



Community Voice (CV) Meeting Minutes 18th March 2024

Present:

CV Members: Tim Mills (Chair), Jill Milner (Vice-Chair), Dawn Johnson (Treasurer), Jim Newcombe, Dawne Reed, Anita James, Keith Lumbers, Kevin Yearnshire, Tami Reeve, Eddie Stringer, Paul Pearson, Ian Bullyment, Tracey Borill (Teams)

Ongo Staff: Kevin Hornsby, Neil Keay, Wendy Wolfe, Karen Cowan, Bev Miller, Pete Stones

Apologies: Matthew Waddingham, Ryan North, Harry Jackson, Sue Whitelock, Tony Sanderson, Tracey Bain, Paul Smith, Ron Weller, Steve Hepworth, Jo Sugden, Judith Tomlinson

1. Welcome, Apologies & Housekeeping - Tim

The chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and brief introductions were given. It was explained that there was no planned fire drill, but the fire exits were pointed out. He also reminded members to not bring up personal issues and to raise their hand if they have a point or question to raise during the meeting.

2. Minutes & Actions of Previous Meeting

These were approved by Keith and seconded by Anita. Wendy then provided an update on the actions:

- Link to household support fund will be shared in the key news and added to the financial section of the Ongo Website
- Check reasons for increase in former tenant arrears. Kevin to answer later in the meeting.
- A key to be added to all performance information reports. Completed.
- Information to be shared as to why air bricks are blocked up. These were first bricked up as part of decent homes when electric fans were fitted so that there wasn't a constant flow.
- A recent Housing Association article referred to not having window restrictors on a property and led to the death of a child. Ongo to be mindful about the restrictors (safety catches / chains for windows) for properties with similar style windows.

3. Treasurers report - Dawn

A copy of the report was provided in the paperwork, no questions were raised. Dawn noted that travel expense forms would not be paid if the form is not filled in completely and correctly. She will be submitting the accounts to Ongo 2nd week of April.

4. Board Observers - Tim

The next Board meeting is taking place on 26th March, 2pm at Ongo House in person or via Microsoft Teams. Three CV members can attend as observers, contact Customer Engagement if interested.

Discussion Items

5. Guinness update – Karen

There were 841 properties taken over by Ongo on Monday split geographically, Ongo are working on an integration plan to make the incoming tenants feel welcome without overwhelming them with information.

Ongo need to ensure that all the property and tenancy data is up to date and relevant, tenancy details, condition of properties, arrears and any financial arrangements in place. It is important that good working relationships are now made with new external agencies that Ongo have not previously worked with, eg, North East Lincs and Nottingham Local Authorities. It was asked if the new tenants were not digitally savvy would they still receive communication from Ongo – the welcome pack that is due to be delivered shortly is all in written form and available in printed or digital version.

Upon transfer of the homes and tenancies, everything will remain as it is, e.g. currently the Guinness staff work differently to Ongo staff so this is a good opportunity to learn from each other's different ways of working and to identify best practise to work to in the future. This acquisition has been worthwhile as it has seen a growth overnight of around 9% of the current housing stock

6. Executive Update – Kevin

Kevin advised that the rent increase letters should have all been received now and that the income team were working hard and income collection remains at a good level.

There has been a big focus on repairs and maintenance with Steve leading a strategic repairs group. Pete explained that what Ongo is struggling with is typical of the sector with an influx of demand and not enough resources, the team are committed and resilient as this has been the worst period for approx. 30 years. The group are showing that Ongo are committed to coming together to make positive changes and improvements and will continue to be transparent and honest even if it makes figures look poor. A member asked if the recent damp and mould issues have caused this crisis. Pete advised that it is an organisational problem rather than a maintenance issue; expectations of tenants, Covid and the backlog of repairs have all had an impact - the recovery period will take time.

The new telephone system seems to be working well. The call back option was queried due to the phone number coming up on screen, one example was that it stated it was from Worcester. A member stated that people may be put off answering thinking it may

be a cold caller/scam. Kevin advised that he would look into this and see what the situation is and if this is the case then Ongo can maybe do some advertising or promotion to advise tenants that this will happen via an article in Key News and some social media posts. **ACTION** Kevin to investigate and advise.

Housing Ombudsman cases are still up across the sector, a member noted that people are still getting cold calls from solicitors re damp and mould business. Another member asked if the case rate was still high because of historical cases. This is in part true as the housing ombudsman are still working their way through a long backlog.

Kevin advised that he has had meetings with Scunthorpe Utd to try and get tenants into some kind of sport and football, this may include free tickets to games. A member said that the team run a training academy in the school holidays so maybe could get some funding to get some more kids into this that maybe wouldn't be able to go previously due to cost. A member asked about children with special needs and if there were to be any sessions suitable for them. Kevin advised he wasn't sure but he would bring this up at a future meeting. **ACTION** Kevin to query.

7. Key Performance and Satisfaction results – Karen

Karen ran through a summary of the scorecard and opened up discussion with CV on current performance. Karen advised that this was slightly different to normal as it was just the scorecard without a written covering report, therefore Karen did the summary herself. She asked if the group were happy with this method going forward as it would relieve pressure on the performance team by not having to produce a written report. The group stated they were happy with this proposal.

ACTION Karen to advise performance team and check that there are no abbreviations.

8. Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) new consumer standards – Karen

Karen talked about the four new consumer standards:

- Safety and Quality standard = Neil Key as lead
- Transparency, Influence and accountability standard = Karen Cowan as lead
- Neighbourhood and Communities (shared spaces) = Dawn Hill as lead
- Tenancy standards = Dawn Hill as lead

Ongo must self-assess each year against these standards and involved tenants will assist with this process (as they do now). E.g. CV will have a workshop to help populate the Transparency, Influence and accountability standard, The Property Services Panel will help to populate the Safety and Quality Standard etc.

When Ongo states it complies with a standard then they need to evidence this. This can be done via minutes of meetings, performance scorecards, tenant satisfaction % etc. She also explained that going forward the RSH can do their own checks should they wish to do so, and this could include speaking to tenants directly.

Going forward the RSH is introducing a new regulatory standard that will address compliance with consumer standards. Therefore housing providers will have their usual viability and governance ratings but a new consumer rating will also be added.

Karen said that CV reports should state how the report links to particular consumer standard/s (if relevant). **ACTION** Karen to cascade this down to other managers.

9. “One Ongo” office project – Kevin

Kevin gave an update on the merging of staff into one building. This will be done by re-locating all of the staff from Cole Street into Ongo House. This makes financial sense and offers value for money savings. Having all the resources under one roof will also offer easier access for tenants. The key changes that people will notice will be in the reception area where there will be more desks and colleagues working in the reception area as well as providing advice and support to our tenants and clients. A member asked if wheelchair accessibility will be taken into consideration. Kevin confirmed that all disability requirements will be considered as part of the change.

The redesign of Ongo House is out for tender at the moment to try and find the best use of the office space. A member asked what Ongo is doing with the Cole street office. Kevin stated this is currently under discussion. Options are that it could be sold (interest has been shown) or it could be leased out, or it could be used as something else, maybe connected with Ongo. A member noted that the building had originally been intended to be an internet café.

Information Item

10. Housing Perks App update – Kevin

It was asked if the housing perks app could only work as an app or if people that didn't work digitally could access these gift cards from Ongo. Kevin said there were no plans to do this as logistically it would be a minefield trying to work out discounts and handling cash with all the different companies that are involved.

Kevin did advise that people could add family members onto the app. It was agreed that the app could result in a good saving for whoever wanted to use it.

11. Customer Engagement Activity Update.

Residents Scrutiny Panel Almost finished their work on the damp and mould report.

Sustainability & Environmental Panel Terms of reference agreed giving details of what they are to be focusing on, particularly partnerships with some local schools for different projects. The group will meet every 3 months moving forward.

Tenant Inspectors Panel They have recruited some new members. No red inspections to report. Fly tipping issues has been raised in one area which will be looked into. Keith was voted in as chair again and a vice chair was appointed.

12. CE update – Wendy Wolfe

Wendy ran through the report that was provided and spoke about the TPAS conference in Coventry – if any members are interested in attending then please contact the customer engagement team. New members will be selected first.

Hayley Sleight’s job has been advertised and shortlisted and Wendy will be interviewing in April.

13. Any Other Business

It was asked if when paying your rent on line if it had changed from ALLPAY to something called high town housing. **ACTION** Kevin to investigate this. The member had confirmed that the payment had been added to their account.

A member noted that they had had a lot of spam calls from solicitors touting for business, the Chair advised that they could register with a call preference service to stop this, he will add these details on to the Community Voice Facebook page for information.

A member asked if Ongo are going to look at the language and terminology that they use, for example with job titles. This had been mentioned before and again when the merger was proposed as both sets of tenants from the different housing organisations had said that it was confusing. When making a complaint tenants should be able to ask for the complaints department, terminology needs to be tenant friendly. The chair asked if this could be put on as a future agenda item and this was agreed. Kevin advised that he will be wanting to get tenants involved in the terminology discussion. **ACTION** future agenda item on Language and Terminology.

A member referred to having a smoke alarm that is battery powered that went off recently. They already have smoke alarms that are hard wired so that one is surplus to requirements and they wondered what to do with the casing left on the ceiling, asking whether it will it be removed. **ACTION** Neil to look into this.

The chair asked that it is noted that CV would like to thank Pete for all his hard work over the years and wish him all the best in his retirement.

Reflection on meeting – The group agreed that it had been an informative and relaxing meeting. Karen felt that she had talked a lot and reminded the group that they can offer up suggestions for future agenda items.

14. Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting will be on Monday 15th April 1.30pm – 4.30pm, at the Arc in-person or via Teams.

15. Action Plan

	Action	Who	Update
1.	CV reports to contain reference to any particular consumer standard/s	Wendy	To be included for reports at future meetings

2.	Kevin to look into how call backs display geographically and see if the displayed number can be changed to reflect Ongo or a local number	Kevin	
3.	Check if children with additional needs are included in the Scunthorpe Utd plan	Kevin	.
4.	Check if all pay has changed	Kevin	
5.	Agenda item at future meeting – Language and Terminology	Wendy	Included for the next meeting in April
6.	Smoke alarm casing left on ceiling	Neil	