

# CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT HANDBOOK

*Give your views*



*Shape services*



*Make a difference*



*Influence homes & communities*



# Hello!

## WELCOME TO OUR CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT HANDBOOK

**If you require any specific support such as large print, braille, translation, audio, or any other assistance to read this handbook, please let us know.**

**If you would like this document in another language, call 01724 279900**

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**Ja vēlaties šo instrukciju savā valodā, lūdzu, zvaniet mums uz 01724 279900**

**Se você gostaria deste folheto na sua língua, por favor ligue para 01724 279900**

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Thank you for taking the time to read this handbook

**We want to give all our customers the chance to tell us what they think about the services they receive and to influence decisions that affect their homes and neighbourhoods.**

We will keep developing our existing methods of engagement to make sure this continues to happen.

**See the back page for all details on how to get involved with us.**

## About Ongo

### WHAT THEY DO?



Ongo is a Social Housing landlord who provides housing and community services to over 10,000 homes based in North Lincolnshire, West Lindsey, Lincolnshire, South Yorkshire, Bassetlaw and the East Midlands.

Ongo is regulated by the Government's Regulator for Social Housing (RSH), who check to ensure Ongo is meeting the requirements of its RSH economic and consumer standards.

Ongo is made up of housing, commercial and community-based companies, and each of these areas has its own board who is responsible for governing the business.

The Boards meet throughout the year and some Board members may sit on more than one Board or committee. The Ongo Homes Board is provided with six monthly Customer Voice reports that provides regular updates on the different feedback mechanisms in use, actual customer feedback, and how feedback is being used to influence service improvements.

Tenants can apply to become an Ongo Homes Board Member when there is a vacancy. This gives tenants the opportunity to be part of the Ongo strategic decision making body that takes important decisions that affect their homes and communities.

Tenants being on the board also gives real lived experience insight into the strategic decision making process.

# Accreditations & Awards

Ongo successfully achieved the TPAS Exemplar accreditation in May 2023. The Tpas Exemplar is for organisations that have previously been awarded the national Tpas accreditation three times and have consistently demonstrated their approach to engagement. It is a comprehensive process involving external consultants to ensure that Ongo continue to provide an excellent service in terms of customer engagement.

The Leaders in Diversity accreditation was awarded to Ongo in August 2022. The National Centre for Diversity offers several accreditations which Ongo have been successful in achieving previously and have now progressed to the higher level of Leaders in Diversity. In December 2023 based on previous accreditation results, Ongo reached position 24 in the National Centre for Diversity's Top 100 Most Inclusive Employers, out of 300 plus multi sector organisations.



**Investors  
in Diversity  
Gold UK**  
*Leaders in Diversity*

# THE CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT framework

We want our customers to not only shape and monitor our services but to be involved in making the decisions too.

**By doing this we can ensure continual service improvements are made that:**

- Benefit our customers, enhancing their quality of life
- Increase customer satisfaction with the services that we provide
- Ensure value for money of rent payers money

## We will...

- Clarify the purpose of their involvement
- Communicate any limitations to involvement or decision-making
- Involve residents before decisions are made
- Provide relevant, accurate, up-to-date, and accessible information
- Use clear, jargon-free language
- Provide support to enable involvement at all levels, including transportation, carer support, interpreter services, refreshments and reimbursement for expenses
- Provide formal and informal training for tenants, residents, and staff to ensure meaningful and equal participation

Our commitment to customer engagement and our principles are outlined in a framework available from the team, our website, or use this QR code.



## We believe...

Our customers are the best people to tell us what's working well or not so well, and that's why it's so important that they have their say on issues that affect their homes, their local communities and all of the services that we deliver to them.

- Provide a wide range of opportunities that match individual preferences
- Be clear about the time commitment involved
- Encourage customers to be involved in the scrutiny of customer facing services and issues
- Use the outcomes of resident involvement to shape service delivery and planning
- Give accurate feedback following involvement activity and deliver this within agreed timeframes
- Provide the resources required in the shape of people, time, facilities and funding, to achieve good communications, effective consultation, participation, scrutiny & partnership working.



# CUSTOMER Charters

There is a regulatory requirement to publish service standards and to ensure that these comply with the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) Consumer Standards.

Ongo's Service Standards need to be clear so that customers will know what they can expect from Ongo. For this reason, the Customer Charters were agreed with customers following full consultation with them. These feed through to Ongo's strategies which are: **be a great landlord, customer focus and growth and sustainability.**

The Customer Service Charters include specific Service Standards within them that customers can help Ongo to monitor to assess performance in each of the following service areas:

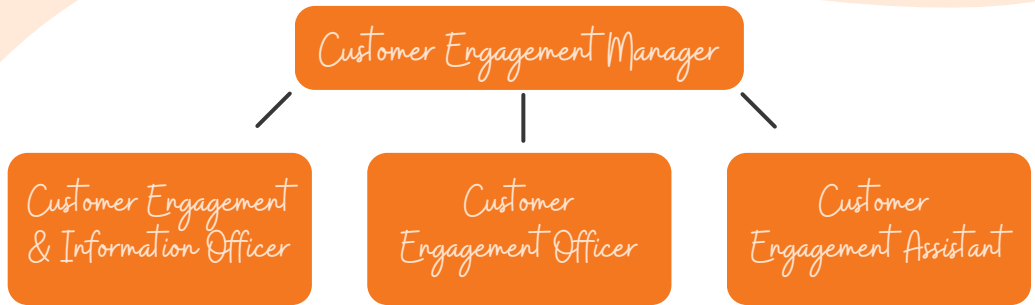
- **Customer Experience**
- **Customer Engagement**
- **Property Services**
- **Neighbourhood & Community**



Copies of the Customer Charters are available on our website, or you can use the QR code.



# MEET THE TEAM



We know it's important that customers are given the opportunity to do things they enjoy; being involved works best if they know their contribution has been recognised and has made a difference. We also recognise that sometimes there are things that might make it a little more difficult for them to take part, so we offer support to all our volunteers.

Members of the team will support individuals and help build confidence for those taking part in meetings to encourage them to participate and share their views.

Staff will help provide one-to-one training to enable new volunteers to learn and develop in whatever method of engagement they decide to be involved in.

## EXAMPLES OF THIS INCLUDE:

- The use of social media and different methods of communication
- Administrative support for producing paperwork for meetings
- Providing useful contacts for external agencies that can help an individual or group
- Training and support opportunities from external companies to help develop skills
- Encourage attendance at conferences or seminars
- Help with transport or childcare costs to allow volunteers to attend meetings



The majority of meetings with Ongo's customer engagement groups are in a blended format which means customers can attend face-to-face in person or join online using Microsoft Teams, allowing them to use a method that they're comfortable with and that fits around their commitments.



# Why get involved?

## WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU?

Getting involved and participating is an important way for you to get your views heard and to influence decisions which affect your home and your local community.

### **Being involved brings lots of rewards:**

- The opportunity to learn new skills and increase knowledge, at a pace and level of your own choosing
- The chance to meet other volunteers who have similar interests and to make new friends
- The chance to really make a difference to the homes and communities that you and other tenants live in



All customers should have an equal opportunity to become involved, regardless of their situation. It's important to us that you're not out of pocket financially as a result of attending Ongo meetings or other activities (such as attending conferences or training events). Therefore, we will cover expenses for travel and other reasonable costs to encourage you to get involved.



# What opportunities ARE AVAILABLE TO GET INVOLVED WITH?

## COMMUNITY VOICE

Community Voice is the main Ongo recognised tenant body. This group works in partnership with Ongo and has delegated decision-making authority from the Ongo Homes Board, to sign off or approve customer facing policies. This group influences improvements to homes, local communities, and improves the quality of life for all tenants.

Community Voice meetings usually take place monthly in a formal meeting setting (using a blended format of meeting face-to-face in person, or online via Microsoft Teams).



Members are provided with agendas and paperwork for each meeting and take part in monitoring the performance of Ongo's service areas. An example of what the group have influenced previously includes providing feedback on the future letting of garages. There was an ever-increasing number of empty garages and there was little publicity about them, therefore the group suggested that garages could perhaps be offered for storage and that a marketing campaign be put in place to promote the vacant units. This feedback was taken on board with the outcome being that the number of empty garages reduced significantly after implementing the changes.

Membership for the group is open to any Ongo tenant or leaseholder. In addition to this if you become a member of Community Voice you can also apply to become a Tenant Shareholder. This is an important role as it allows you to attend and vote at Ongo Homes Annual General Meetings (AGMs) and General Meetings (GMs). This means you would be able to vote on major decisions.



**Time commitment** - meeting dates and times are planned in advance and take place for three hours each month. All paperwork is provided in advance of each meeting to allow time for reading the information and getting prepared with questions.

# Residents Scrutiny Panel



The Scrutiny Panel consists of a group of residents who carry out detailed investigations into all aspects of Ongo services (from a customer perspective). The panel work as customer auditors and uses performance data provided by Ongo on the area they want to investigate. They carry out desktop analysis of policies and procedures, customer satisfaction results and financial information, plus they conduct interviews with Ongo staff and research what other housing providers are doing.

The panel makes an overall assessment and agrees on recommendations for future improvements. For example, recommendations for improvements on the number of 'average days for standard repairs' which were subsequently approved.



**Time Commitment** - meetings usually last for three hours and the frequency of meetings increases during each investigation. Additional time commitment will be required for carrying out research, interviewing, surveys, training etc, but will depend on the nature of the work involved for each investigation.



**This was my first full investigation as part of the panel, and I loved it. Knowing that we as tenants can help improve an integral service area such as repairs is very reassuring.**



*- Member of the panel*

# TENANT Inspectors

Tenant Inspectors are volunteers who carry out reality checks on our services.

**Examples of the inspections they can be involved in include:**

- Mystery shopping to assess how a service is working in reality
  - Estate inspections to evaluate the condition of estates managed by Ongo and to raise any concerns, such as Health and Safety related issues
  - Visits to empty homes to check properties that are considered as 'ready to let' against Ongo's Lettable Standard. Checks can be carried out by doing a physical visit to a property or by a virtual method online
- 
- Inspections of internal communal areas in Retirement Living Schemes and High-Rise flats to check spaces are clean, tidy and that the required information is displayed on boards or within communal rooms
  - Green Space inspections to check that grounds maintenance work is being carried out effectively in areas managed by Ongo
  - You can get involved in various inspections and visit estates across the stock owned and managed by Ongo.

An example is that Tenant Inspectors carried out a Mystery Shopping exercise on the customer services team testing out several contact methods to check whether a quality of service and advice was delivered. The overall service was rated good but some areas for improvement were highlighted, e.g., the carrying out of sensitive and confidential conversations with customers. This resulted in refresher training being rolled out across a number of teams.

## Time Commitment



Meetings take place every two months and normally last one and a half hours. Inspection schedules are produced in advance and each month names are taken at the meetings of who will cover the different inspections and areas in that particular period.

# COMPLAINTS

## Monitoring Panel

The panel is made up of volunteers who focus on how Ongo deals with complaints. The purpose of the panel is to drive change across the business and raise standards for tenants and customers who use the complaint service. The panel achieve this by quality checking all aspects of complaint handling and performance, analysing, and understanding themes of complaints and spotlighting areas for further scrutiny. Using example case studies, the panel identifies themes and trends to assess whether procedures have been followed or require changing.

The panel also provides comments on the Housing Ombudsman complaint handling code and monitors the self-assessment to ensure Ongo is compliant when dealing with complaints.



**Time Commitment** - meetings take place for two/three hours every three months. Papers are sent out prior to each meeting to allow members to read them in advance to prepare for attending a meeting.

## Equality Diversity & Inclusion group

This is a group of staff and volunteers who are responsible for making sure all Ongo staff and customers are treated fairly and appropriately, making sure that everyone has equal access to services and opportunities.

The membership of the group is predominantly made up of staff with a small number of tenants taking part.

**Vacancies to the panel are promoted when they become available.**



**Time commitment** - meetings take place for two hours every three months.

# Property Services Panel

Volunteers are involved to ensure that Ongo's property services meet the needs of customers. Where required, the panel can invite tenants at large to the meetings to share their customer experience on work recently carried out to their home. Panel members are also given the same opportunity. The panel helps to influence improvements to the repairs service by monitoring the performance and delivery of the service. They also monitor the out-of-hours service and repair priorities, suggesting any improvements that may be required.

The panel has influenced changes to the categories and timescales for repairs and in performance reporting.



**Time Commitment** - meetings are held for two hours every three months, with additional meetings if required.

## Publications Panel

Ongo provides information to customers through its tenants' newsletter Key News, and in a variety of other ways such as letters, leaflets, and newsletters.

The panel's purpose is to ensure articles are user and reader friendly, using plain English and are free from jargon. They provide comments either at face-to-face meetings or digitally online. Sometimes a quick turnaround for responses is required and so the use of email is essential.

The panel has influenced changes to the wording used in letters sent out to customers in relation to rents, smoke alarms, gas safety checks etc. They also agree and have input to the Key News magazine, e.g. influencing content and articles prior to them being published.



**Time Commitment** - meetings are held four times a year, with additional meetings taking place as and when required.

## Leaseholders

This is made up of a group of leaseholder representatives who come together to discuss common issues such as service charges and planned major works. Meetings take place using a blended format of face-to-face in person, or online via Microsoft Teams.



**Time Commitment** - meetings are held twice a year, with additional meetings taking place as and when required.

# Right To Manage

(Residential Long-Leaseholders Only)

Where a group of leaseholders meet the qualifying criteria for collective enfranchisement, but do not wish to purchase the freehold, they are entitled to set up their own management company and to exercise their Right to Manage.

This Right empowers leaseholders to take responsibility for the management of their block and Ongo retains the ownership of the freehold. Ongo would also retain the right to become a member of the management company.

Any application for Right to Manage will be dealt with on an individual basis and in accordance with all relevant legislation.

Further information and guidance on Right to Manage can be found on the Leasehold Advisory Service web-site [here](#).

## Resident Building Safety Group

The group are made up of volunteers who represent different property types and monitor that Ongo are complying with regulations in terms of building safety e.g. fire, asbestos, electric, gas, lifts, water etc. They also agree how information in relation to building safety is shared with customers living in different property types owned by Ongo. Members of the group can influence and challenge changes to policies and procedures in relation to building safety to ensure the safety of all residents. Being a member of this group provides opportunities to increase knowledge and become champions to help spread the word to others living in local communities on how to stay safe. Meetings take place using a blended format of face to face in person, or online via Microsoft Teams.



**Time Commitment** - meetings are held for two hours every three months, with additional meetings if required.





# FOCUS/CONSULTATION GROUPS

Ongo regularly utilise focus groups to gather views and opinions on a specific area of Ongo's services.

The group could be a one-off meeting to discuss a specific topic with the aim of providing solutions to help improve a particular service. This would normally include a small group of customers and one or two Ongo staff. Customers are encouraged to put forward their own personal views on the topic in question. For example, people who have recently been allocated an Ongo property are able to influence the future standard and condition of homes that are made available to let.



**Time Commitment** - these meetings are usually held as and when required and would last for a period of two hours.

# Procurement

Volunteers are asked to take part in the procurement processes for taking on new contractors to work with Ongo. This involves checking tender documents and helping to select a preferred contractor that will work with Ongo over an agreed period of time.

Ongo involves volunteers in any procurement which would have a direct impact on them as a stakeholder. For example, where tenants will be coming into contact with the contractor, where the contractors will be making appointments with the tenant, or where the tenant will have some kind of involvement in the future operation of the contract. Examples include the tenders for kitchens, decent homes works, and grounds maintenance services. Exceptions are where the contract is very safety orientated and would mean more objectivity must be applied to the selection process, such as checking experience, certification, and qualifications etc. Examples of this include the Fire Safety contract and Asbestos services.



**Time Commitment** - meetings are held as and when required and depend on the type of contract and number of tender submissions received. Additional time is required to read through documents before meetings to agree on the outcome.

# Surveys

Ongo uses a variety of written, telephone and digital surveys to obtain views about a range of issues that affect customers' homes and communities. Comments received are used to improve and develop services and to plan the best use of resources. Surveys are a cost effective and convenient method for customers to give their views from the comfort of their home at a time of their choosing.

# SOCIAL MEDIA

## Communication

The information in this booklet shows how we provide a variety of opportunities to consult with tenants, but we also recognise that attending meetings may not be the right choice for everyone. Therefore, many other communication and engagement methods are available for customers to make their views known to us. Examples include X, Facebook and our My Home app.

We have a digital group of tenants who we can call on when we have something that we need to run past our customers. This group is willing to challenge the way we do things, to recommend improvements, and offer vital insights when recommending service improvements.



### Time Commitment



This will vary depending on the topic the group are involved with at the time. We can ask for a quick response over a few days or plan over a set period. Feedback sessions with the group are planned every months.

## TRAINING

Our volunteers can take part in training to help them learn more about the groups or on a specific topic. There is help available to learn about using social media such as Twitter and Facebook. If you want to know more about this, please ask the Customer Engagement Team.

# RESIDENT ASSOCIATIONS & OTHER COMMUNITY GROUPS

A residents association is a community group that advocates residents interests and encourages community spirit by bringing people together. It helps to influence home, estate and community improvements.

We have a responsibility to ensure that groups are truly representative of the area they live in and represent and therefore offer resources and support to help resident associations to operate effectively.

## **Funding for local community groups**

We can help to support resident associations/local community groups apply for grants or funding. We can help groups to prepare information and submit funding applications or we can signpost to organisations that can do that for them.

*Opportunities to engage  
The wider customer voice*

In addition to the formal group structures of involvement, customer feedback is routinely gathered via a variety of methods, e.g., meetings, email and text surveys, Mail Chimp, social media, Key News, face-to-face, telephone conversations, complaints and compliments.

Topic specific consultation is also facilitated via focus or task and finish groups which are useful to 'deep dive' into issues that require wider customer involvement to help inform changes or decisions.

To enhance our performance across various service areas, we regularly distribute monthly performance reports to tenant groups and post them on our website. This allows all tenants to review the performance and offer feedback or raise any questions they may have.

# GET INVOLVED

*make a difference*

**If you are interested in any of the engagement opportunities available, then you can:**

Try our online Live Chat feature to speak to an advisor or complete our online customer contact form.

 Visit our website - [ongo.co.uk](https://ongo.co.uk)

 Email us at [customer.engagement@ongo.co.uk](mailto:customer.engagement@ongo.co.uk)

**You can talk to us on our social media channels too:**

 [Facebook.com/OngoHomes](https://Facebook.com/OngoHomes)

 [Twitter.com/ongoUK](https://Twitter.com/ongoUK)

You can also phone us on **01724 279900**, or write to us at:

**Customer Engagement, Ongo Homes Ltd, Ongo House, High Street,  
Scunthorpe, North Lincolnshire, DN15 6AT**