

Community Voice Meeting Minutes



Date: Tuesday 14th February 2023
Time: 9.30am – 12 noon
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: Ron Weller, Ryan North, Stewart Pearson, Keith Lumbers, Keith Riley, Tracey Bain, Paul Pearson, Jim Newcombe, Susan Hickling
CV Observer: Dawne Reed
Ongo Staff: Wendy Wolfe, Jane Crookes, Neil Keay, Fran Rhodes, Emma Atkinson, Kevin Hornsby, Pete Stones, Steve Hepworth (Teams), Ollie Mortimer
Ongo Board Member: Melvin Kenyon (Teams) (in-part)

1. Welcome, Apologies & Housekeeping

The chair welcomed everybody to the meeting. An Ongo Homes Special General Meeting (SGM) was due to take place afterwards so he explained each agenda item would have to keep to the allotted time. Those CV members who are tenant shareholders had received invites to attend.

Apologies were received from: Anita James, Harry Jackson, Michele Hodgson, Melanie Newberry, Joyce Wright, Maria Havercroft, Ian Bulleyment, Tony Sanderson, Paul Smith, Sue Whitelock, Mark Chappell (planned observer), Karen Cowan (Ongo) and John Baker (Ongo).

Tim explained 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

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

- The suggested changes had been made to the Tenancy Management Policy.
- Kevin updated that there had been 32 evictions so far in 2023. Five were due to anti-social behaviour (ASB), 26 were for rent arrears and one was a combination of both. Eviction remains the final course of action and Ongo are committed to the pledge that if customers struggling to pay their rent engage with the relevant support, no legal action will be taken.
- The tables in the meeting room had been pushed together, with provision made for those attending in mobility scooters.
- The wording had been changed to 'Wellbeing Officer' in the Annual Service Charge report.
- Members had been given extra time to feedback on the draft Damp & Mould policy, no further comments were received.

Wendy added that she meets with the CV Officers every month in advance of the main meeting to discuss the group and future meetings. It had been agreed to produce a summary sheet of

the Volunteers Code of Conduct which will act as a reminder for members at meetings. Copies were given to those present.

3. Treasurers Report – Dawn

A verbal update was provided. The room hire at the Arc for the November and December meetings, along with the Christmas buffet, had been paid for along with travel expenses and Internet for the CV Officers. There is £2,959.87 in the group's bank account.

4. Board Observers – Tim

The next Board meeting will take place on Tuesday 28 March, 2pm to 5pm, in the Ongo House Board Room or via Microsoft Teams. Three CV members can attend, names interested to notify Customer Engagement (CE).

One member expressed their interest in observing the meeting.

ACTION: Customer Engagement to send details to Governance team.

Decision Items

5. Mobility Scooter Policy – Fran Rhodes

Fran introduced herself as the new Tenancy Services Manager and explained the policy had been presented to CV twice before. All the requested changes had been made and she asked for any questions before seeking approval.

In relation to item 4.4, a member queried about a tenant not being able to store their mobility scooter in their home, garden or a communal area. Fran clarified that the policy only relates to the three high-rise buildings at Market Hill, retirement schemes and specialist accommodation (e.g. Myos House) as set out in item 4.1 and under section 2.

Another member asked who pays for the electricity in the scooter storage areas and if it is metered or included as part of the service charge.

ACTION: Fran to check.

All present approved the policy.

6. Specialist Accommodation Policy – Jane Crookes

The draft policy had been discussed at the October 2022 CV meeting as part of formal consultation with tenants, the local authority and service users. All feedback had been incorporated into the policy for approval.

A member asked for some further background. Jane explained that Ongo have some properties in Doncaster that provide accommodation for homeless people, this arrangement has been in place since the service transferred over to Ongo. There has never been a specific policy on this subject before, one member commented that it was well-written. All present approved the policy.

Discussion Items

7. Building Safety Resident Engagement Framework (draft) – Emma Atkinson

Emma introduced herself as the Building Compliance Manager and provided some background for the framework. There have been many changes in legislation since the Grenfell tragedy, with a significant finding from the inquiry being that residents had not been listened to. There now needs to be a formal arrangement in place for residents to be able to get information on the buildings they live in and to have their say.

The first draft of the framework had been included in the meeting paperwork along with a covering report. This will be the over-arching document, with a separate policy and plan in place for each of the four high-rise blocks. Consultation on the framework had been held with Market Hill residents and was due to take place with those living at Trent View House.

The framework will be brought back to CV when ready, with the Residents Building Safety Group also feeding into it. Emma asked for any initial comments.

A member raised in relation to point 5.4, that the wording was confusing. He thought the word 'ultimate' could be softened and that the first sentence under 5.4.1 was poorly written. He added that the third-to-last bullet point in this section should also include mention of within its timeframe.

ACTION: changes to be made.

An observer praised Ongo that, as soon as Grenfell occurred, they put plans in place immediately with checking everything. Emma mentioned that a lot of work goes into the high-rise blocks, including daily safety and compliance checks. There is a very clear reporting system in place so, if there was a building safety issue, it comes to the team straight away and dealt with swiftly.

Another member asked about the residents who aren't Ongo tenants in the high-rise blocks. Emma clarified that Ongo owns all the homes in the blocks and so all are tenants, the legislation that had been introduced was only in relation to the four high-rises. She would like to introduce a framework for low-rise flats and retirement schemes in the future too, but the first phase is high-rise blocks due to their height and associated high-risk.

A member queried if it was all electric in the high-rises. Market Hill is heated by gas but does not have a direct gas supply to the flats and maisonettes - the heating is controlled by a communal boiler. Trent View House have gas boilers as the building is constructed differently. Gas servicing is carried out annually to avoid any issues, gas is transferred up the side of the building with gas shut-off valves outside. Ongo and the fire brigade know where these are in the event of an emergency.

A question was asked on the installation of carbon monoxide detectors. Emma explained that the programme hasn't been completed yet but they are going in as quickly as possible. There had been some initial supply issues as all registered providers had been in the same situation, and trained staff are needed to fit them as well. They are being installed during gas services, if a property becomes empty, during gas and electric repairs, plus a contractor is helping to fit them. Pete asked for anybody who hasn't had one installed yet to contact Ongo.

8. Delivering the repairs service – Neil Keay and Pete Stones

Neil shared and went through a presentation which will be sent out with the meeting minutes. It included background on the service as a whole, some facts and figures on the current position, actions from a recent Resident Scrutiny Panel (RSP) report, what is being done to improve the service and further plans to be carried out in the coming months.

Pete added that extra resources have been swiftly put into the service. Although this might not lead to an immediate reduction in the current timescales for some standard repairs, he expects it to come back down to a much shorter waiting time in the near future. This will mean that around 7,000 extra repairs can be carried out each year by internal Ongo staff. He thanked all tenants for their patience and understanding during this difficult time.

A member asked about the severity of some repairs, in particular damp & mould cases, and if it would ever mean that certain properties would have to be demolished. Demolition would only be considered if all other work and solutions had been sourced. Neil said there aren't many properties that are requiring a lot of work. Extra training is being provided to the Customer Experience Advisors and Stock Surveyors to ensure that the Red, Amber or Green (RAG) rating that comes back on a property is appropriate to the work required.

A fellow member enquired about the apprenticeship scheme. Neil said that the team and other departments within Ongo do recruit apprentices, this helps with succession planning, some of the current staff began as apprentices. Good partnerships are held with local colleges and other agencies to identify the opportunities.

In response to a query about monitoring contractors and the work they carry out, Neil said when contractor meetings are held they look at performance, but added this needs to improve. A similar process had been carried out in the empty homes team where two coordinators had been introduced to help oversee contractors, and the impending recruitment of a Contractor Co-Ordinator within the Maintenance team will do the same. Neil encouraged any tenant who is unhappy with work carried out in their home, whether it's Ongo staff or a contractor, to contact Ongo.

All contractors should be wearing ID and there is also a Code of Conduct in place that they must follow. In the past, sometimes two or three jobs the same will have been carried out by different staff and contractors on separate visits, but recruiting four Maintenance Assistants who are multi-skilled will make situations like that more efficient and lead to less delays.

A member of the Property Services Panel (PSP) had said at their last meeting that tenants just want to know when a tradesperson will be at their home and who it will be. Neil said improving this communication is a priority. Another member asked if the policy about hiring contractors as locally as possible is still in place, Neil confirmed where possible.

A question was raised about the cost of contractors. It does cost more, and there are around five or six working on repairs specifically at the moment. Some are specialist contractors who work on, for example, Asbestos and cover both the Maintenance and Investment teams.

There had been issues with getting materials, particularly during the Covid lockdowns, but Neil explained this had improved and the supplier (Buildbase) has been good.

ACTION: copy of presentation to be included alongside the meeting minutes.

Information Items

9. Executive Update – Kevin Hornsby

An Ongo member of staff, Denise Ford (Wellbeing Officer at Myos House), had tragically passed away over the weekend. All Ongo colleagues have been communicated to along with tenants of the scheme where appropriate. Fran is helping to ensure all support is in place as well as being in contact with Denise's family. All at CV passed on their condolences.

The rent increase report that had been discussed at the January CV meeting around rent has been taken to Board who approved all the recommendations. This included, whilst not explicit, a 7% cap on rent increases for all general need properties, a rent freeze on garages and an increase in service charges where required to meet the rising costs of those services. Kevin assured members that, although rent will increase, a range of support will be available to tenants to help with any budgeting or hardship issues and information surrounding this will be kept updated. The statutory notice rent increase letters are due to be sent out next week so should reach tenants starting from Thursday 16 February.

There was also a discussion at the previous CV meeting about an increase in Ongo's call-handling times and the pressures on our Customer Experience team. New resources have been invested into call-handling and, through new ways of working, there has been a vast improvement in this area. Waiting times are down from, on average, 12.5 minutes to closer to 7 minutes with 23% of all calls being answered in 30 seconds and 35% within 60 seconds.

Although these times are improving, advisors are tending to have longer calls due to more complex issues. The extra time enables advisors to fully understand the query and provide the best solution under right first time. A specific example is using the new damp and mould process where Ongo can link to a tenant's smartphone using virtual assistance to see the issue being reported. This leads to less delays and swifter diagnosis and resolution.

A member asked if there was any data to show this efficiency and to evidence how Ongo were getting things right first time.

ACTION: Kevin to provide figures.

Two other members provided positive feedback – one in relation to a plumbing repair that had been booked through My Home, and the other for the way an advisor had handled their telephone call in a pleasant and professional manner.

Another member asked about the training that new staff are given. Kevin explained that Customer Experience Advisors will have at least three weeks training. All the team have a general knowledge of the different services but there are some specialist advisors in certain areas.

There had been a large increase in complaints during December, but extra resource has been brought in which has led to similar levels to the same time last year again. The team are back to responding to Stage 1 complaints within 5 days against Ongo's 10-day target.

After a question was raised about adding videos of repairs onto the Ongo website, Neil advised that there are some on there already and are currently looking to add to these.

ACTION: check what repairs videos are currently on the website.

10. Procuring Energy Contracts – Wendy Wolfe

Wendy presented the item on behalf of John Baker (Procurement & Value for Money Manager). Full details were included in a covering report as part of the paperwork.

Ongo's contracts for gas and electricity are due to be re-procured. Wendy said that there are a group of tenants who get involved in procurement and tenders for contracts that will affect tenants in the future. Because there is a restricted process with the replacement of utility works and there are tight timescales involved, tenants are unable to be involved in this specific piece of work.

Ongo recognise the importance of this procurement and are working with their contracted broker (Monarch Partnership) and energy advisors to try and secure the contracts when the market rate is at its lowest point. The market is often unpredictable though and can be affected by external forces out of the company's control.

Steve added that the report was written around a fortnight ago, since then the electricity contract has been signed for (just over double the price compared to the previous contract) and he is hoping the gas contract will be sent through later in the week. He explained that a price is received at lunchtime and Ongo have until close of play that afternoon to decide if they wish to go with that price before signing the contract. If this isn't done in time, then a new higher price will be quoted the day after.

These contracts will not be covered by the government's energy cap as it doesn't include commercial supplies. Whatever Ongo pays will be fed through to tenants via service charges. The contracts are due to start from part way through 2023, service charges have already been forecasted for the financial year ahead so the price increases won't be fully reflected until April 2024 onwards. Until then, Steve urged the importance of consulting with those tenants who will be affected (high-rise blocks and schemes) and explaining what it will mean for them.

A member explained an issue that a low-rise flat resident was having with their gas supply. Steve clarified that this contract relates to Ongo's heat-networked properties and those whose energy supply is provided by Ongo. Such an issue is between the individual tenant and their own energy provider, he advised them to seek advice from the Citizens Advice Bureau where there is a member of staff employed to solely deal with queries from Ongo tenants.

Another member asked how long the contracts would be for. They will be for two years as Steve said he hopes energy prices will have reduced over that time. It was also raised if there was a provision in the new contracts that it could be re-negotiated if prices were to drop rapidly. Steve confirmed they had asked for this but that they didn't get it.

11. CE update (verbal) – tenant reps and Wendy

Tpas re-accreditation focus group – the session had been arranged particularly for the newer tenant volunteers to take part and learn more about the re-accreditation process. This is an independent review of how Ongo is doing when it comes to customer engagement throughout the organisation, a report will then be produced with recommendations in for future improvement.

Jill explained that being a member of Tpas really helps, it provides members with opportunities to access training, courses and conferences and recognises excellent customer engagement.

Some individual members have been invited to an online focus group with a Tpas member of staff to discuss the tenant groups, involvement opportunities and work carried out with other teams within Ongo. Wendy explained that these are all detailed within the CE Handbook, it's important to have an awareness of these.

The focus group will be a part of the reality checking phase. The evidence checking stage has been completed with lots of documents sent through as part of the checks, and Tpas are also due to hold phone conversations with Steve (Chief Executive) and the Chair of the Board.

RSP - Dawn explained that the project scope for the group's latest investigation (into ASB and communication given to tenants) had been approved. The first part will be the desktop stage where members will read and research the relevant policies and other documents before

meeting to share their feedback. Relevant managers and operational staff will then be interviewed by the panel before a report is written and recommendations made.

Publications Panel – Jill provided an update. It had been agreed that there would be four editions of Key News each year moving forward – two printed (March and September) and two digitals (June and December). A survey is due to be carried out about tenants' preferences in the magazine and for their overall thoughts on how Key News currently is. Ollie is looking to feature more news and updates from a wider range of communities, particularly those in rural areas, so it is inclusive and more representative.

Wendy went through the CE activity report which had been included in the paperwork. The team are actively promoting all groups, especially those with vacancies (RSP, PSP and Complaints), and will be going back out into communities more from April onwards. They are also contacting new tenants who moved into their properties six weeks before to explain about the groups.

Tim has agreed to do a volunteer video as the Chair of CV promoting the opportunities available and why other tenants should get involved.

Joint community events are still in the planning phase and will target areas where there have been issues. Wendy said that most identified were based in Scunthorpe, but other areas will be looked at and focused on in the future. A member asked for a list of locations and dates when confirmed. Wendy said this would be provided.

12. Any Other Business

Dawn said that she had enjoyed the meeting and found it interesting. Another member said that they had struggled to hear parts of the meeting, Wendy reminded that all speakers would stand up in the future.

The member also queried about the time allotted for certain agenda items and felt more time was needed. It was explained that this meeting had to be kept strictly to time due to the SGM afterwards. Wendy added that a separate focus group can be held on a particular topic if members would benefit from it.

Another member asked about the morning meetings and if it was possible to see if there was lower attendance for these compared to afternoon meetings. Wendy said that it had been previously agreed to try CV meetings at different times for fairness and to try to cater for all those wanting to attend.

CV members who are tenant shareholders were asked to remain behind after the meeting ready for the SGM at 1pm.

Wendy mentioned that performance information is usually on the agenda. It hadn't been included for this meeting as Karen was on annual leave so the December 2022 and January 2023 performance reports will be delivered together at the next meeting.

She also gave an update about CV member Joyce who had recently been diagnosed with cancer. All at CV wished to pass on their best wishes.

13. Date and Time of next meeting

The next meeting is due to take place on Wednesday 15th March 1.30pm to 4.00pm at The Arc.

14. Action Plan

	Action	Who	Update
1.	Member's details to be passed to Governance team for observing Board meeting.	Customer Engagement	Complete.
2.	Check who is responsible for paying for the electricity in the mobility scooter storage areas.	Fran Rhodes	Update to be given at the next meeting.
3.	Wording to be changed in the Building Safety Resident Engagement Framework.	Emma Atkinson	Update to be given at the next meeting.
4.	Repairs presentation to be sent out with the minutes.	Customer Engagement	Complete.
5.	Provide data on virtual assistance and how Ongo are resolving queries right first time.	Kevin Hornsby	Update to be given at the next meeting.
6.	Check what repair videos are currently on the Ongo website.	Customer Engagement	Update to be given at the next meeting.