

## Community Voice (CV) Meeting Minutes



**Date:** Thursday 14th September 2023  
**Time:** 1.30pm – 4pm  
**Chair:** Tim Mills

**Present:** CV Officers: Tim Mills (Chair), Jill Milner (Vice-Chair), Dawn Johnson (Treasurer)  
CV Members: Keith Lumbers, Paul Pearson, Jim Newcombe, Tami Reevell, Anita James, Tracey Bain, Jeanette Ellis, Tina Omari (Teams), Melvyn Kenyon (Teams)  
Ongo Staff: Karen Cowan, Steve Hepworth, Bev Miller, Russ Edwards, Hayley Fateni.

**Apologies:** Kevin Hornsby, Wendy Wolfe, Neil Keay, Ian Bullyment, Ron Weller, Harry Jackson, John Parsons, Keith Riley, Tracey Graham, Tony Sanderson, Judith Tomlinson, Dawne Reed, Tracey Borrill, Michelle Hodgeson, Alexander Buckley.

### **1. Welcome, Apologies & Housekeeping.**

Tim welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that there was no planned fire drill, and the fire exits were pointed out. He also reminded members to not raise any personal issues and to use the general enquiry log if a personal 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; proposed and seconded by Dawn and Keith, other than an incorrect phone number. Karen provided an update on the actions:

	<b>Action</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>Update</b>
1.	Correct phone number on minutes	Bev	Completed
2.	Renters Reform Bill – removing the need to seek permission to alter within 12 months for grab rails etc.	Richard Clark	Majority of minor adaptations are made via referral which would have been allowed within first 12 months
3.	Renters Reform Bill – will mutual exchanges be able to proceed within the first 12 months?	Jane Crookes	Right to exchange is dependent on the tenure of the tenant not the amount of time, so would need an assured/secure tenancy - but yes once this bill comes in then subject to meeting all other requirements then could exchange within the year
4.	Change long term trends for customer engagement performance on young person's figures	Bev Miller	Details passed on to performance team to make changes
5.	Include updated training schedule with minutes	Customer Engagement/Bev	Sent out to members

6.	CCTV guidance to be shared with members	Customer Engagement/Bev	Sent out to members
7.	Copy of Claire's presentation to be sent out with the minutes	Customer Engagement/Bev	Sent out to members
8.	December Christmas Lunch, names for attending to be recorded	CV Officers	Details at future meetings

### **3. Treasurers Report – Dawn Johnson**

Finance is setting up the ability to use the bank transfer system for the Community Voice bank account. Dawn asked who would be interested in having the money paid directly into their bank account. Anita and Tracey would both like to be paid in this way when this system comes into practice.

### **4. Board Observers – Tim Mills**

The next Board meeting is provisionally 29<sup>th</sup> November at 2.00pm at Ongo House in person or via Microsoft Teams. Three CV members can attend. Names interested to notify customer engagement team. Dawn Johnson, Keith Lumbers and Anita James expressed interest.

### **Discussion Items**

#### **5. Chief Executive update – verbal – Steve Hepworth**

Presentation to be sent out with the minutes.

Steve spoke about the proposed merger between Ongo Homes and Lincolnshire Housing Partnership (LHP).

The potential new organisation would continue to have offices in Scunthorpe, Boston and Grimsby.

Community Voice are getting one of the first briefings on this. Ongo and LHP must do formal consultation and take into account tenant views. Community Voice will probably want to ask questions and will have their own ideas and opinions going forward. All tenants will receive letters which will inform wider tenants and will seek their views.

Steve informed the group that Ongo will have a section on its website which will show frequently asked questions and answers, e.g. will rents increase, will my tenancy agreement change, how do I ring up for a repair appointment etc. Information on the potential merger will also go into the next edition of the Key News magazine. Community Voice (CV) were advised that they are more than welcome to hold separate sessions to discuss the proposal. Also they may want to meet with LHP's equivalent tenant group. It was stressed that tenant views are crucial.

Steve asked if Community Voice want to meet up with their equivalent group from LHP and CV responded with a resounding yes please.

#### **Debate**

Question was raised re customer engagement groups such as Tenant Inspectors - will they merge? Steve responded to say that decisions will need to be made further down the line about groups and panels, maybe a local group and then an overarching one? This would be down to the tenants to decide as its their views that count.

Russ noted that it would be good to be able to dip into other resources especially logistically, with suppliers potentially being closer geographically. This would save valuable time resources giving the ability to attend the appointment on time and with quicker responses to follow up appointments.

A member stated that this is a massive decision and asked, will shareholders have a vote or would this strictly be a board decision? Steve said that this depends on legal advice received as there will be a legal structure and processes to go through.

Another member raised the issue of Ongo having already gained TPAS exemplar accreditation showing how well it is working, raising concerns as to what could happen should the merger take place. Steve responded to explain that tenant views on the potential merger would provide a great opportunity for tenants from both organisations to deep dive into learning for the future as to what would work best going forward. He said that the CV group would be heavily involved in this and envisioned tenant involvement strengthening going forward.

Assets will be owned by the whole organisation; it wouldn't matter if Ongo bought 10,000 homes into it and LHP 12,000, it would all be brought into one new company.

What would happen with tenancy agreements? Steve's understanding is that they wouldn't need to be changed. However, going forward tenancy agreements would be considered to identify any differences. Decisions would then need to be taken as to whether to leave as they are and just new tenants to the new company to get a new version, or if a new one that still protected existing rights should be considered and consulted on.

It was asked as a tenant of 10 years, if the merger went ahead would Ongo still retain their tenancy tenure in terms of length of time. The response was that yes, this would be retained so that the date on the original tenancy would stand, ensuring current rights to right to buy or right to acquire would remain unchanged.

Melvyn said that he felt very positive for Ongo and thinks services to tenants can only be beneficial. The merger proposal has the boards support as they believe it offers a much stronger Ongo for the future. He also believes this is a real opportunity to make things better, offering more people more opportunities in the Greater Lincolnshire area.

The suggestion was raised for a small number of involved tenants, senior staff and CEOs from both organisations to attend each other's meetings to observe, e.g. CV, Scrutiny Panel etc.

## **6. Update on Repairs and Figures – Russ Edwards**

A copy of the presentation will be sent out to the members with the minutes.

Russ introduced Hayley as the Contracts Coordinator.

Hayley explained that previously if a job was sent to a contractor, then it was assumed that the job would be completed in a timely manner and Ongo would only be made aware if something had gone wrong. This has now been changed and monitoring is in place to make Ongo aware of how many jobs are passing to contractors, how many times no access to a property is encountered etc. Contractors are aware and reminded of Ongo's expectations in relation to always carry ID, professionalism, and courteousness with Tenants. Ongo is looking at value for money in relation to different contractors and costings of jobs.

Service Level Agreements ensure that tenants have the communication they need so they are aware of who will be coming to complete a job and the date and time slot of when they are to be expected. Steve mentioned that in previous times we hadn't used that many different contractors as we do now, so this problem has seen an upward trend. Ongo had previously relied on terms of contracts and informal arrangements but as there are now 30 or 40 contractors in use, a standard service level agreement is necessary across the board.

## **7. Any Other Business.**

### Reflection on meeting:

Karen advised the group that they had been privy to the news about the potential merger and asked members to use their knowledge to inform and if necessary correct tenant misconceptions. She requested that if people are asked any questions that they refer them back to Ongo so that the questions can be answered and also shared, together with answers, on the Ongo website under Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's).

### Tenant language:

A member asked how tenants can influence the new organisation's names of departments and job titles so that tenants know what these mean in the future, e.g. tenants at large don't understand the terms customer experience, community resolution - much simpler to understand are customer service and ASB. A complaints officer should be known as that and not something else. The title of tenancy coach is something that definitely shouldn't be used going forward as this is seen as patronizing to tenants. This has been raised to Ongo numerous times in the past 18 months.

Karen suggested that CV could raise this issues of language when they meet with LHP involved tenants, talking about all issues of what really matters to them. This would be a great opportunity to influence the potential new organisation.

### Thank you:

It was recognized that the potential merger had been a massive piece of news, making it a really busy meeting. Thanks were given to all for the debates and contributions made at the meeting.

## **13. Date and Time of next meeting**

The next meeting will be on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> October 1.30pm to 4pm at the Arc in person or via Teams.