

Community Voice (CV) Meeting Minutes



Date: Tuesday 11th April 2023
Time: 1.30am – 4pm
Venue: The Arc or via Microsoft Teams
Chair: Tim Mills

Present: CV Officers: Tim Mills (Chair), Jill Milner (Vice-Chair), Dawn Johnson (Acting Treasurer)
CV Members: Stewart Pearson, Keith Lumbers, Keith Riley, Paul Pearson, Tami Reeve, Anita James, Maria Havercroft, Sue Whitelock, Judith Tomlinson, Susan Hickling, John Parsons, Tracey Bain (Teams)
CV Observers: Jeanette Ellis, Tima Omari (Teams)
Ongo Staff: Karen Cowan, Neil Keay, Pete Stones, Steve Hepworth, Jo Sugden, Wendy Wolfe, Ollie Mortimer

1. **Welcome, Apologies & Housekeeping**

Apologies were received from: Tony Sanderson, Dawne Reed, Paul Smith, Ian Bulleyment, Harry Jackson, Michelle Hodgson, Ron Weller, Jim Newcombe, Andy Mumby, Ryan North, Kevin Hornsby (Ongo).

All members and observers were welcomed, and brief introductions were given by all present.

Tim explained that there was no planned fire drill, but the fire exits were pointed out. He also reminded members to not raise any personal issues and to use the general enquiry log if an issue had been raised before but no update had been received.

2. **Minutes & Actions of Previous Meeting**

A member pointed out that their apologies hadn't been included in the March meeting minutes.

ACTION: apologies to be added.

The minutes were approved as a true record and Wendy provided an update on the actions:

- Members details were passed on that wished to observe the March Board meeting
- A focus group was due to be set up to discuss anti-social behaviour (ASB) and nuisance issues. Karen mentioned that ASB had been discussed in detail at the recent self-assessment against the Regulator of Social Housing's (RSH) Neighbourhood & Community Standard. She asked if members still wanted a separate focus group, the majority were happy not to have one. The Resident Scrutiny Panel (RSP) are also carrying out a review of ASB and the final report and recommendations will be presented at a future CV meeting
- Becky Johns (Customer Experience Manager) has been added to the May agenda to show members how the augmented reality system works
- At the CV Officers meeting on 03/04, the paperwork for meetings was discussed. A Customer Engagement Officer will give any new member of CV a phone-call to discuss the group further and go into detail about the paperwork
- Lettings have been made aware and are looking into the address where a tenant recently passed away

3. **Treasurers Report**

The report was included in the meeting pack. The balance is currently £2,252.47 and the books are currently with the Ongo Finance team for the annual check.

A member asked about the charge for room bookings for CV meetings. Dawn said that these are included in the report when received and paid but it depends on when the invoices are sent.

4. **Board Observers**

The next Board meeting will take place on Wednesday 17 May, at 2pm, in the Ongo House Board Room or via Microsoft Teams. Three CV members can attend, names interested to notify Customer Engagement (CE).

Discussion Items

5. **Performance Report – Karen Cowan**

Karen explained that Ongo has a requirement to monitor its performance every month. Tenants had previously been consulted on what performance information they would like to see Ongo report against and to monitor, this can be added to if there is anything additional that members would like to include.

Steve raised that there are a lot of new CV members, so it would be worthwhile to have another session on what performance information members would like. The new Tenant Satisfaction Measures set by the Regulator of Social Housing have also come into effect from April, with landlords starting to collect and report on the required data.

ACTION: session to be arranged.

The performance information for April 2022 – February 2023 had been included in the meeting pack, along with a covering report.

Complaints

This is an important focus for Ongo and the Housing Ombudsman in terms of how customers find the complaints process, plus the learning and improvements put in place. Ongo have a target of 10 days to respond to a Stage 1 complaint, in February this was at an average of nine days. In the period Ongo received 356 complaints, which is a 72% increase compared to last year, and 65% were upheld. One of the main reasons for the increase in complaints is due to the recent call-handling and repair timescale issues. As discussed at previous CV meetings, extra resources have been put into both areas and improvements should be evident in three to six months' time.

Customer Engagement

8.8% of tenants engaged during the period were aged 30 and under, which is above the 4% target. This shows that, although these tenants don't often engage by attending the traditional groups and structures, they are still having a say and influencing improvements.

Employment Support

Ongo have a service that, amongst a range of other services, helps people into employment. Some of their funding comes from external sources and is to help anyone in the community, although the team have a specific target to show their supporting Ongo tenants. On average 26 tenants have accessed employment support each month, with 47 in February 2023.

A member asked why the status for tenants gaining sustainable employment was red (requiring improvement), but it showed an upward trend for both the short and long-term. The monthly target is 7 and the figure for February was 3 which is why it was red, but the trend is anticipated to improve. Karen explained that they are the kind of questions that Ongo wants, figures on their own are meaningless and the context behind them is important. She encouraged all members to raise such questions on any of the information provided.

Empty Homes

Though there were 125 empty properties in February, the percentage of rent loss is still below the target, which is good. Lettings had a lot of new build properties during the month which could be the reason why the figure is higher than the monthly target of 85. It also took an average of 33 days to relet a vacant property, this is higher than where Ongo wants to be, but it does show an improvement through the last year. The number of empty garages (100 in February) is also less than the monthly target (150) and then the figure in March 2022 (186).

A member queried if this number had dropped because some garages have been knocked down. Karen said that some have over the last year but not many, the number of garages let has risen dramatically in recent times. Steve added that sometimes tenants decide to give notice on their garage after the rent notification letters are sent out.

A member raised if it would be possible to get a breakdown of the demographics of those who the homes are let to each month. Steve explained that this is data that Ongo provides to the RSH, and it will be brought to the next CV meeting that features performance. Another member added that it would also be useful to know how many properties for specific needs become available over a set period of time.

ACTION: information to be brought to upcoming meeting.

Health & Safety and Compliance

Ongo are currently at 100% on all safety checks.

Income

This continues to perform well towards the target, Karen said Ongo are sector-leaders for income performance. There were 4,405 tenants claiming Universal Credit (UC) as of February, it was thought that this might have a detrimental impact on the level of rent arrears due to UC being paid direct to the claimant rather than to Ongo. Though just under 75% of the current arrears are because of tenants on UC, the amount of arrears overall is still a lot less than the target. This shows that tenants have generally been good at managing money, especially during the recent financial pressures.

Repairs

The average amount of days it currently takes to complete a standard repair is 38 days. There was also a drop in completion levels for both same and next-day repairs in December and February (both in-house work and contractors). As mentioned previously, extra resources have been invested in the team which will reduce the recent delays.

ASB

There are 254 live cases, of which 105 new cases were received in February.

6. Corporate Plan – Karen Cowan

This sets out the organisation's vision about where they would like Ongo to be in the future. The current plan is from 2019 – 2023 and includes where Ongo are now, where they want to get to and how they would achieve that. The three current objectives are to be a great

landlord, to offer quality homes and to create opportunities, with several commitments sitting under each.

However, there has been recent national changes in terms of finances (cost of living, rent cap, price of materials increasing), the government's focus (safety in homes after Grenfell and recent damp & mould cases in the national news) and environmental (Net Zero and climate change). Ongo needs to incorporate these into their future plans, and Karen stressed the importance of consulting with tenants on the next Corporate Plan that will come into effect from April 2024. There will also be a survey on the public Ongo website and shared in the next edition of Key News to get feedback from the wider tenant base.

Members were asked three questions and, on the first two questions, were then asked to rank which two answers that members had given they thought were the most important priority. The number of votes received is in brackets next to each option:

1. What do you think makes a great landlord?

- Listen to and act upon tenants' views, communicate effectively with tenants and treat them fairly and with empathy (7)
- An effective repairs service (completed right first time where possible, the right trade doing the right job, prioritise repairs depending on need and time) (4)
- Clear tenancy agreements that set out who is responsible for what, and what tenants can and can't do (4)
- Quality homes (including having a bigger say in the standard of work done to a property) (4)
- Quality of neighbourhoods (1)
- Fit for purpose homes (10)

In relation to the repairs point, a member suggested booking a job when it is convenient for them, for example, those who work 9am – 5pm Monday to Friday and who would need to book time off for a repair. Would it be possible for jobs to be done on a Saturday, but they understood this could lead to more costs in terms of overtime. Karen said it was important to get the themes from this discussion as to what tenants are saying which can then be fed back to Board.

On the last point, Pete explained that newer homes are more adaptable compared to the older, existing homes where certain amendments to a property aren't usually possible.

2. What makes a quality home?

- Safe, secure (15)
- Spacious (1)
- Cost-effective and energy efficient (including smart home technology) (12)
- Sufficient plug sockets (1)
- Inclusion of outside taps (2)
- Having a good partnership with other agencies e.g. Occupational Health (1)
- Modern (1)

A member asked if worktops in all new properties could be lowered and heightened. These have been done in some homes, but it would cost a huge amount of money to be done in all homes as a standard and would limit the number of new homes that could be built. Pete highlighted that new builds are made flexible where possible so they can be amended in the future if required.

3. What should Ongo look like in five years' time?

- Happy tenants
- Continue to build more homes to meet need
- Investment in existing homes
- Sustainability

Pete said that Ongo carry out market research before planning any build, so they know what is needed at the time. In response to a point about Ongo not building enough single-occupancy and one-bed properties, Pete explained that they build more one-bed flats and bungalows than most other providers and there is more of a push towards this.

Steve added that, when building in villages, local councils set planning rules and regulations. Local councilor's will be knocking on doors in the area over the coming weeks ahead of the upcoming local elections, and he encouraged members that, if they would like to see more affordable homes in the area, to raise this with the councilor's as well to see what their stance on this would be if elected.

Karen thanked everybody for their input and asked members to let Ongo know if there is any further feedback that hasn't been covered. It will be combined with the survey responses and other tenant feedback before being shared with the Board on their away day and then a draft version of the plan will be created.

Information Items

7. **Executive Update – Pete Stones**

As covered in item five, Ongo's operational performance continues to be good in terms of income collection levels with the end-of-year target of 2% being achieved.

The tenancy sustainment fund has supported hundreds of tenants with a mixture of food vouchers, fuel vouchers, rent credits and financial / energy advice from the Citizens Advice Bureau. As a new financial year has begun from April, Ongo are now looking at how they can continue to invest in tenants in a sustainable way that leads to longer-term changes.

Pete asked if members had an awareness of this fund and how else they would like to see Ongo supporting tenants. A member suggested Ongo to offer a bulky item collection service, with a charge, for those unable to move an item outside their property. North Lincolnshire Council offer three free collections each year but only collect from directly outside the home. This service would further help to reduce fly-tipping and potential health & safety issues.

ACTION: to be investigated.

A fellow member queried about a more affordable and sustainable way for tenants living in villages to heat their homes when not on a gas supply. They felt that storage heaters don't generate much heat and use a lot of electricity. Pete said this is being investigated as part of the carbon reduction agenda, it is important to ensure that properties are effectively insulated first.

Ongo colleagues have been carrying out visits to the retirement living schemes to take feedback from tenants on improvements they would like to see to the buildings and the services delivered. Eight schemes have been visited so far and eight remain, which have all been booked in along with follow-up meetings. Action plans are being created from each and feedback given to residents. Once all initial visits have been completed by the end of July, the findings will be discussed with CV members.

A member asked when their scheme (Martins Close, Barrow) was due to be visited, Wendy confirmed Wednesday 15 May between 10am – 12 noon.

There has been an improvement in Ongo's call-handling times over the last month as the new resources start to take effect and continue to resolve more queries at the first point of contact through the Property and Tenancy triage roles. The number of incoming calls has started to reduce to last year's figures and they are only tracking approximately 300 calls higher than the same time last year. On average queue times have fallen to 3 minutes and 14 seconds.

There has also been a significant rise in calls answered within 30 seconds and this now meets the same service levels of 70% answered within 30 seconds as the same time last year. 60% of the calls were answered in 15 seconds and 83% were answered within one minute.

Ongo have just completed the annual Community Grants scheme where they were able to donate £10k from Ongo Communities and £10k from one of their commercial companies, Hales and Coultas, to 18 community groups.

Jo also provided a governance update. There has been work taking place over the last year to change the parent company from Ongo Partnership to Ongo Homes, this change has been confirmed and took effect from 1st April. It is now a simplified structure, and several Special General Meetings took place as part of the process.

8. Policy Update (6 monthly) – Karen Cowan

Every six months, a list of customer-facing operational policies that have been approved is presented to community voice. Some of these just require a quick health-check and are then signed off at Heads of Service, others that need a full review are presented to Community Voice for discussion and approval.

The covering report included all those which have been approved between 1st October 2022 to the end of March 2023, and the policies due to be reviewed over the next financial year. Karen asked for any questions.

A member felt that the Lettings Policy, in particular Home Choice Lincs (HCL), is not fit for purpose. They find the system very inflexible compared to My Move, but they stated that not many properties are available on the latter platform. Steve clarified that, because Ongo are a stock transfer, they have a legal agreement to use North Lincolnshire Council's (NLC) housing register and let the majority of homes through HCL. Due to being a Housing Association, they must also co-operate with local authorities. Discussions are being held with NLC to make the HCL system more responsive and easier to use.

9. Customer Engagement Activity update – tenant reps

Tpas re-accreditation focus group

Tim said that it was a very worthwhile, interactive, and informative session. The rep from Tpas had asked a range of questions about Ongo as a whole and all present had the opportunity to have a say. Wendy added that all the required evidence had been submitted previously, and that relevant focus groups and a survey had taken place. The outcome from the re-accreditation is due during the middle of April.

Neighbourhood & Communities Consumer Standards focus group

Karen explained that this was a workshop held on Ongo's self-assessment against one of the RSH standards. Feedback had already been given by staff and tenant feedback from the session

has been added. Reps from the Tenant Inspectors group felt that the standard of cleaning had improved, those attending also mentioned that there is good partnership-working with NLC on fly-tipping issues. It was felt that better partnerships could be developed with some agencies outside of North Lincolnshire, and work with the Residents Building Safety Group was also to be added. Future focus groups will take place on the other three consumer standards.

Resident Scrutiny Panel

The group's latest investigation is looking at ASB. They have spoken to staff at Heads of Service level, asked relevant questions and received information. They will soon be meeting with operational staff, and all the findings and proposed recommendations will then be collated into a report.

Design Workshop

Jill mentioned that it was nice to be involved in the work to re-design the Ongo website. They are working with a company called MediaWorks, reps from the external company gave background information during the session and involved all those attending in their thoughts on how it could be improved. The feedback will be taken on board and implemented in the design changes. MediaWorks wished to thank those volunteers who were involved in the session, and the next stage of improvements will be to review the current content on the website and what will be included.

10. Customer Engagement Activity Update – Wendy Wolfe

The information had been included in the meeting paperwork. Wendy added that a tenant networking session with tenant volunteers from other local organisations will be set up for later in 2023. Networking with the Crosby Community Association is going well, and progress has also been made with engaging the NLC Youth Council.

A member commented on how they liked the bright and colourful design of the document.

11. Any Other Business

Tim reflected that the level of knowledge and range of suggestions made from members throughout the meeting was excellent.

Karen asked, in relation to the Corporate Plan item, if the group had liked it being a part of the main CV meeting or if is better as a separate focus group. Some felt it had worked well whilst others thought more time could have been given. It was agreed that it depends on the agenda, Wendy added that the time given for the information items could be shortened and members could be given sufficient notice beforehand to prepare any questions.

After the feedback from the group's last away day at Holme Hall Golf Club, Jill had looked into booking the same venue for the December CV meeting (meeting in the morning followed by a buffet lunch) but had not received a response. All agreed to try Holme Hall one more time and then look for an alternative venue if needed.

ACTION: update to be provided at the next meeting.

12. Date and Time of next meeting

The next meeting is due to take place on Tuesday 16th May 9.30am to 12 noon, at The Arc.

13. Action Plan

	Action	Who	Update
1.	Member's apologies to be added to March meeting minutes.	Customer Engagement	Completed.

2.	Session to be set up on what performance information members would like to monitor.	Customer Engagement	To be arranged.
3.	Information to be brought to future meeting about the demographics of those who Ongo let homes to and how many homes for specific needs become available over a set period of time.	Performance	Update to be provided at the next meeting where performance information is an agenda item.
4.	Look into the possibility of a bulky item collection service for those unable to move items outside their property.	Pete Stones	To be followed up.
5.	Check with venue for December CV meeting and book in advance.	Jill Milner	Update to be provided at the next meeting.