed and officers felt Ongo Homes was fully compliant.
- It was explained Board would be receiving a resolution via Convene to approve a change to the Articles of Association of Ongo Homes. As group parent and sole shareholder this needed Ongo Homes sign off.

Ongo Homes Agreed: Board

- Received the in-depth self-assessment for the 2023 rent standard and noted officers find Ongo Homes to be compliant.
- Noted the sector update on regulatory findings by the Regulator of Social Housing particularly.
- Noted a resolution will be circulated to Board to give approval to adopting new Articles of Association for Ongo Commercial Ltd and to respond in a timely manner when it is received.

11. Agenda Item 13: Approvals Taken via Convene in Advance

Summary: Items were circulated on Convene with a request for Members to consider them in advance and the approval decisions to be ratified at the meeting.

Discussion points/questions:

- It was confirmed the decision had been approved by a majority of Members via Convene.

Ongo Homes Agreed: It was confirmed the Rent Setting Policy, having been circulated in advance by Convene were approved with immediate effect.

12. Agenda Item 14: Decisions between Meetings

Summary: Standing Orders allows the Chair and others to deal with decisions in between scheduled meetings and for those decisions to be reported to the next meeting.

Discussion points/questions:

- The report and its contents were approved.

Ongo Partnership and Ongo Homes Agreed: To formally record in the minutes of the meeting the decisions taken by the Chair on 31 March 2023 by Convene to approve an application by a tenant to become a Tenant Shareholder of Ongo Homes.

13. Agenda Item 15: Other Board & Committee Updates:

13.1 Agenda Items 15.1: Minutes from all meetings within the group

13.2 Agenda item 15.2: Assurance Update from Board and Committee Chairs

Minutes from all other Board and Committee meetings are available for Members to view within the Document Library in Convene. No updates were provided by the subsidiary Chairs due to timing of meetings and issuing of meeting packs.

14. Agenda item 16: Attendance List



The attendance list was noted.

15. **Agenda Item 17**

Discussions recorded in confidential minutes after agenda item 19.

16. **Agenda Item 18**

Discussions recorded in confidential minutes after agenda item 19.

17. **Agenda item 19: Time for Reflection**

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and asked Board Members to remain present to discuss agenda items 17 and 18.

Ahmad Kohzad, Lisa Whelan, Emma Atkinson and Melvin Kenyon left the meeting at this point.

With no further business the meeting closed at 5.15pm.

Signed by Chair: Date:

As a true and correct record of the Ongo Homes Board meeting held on 17 May 2023.

