

Community Voice Meeting Minutes
Monday 16th January 2023



Present: CV Officers: Tim Mills (Chair), Jill Milner (Vice-Chair), Dawn Johnson (Acting Treasurer) CV Members: Jim Newcombe, Anita James, Paul Pearson, Tracey Bain, Ryan North, Paul Smith, Susan Hickling, Keith Riley, Stewart Pearson, Keith Lumbers, Ian Bulleyment, John Parsons (teams in part)
CV Observer: Sue Whitelock (in part) Michelle Hodgson, Melanie Newberry
Ongo Staff: Kevin Hornsby, Karen Cowan, Wendy Wolfe, Beverley Miller, Neil Keay, Andrea Morley, Fiona Ruddick.

1. Welcome, Apologies & Housekeeping

The chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave apologies - Celeste Fox-Pines, Tony Sanderson, Harold Jackson, Eddie Stringer, Alexander Buckley, Tami Reevell, Judith Tomlinson and Jason Ladley.

He explained there was no planned fire drill due, however the fire exits were pointed out and members were asked to follow staff if anything untoward happened.

Brief introductions were given from members for the benefit of the new members observing the meeting.

2. Minutes & Actions of Previous Meeting

Keith and Jim proposed and seconded that the minutes were a true and accurate record. Wendy provided an update from the action plan:

- Tami has now been added to the Facebook group
- Grass cutting for the carnival will be looked at nearer the time
- Update on ASB included a total of 831 cases from April, those reported using My Home reports include 129 cases
- The query raised in relation to the window handle heights is awaiting a response on
- Door openings in Ongo House are to be looked at in March when there will be an access audit carried out on the building
- An evening CV meeting is to be arranged and the date will be confirmed once it has been booked
- The presentations discussed in the last meeting on: Fraud Prevention, Equality Diversity & Inclusion and the performance report have been sent out to CV members.

3. Treasurers Report – Dawn

The information was sent out in the meeting pack and the treasurer added that she now has some of the landscape size travel expense forms to distribute. There were no questions asked in relation to the treasurer's report.

4. Board Observers – Tim

The next Board meeting will take place on Tuesday, 24 January, 2.30pm via Board Room or Microsoft Teams. Three CV members can attend, any names interested are to notify customer engagement.

Decision Items

5. Tenancy Management Policy – Kevin Hornsby

Kevin explained to members this policy provides details about managing tenancies for Ongo and how Ongo deal with everything relating to tenancies. There are several other policies that also relate to this. The policy had been presented to CV at a previous meeting and any changes put forward have now been included. CV members are asked to provide approval to the policy.

Kevin was happy to take any questions from the paperwork that had been sent out in the pack. A member asked if the “not” in 4.14.7 should be there and suggested changing the wording to “unable” so it’s easier to understand.

Also, where it states the 24 hours to gain access otherwise legal access may take place, is this a reasonable amount of time or should it be 48 hours? Kevin explained that this situation would occur very rarely and only where the tenant or Ongo would be at risk. A member said that the language used could be deemed as aggressive.

ACTION Kevin to look at the wording on these 2 points, however CV are happy to approve the policy when these changes have been made.

6. Customer Engagement Framework (Annual Review)

This document was formally approved by CV last year and was due for an annual review. There was only one area to update, and this includes section 5 to remove the tables and commentary around data that was previously included. The reason for this being that data continually changes meaning the document is out of date lots of the time. There were no other changes to the document. Members were asked for approval: approval given.

7. Annual Rent & Service Charge Report

Kevin explained about the report being very technical and apologised in advance for this. He asked members to focus more on the figures and options in the report. The report will go back to board. It explains how Ongo sets its rent as an organisation, the government rent cap restrictions which have been set at no more than 7% and the fact that rents are normally set at CPI plus 1% (11.1%). This leaves Ongo with a massive gap of over £104 million over the long term 30-year business plan.

If a tenancy ends we may look at charging target rent plus tolerance and Ongo will need to look at affordable rents in the new developments which are set at 80% of market price. Kevin explained that Ongo are going to freeze the garage rents at the current rate. Most properties are at target rents or below already.

To put the information into context a rent of £91.35 a week at 7% will go up by £6.39 (£97.74), however for every ½% under 7% this will be £30 million Ongo need to find for other services.

Kevin referred to something not included in the report but would be discussed at board which is the provision of a sustainment tenancy fund to pay for items like school uniforms, budget advice etc.

Ongo now also have a specialist energy worker that works with tenants at Citizens Advice Bureau around energy tariffs and how to maximise energy within homes.

A member raised concerns that neighbours living in the exact same property could be paying more or less rent than each other. Kevin said that this is a possibility but there wouldn't be much difference as these tenancies are set at affordable rents.

The service charges show no profit, but Ongo has to pass any increased costs on to the relevant tenants.

ACTION: A member suggested it might be worth changing the wording of the retirement scheme officer in the document as they are now called Wellbeing Officer.

Approval was given to the document and Kevin reminded members that when they receive letters regarding their rent if anyone needs support they should notify Ongo.

Discussion Items

8. Damp & Mould policy

Andrea referred to the national focus for the housing sector on this topic and advised that Ongo have now created a stand-alone policy for Damp & Mould that includes timescales for responding (previously damp and mould being included in the wider maintenance services policy). The policy had been sent out after the main paperwork for the meeting and some members may not have had chance to go through it in detail, so Andrea briefly went through a few things. In the past there were some occasions when damp and mould issues were referred to as being the tenants lifestyle. The regulator now says it is not acceptable to assume and landlords have to be seen doing more to try to find out the source of the problem whilst trying to educate tenants on how to self-resolve some issues.

A member stated that extractor fans are only found in kitchens and bathrooms and asked what happens when the mould is discovered in a bedroom. Andrea explained there could be several reasons for this e.g. a guttering/downpipe repair needs to be done, furniture has been placed next to a wall with no air flow for a long time, ill-fitting windows.

A member said that it seems a bit harsh to say that Ongo has to take responsibility for all of the problems, it might be down to the tenant who could have excessive amounts of fish tanks, and general moisture buildup. He referred to 4.3 which says that Ongo will accept responsibility for damp and mould, and asked where legally does this leave us?

A member asked if Ongo linked in with environmental health at the council and Andrea confirmed that yes this happens.

It was also suggested that some instances of damp and mould were only discovered when tenants had moved out due to furniture being moved, this could be surface mould and a quick treatment/clean may improve the issue.

The regulator wants a fair investigation, if there is a leak then Ongo need to address this and carry out the repair, also offer advice on lifestyle changes that could be made by the tenant. Ongo can't tell tenants where to put furniture, however staff can offer advice to always leave air flow behind items to stop damp and mould occurring in the first place.

Andrea wanted to allow CV members more time to look at the policy and gave members until Friday to respond with any queries or questions to customer engagement.

A member said that it is a good first proof, it is a living issue and needs some tweaking going forward.

ACTION: Members to notify Customer Engagement of any queries or question relating to the policy.

9. Performance Information

Karen explained that the information was received after the initial paperwork was sent out due to the timing of the performance information being available.

This information includes the November figures which show there has been an increase in complaints recently, particularly around the time to complete a repair and the time to answer telephone calls.

Additional resources have been approved to recruit more trades people into the maintenance department, but there is a continual struggle actually getting people in place (this is a common issue across the housing sector with a lack of trades people coming through). In relation to call handling, again additional staffing resources have been approved but it's a long process to get the new staff recruited and trained up. Recruitment is therefore not the magic quick solution we had hoped for, but it will prove beneficial once in place.

There has been improved performance re anti-social behaviour (ASB), with a drop in the number of cases reported and an increase in customer satisfaction in the way we have handled cases.

The empty homes and relet processes have seen a massive improvement and are now performing to target.

The letting of garages is still going well and with the freeze on the rent this will continue to improve.

Income is on target with people continuing to pay their rent.

Work is ongoing with the Contractors, to get them working to Ongo standards. Plans are being made to address the next winter issues, e.g. in the summer will internalise condensate pipes where possible to eliminate them freezing in the cold weather and bursting.

Ongo are encouraging tenants who use digital methods to use the My Home App which eliminates the long telephone call wait times. Heads of Service are looking to “loan” staff from different teams to help with answering calls etc.

A member asked if the IVR message directs you to the self-help videos. There has been feedback on the IVR previously to say that there are too many options to choose from, so this may be better put on social media/website, digital platforms etc.

A member referred to not being sure on how to go about getting involved with Ongo, she feels it isn't very clear on the website and there is nothing on the IVR when you are waiting to tell you how you can get involved. It was also asked if there was any information on the My Home App. Wendy advised Ongo is looking at the website as information has been identified as not being in the right/logical place, with no clear pathway. A new website is being constructed and so the information will all need populating again; tenants will be asked for their help in identifying where they would want to see different types of information. Wendy added that the customer experience team and other staff members give tenants information on customer engagement opportunities, and they also direct tenants through to the customer engagement team for further detailed information.

10. Executive Update

Kevin provided an update from different areas of the business and explained the operational performance around Income collection remains sector leading and ahead of Ongo's predictions. The current rent arrears are £641,859 (1.35%) vs our 850k (2%) target. This is down to the resilience and hard work of the Income Officers and wider teams working across Ongo to sustain tenancies. As an added comparison at this point last year rent arrears were £647,863.

There has been a slight rise in evictions over the recent months, but upon review of all cases it is where tenants are failing to engage with our services or not adhering to agreements made as eviction is always the last resort for us as a landlord. There is some work being done to modernise our pre tenancy financial assessment prior to tenancies being offered as a responsible landlord.

The Tenancy Sustainment fund that was agreed by board is being well received by our tenants and wider teams. From the 125k that was allocated we have now spent 42k and this is made up of a mixture of energy vouchers, food vouchers and rent credits where needed as well as funding towards a specialist energy worker at the Citizens Advice Bureau that is working with Ongo tenants only around energy tariffs and how to maximise energy within the home.

Complaints are continuing to rise and data shows that over the last 3 months complaints are 130% higher than in the same three months last year. A large proportion of these relate to repairs and Maintenance and staffing resources which are being looked at and further recruitment taking place.

To further improve Ongo's performance against the strategic aim to be a great landlord and improve services at the first point of contact we have recruited to a second maintenance triage officer. This officer is a trained gas engineer who will be working within the customer experience team, and will be focusing on improving diagnosis of heating and plumbing failures where customers are able to self-resolve or where we can identify parts and works required at the point of contact.

Work has continued across Ongo Communities on the Warm Spaces project. The Arc is providing free hot meals for up to three evenings per week and the Viking centre continues its Wednesday free Tea-Time club. In addition, hot drinks and soup are available from 3pm to 5pm in both centres along with Thursdays at the Cole Street office. Numbers using the warm spaces have risen from 100 to 150 in the past few weeks.

A member asked what age Ongo classed as vulnerable. Karen said that it's about need not age and it was then asked if a vulnerability or disability is recorded on the tenants account as to how it would impact if the repair were not completed in a timely manner. Karen responded to say that this type of information would be dependent on the individual (if they chose to declare it) and may not be relevant to all repair types, hence each case would be assessed on its own merit.

The chair asked how many of the evictions that have been carried out are due to ASB issues. Kevin said not many as its mainly due to rent arrears and down to not engaging with Ongo or not adhering to agreements put in place.

ACTION: Kevin agreed to find the figures on how many evictions have been down to ASB.

Kevin explained that as part of being a responsible landlord we should not be allocating a tenancy to someone who can't afford it especially in these times of the rising cost of living. It was asked if Universal Credit can still be paid directly to Ongo. The answer was yes, it can be paid in two ways, either from the tenant themselves requesting it or by enforcement.

A member mentioned that sometimes people find it difficult to express their disabilities/vulnerabilities on the phone and that some may have support workers that are able to do this for them. Karen explained if someone has a support worker / advocate and the tenant authorises Ongo to recognise them as their advocate then the details of the advocate can be captured on the system in the tenants file.

Information Items

11. Governance Report

Fiona provided information on the group structure and working towards Ongo Homes being the parent company; we are working with external advisers on this. It requires changes to the rules for Ongo Homes and a special general meeting will be held to approve the changes, this meeting will take place on: 14th February straight after the CV Meeting.

Fiona encouraged tenant shareholder members to send a proxy form in so they can still get a vote if they can't attend the meeting.

Fiona will send notification out in about 10 days' time, and this will include a draft of new rules to tenant shareholders.

A proposal within the new Rules is to remove North Lincolnshire Council as a shareholder. They are currently a non-voting shareholder, this means they can attend meetings but can not vote.

The chair advised members that the changes to the group structure is just to make things simpler and a way of tidying up the way Ongo work.

12. Customer Engagement Activity Update – tenant reps.

Resident Building Safety Group – Tracey provided the update. The group had been involved in developing a draft leaflet which has been approved and is going to be sent out to residents and posted on noticeboards regarding the fire doors and their correct useage.

Digital Experience Group – Tim explained this was the first meeting after the relaunch so it was an introduction about what the group will be working on, going over the terms of reference, and looking at the website and ease of use for this.

Tenant Inspectors – Keith gave an update on the inspections, results from these are that most inspections are giving mostly green ratings with a few amber, and only a couple coming out as red. There has been a mystery shop on the Arc Café and a few points have been raised which are being addressed by the Manager. Shadowing is ongoing with more being organised. The membership and profile need to be raised to help get more inspectors on board.

Customer Engagement update

The activity report was included in the meeting pack and includes the engagement and promotion carried out during the December period. 213 tenants were engaged through meetings, surveys or events, 17 of which were under 30. There were 8 expressions of interest for various groups and will be invited to the relevant meetings.

Customer Engagement will be undertaking some social media promotions and have invited tenant volunteers to do some videos to help promote the benefits of getting involved with Ongo.

There will be a residents association networking meeting where members get together from the different community groups and share ideas on fundraising and learn about what other groups are doing.

Contact has been made with Hull City Council and the tenant involvement staff who are interested in a joint meeting with their tenants to learn from each other's organisations.

The Focus Groups at the retirement schemes are going well and has created lots of actions, this has been a good opportunity for staff from Ongo to hear the tenants' views and opinions. Plans are being made to revisit them and provide updates on progress made on the actions. It was asked about other residents that live close by but not necessarily in the retirement schemes, who may be vulnerable or disabled residents, if Ongo were planning on asking their views. It was explained that they won't be included in these meetings, but Ongo could perhaps accommodate their views via focus groups or surveys.

A member noted that it was good to see tenants with disabilities representing Ongo although disabled people are still very much under represented.

Wendy promoted the date for the focus group meeting that will cover the Tpas re-accreditation work being done.

13. Any Other Business

Members had no other business to raise.

Reflection on the meeting - Karen said that it was good to see lots of people here, she said that somethings can be distracting like people answering their phones, obviously if its an

emergency then it can't be helped but as a rule asked members to try and have phones on silent.

An observer attending the meeting for the first time, thanked everyone for making her feel welcome.

A member asked if the people in wheelchairs could be seated near the doors for ease of access. It was agreed that this will be really easy to sort if Customer Engagement are informed of who will be attending in advanced so the area can be reserved.

ACTION: Agreed to push the tables together to create more room around the outside also enabling people to hear better if there is some background noise.

14 Date and Time of next meeting

The next meeting is due to take place on 14th February 2023 and is a morning meeting starting at 9.30am until 12.30pm, at the Arc. The Special General Meeting for those that are tenant shareholders will take place after the close of the CV meeting.

12. Action Plan

	Action	Who	Update
1.	Kevin to look at the wording on the two points discussed on the tenancy management policy.	Kevin Hornsby	This has been slightly amended.
2.	Kevin to check the figures on how many evictions have been down to ASB.	Kevin Hornsby	
3.	New layout with tables pushed close together.	Customer Engagement	
4.	Annual Service charge report, a suggestion was made to change the wording of the retirement scheme officer in the document to Wellbeing Officer.	Kevin Hornsby	
5.	CV members to have more time to look at the Damp & Mould policy, providing any comments to Customer Engagement by Friday 20 th January 2023.	Customer Engagement	