

COMMUNITY VOICE
MINUTES 14th August 2024



Present:

CV Members: Jill Milner (Acting Chair), Dawn Johnson (Treasurer), Tracey Bain (Acting Secretary), Keith Lumbers, Stewart Pearson, Judith Tomlinson, Ron Weller, Paul Pearson, Eddie Stringer, Rhiannon Jeans (observer), Rachel Cook.

Ongo Staff: Wendy Wolfe, Karen Cowan, Bev Miller, Steve Hepworth, Kevin Hornsby, Jo Sugden, Steve Ellard, Becky Johns.

1. Welcome, Apologies & Housekeeping

Jill mentioned keeping to agenda times and that there was no planned fire drill. Apologies were received from Harry Jackson, Dawne Reed, Jim Newcombe, Tami Reevell, Tima Omari and Lee Coulson.

2. Minutes & Actions of Previous Meeting

Dawn and Judith proposed and seconded that the minutes were a true and accurate record of the meeting held in June.

Longevity of employment support – didn't want including in future balance scorecard.

3. Treasurers Report – Dawn Johnson

The balance is decreasing as hotel and food from the TPAS Conference has been paid for – no further questions were asked from the report presented in the pack.

4. Board Observers – Jill Milner

The next Board meetings will take place via Board Room or Microsoft Teams for:

Ongo Homes Board: 11th Sept 2.00pm to 5.00pm, Ongo Communities Board: 8th Oct, 2.30pm to 3.30pm. Three CV members can attend, names interested to notify customer engagement.

Decision Items

5. Customer Charters 23/24 (annual update) – Becky Johns

Becky gave a quick overview of the report included in the paperwork as this is a decision item. The appendix 1 is what the group were asked to consider and will be kept updated on the progress through the coming months.

Any questions or challenges. It was mentioned that the paperwork for this had been very long and difficult reading, Karen asked that if people haven't had opportunity to read through every single page it gave her an opportunity to add more evidence re some points. She asked whether it would be better for Ongo to complete the extra work and put this on as an action, raising under Matters Arising in the following month's agenda – **matters arising ACTION within the September agenda (for decision)**.

All agreed on a revised version to be sent out to members separately throughout the month, raising any questions directly with customer engagement or discussing at next meeting.

A member noted that the Customer Experience Team are doing a really good job

if there are any queries or questions send to Customer Engagement Team and this can be fed back to Becky.

Discussion Items

6. Annual Complaints Report – Becky Johns

Annual complaints performance went to board as part of the HO (Housing Ombudsman) compliance in June. The Complaints panel have been consulting on this and thought it worth bringing to Community Voice for their view. Considerations for CV on some items. HO requested yearly with sections asked for specific information. Restricted (minimum) set of standards in the report.

Complaint performance/handling etc again the timescales given to us by Ongo are at 93% for stage 1 complaints which makes us compliant. Only a few slipped over timescales. Key things are self-assessment within the report to be scrutinized by the board and responded to, this, along with much more information, is included in the complaints section on Ongo's website. Not every HA (Housing Association) are consulting with tenants, but we can be sure that Ongo does this, this is highlighted with their input. Also learning exercises from HO determinations especially the mal administrations that have been received. This has coincided with the strategic repairs panel and the new director of property services Steve Ellard who is now in place.

Questions- How did we improve? The team was bolstered to 3 complaint handlers (1 extra person) this specifically reduced stage 2 complaints as tenants were being visited and felt that they were really being listened to at this stage. Rapid resolutions recognize what is a service request which needs to be carried out asap – if this doesn't happen then it would go through to a stage 1 complaint. A member noted that complaint volumes at stage 2 have increased year on year. This is down to call handling in the first stage, make it right campaign, solicitors "touting" for business, media, damp and mould situations. This has lifted the prevalence of people wanting to complain, not one thing but an amalgamation of many. There may be an occasion when a tenant tells us their complaint will go straight to stage 2 because they specifically want it to go to the HO.

Always going to see more complaints about repairs and maintenance due to demand and this will probably never change. For instance, with ASB (anti-social behaviour) cases if we can't do what the tenant wants, they won't be happy and want to escalate.

7. Budgets – Steve Hepworth

Question – how many repairs were completed last year? Answer 41,000. In 2020/2021 completed 27,000 responsive repairs, this increased massively in 2023/24 to 41,000. 2020/21 £4 million was spent on empty homes repairs compared to 2023/24 £10.7 million. This equates to a huge budget problem which needs addressing.

Ongo needs to be clear about what is TOR (tenants own responsibilities) and what is Ongo's responsibilities, e.g. if it's a fist hole in a door then the tenant needs to be recharged. Ongo needs to be stricter with things like this now and manage expectations at the first point of contact.

The Lettable Standard now says that if a cupboard door needs to be replaced in a kitchen this must be similar in nature/colour to the current one otherwise we may have to replace all the doors. Ongo needs to decide what is the best way to spend rent money, e.g. leave it slightly mismatching and then replace it in a couple of years? A member asked if instead of replacing a cupboard door, could this space be converted into an open shelf. A member suggested reusing stock, this has been an idea in the past just the issue of storage space, also with discontinued designs it is no longer an option to purchase matching products.

Steve Ellard noted that across the sector, Ongo's costs have increased more than other housing associations which must be investigated. He said there are 5 themes which are going to be looked at.

Optimizing systems to get the best use out of them, reviews of schedule or rates (SORs), e.g. which trade is best suited to complete the job on the first visit, i.e. specifically a joiner or can a multi skilled tradesperson complete this and then allocate the correct amount of time. Subcontractor usage, this is a symptom of Ongo not working as efficiently as we could, additional controls are being put in place around this. Ongo's in-house workforce are getting paid a fixed salary so can keep track of how much is being spent, we need to optimize these colleagues. There is also fluidity of in-house workforce moving them to empty homes raises satisfaction and figures in this sector but then repairs suffer, get swapped around again.

It was noted that Ongo are always cheaper than contractors therefore they need to be used more efficiently. It was asked if a call handler needed help on who to send a job to, is this in place – yes this would be sent through to the triage officer for that team.

A member asked if Ongo does too much for tenants, do we take on TOR instead of enforcing that they should do this themselves. This would fall under standards and responsibilities - what is Ongo responsible for, we need to be responsible for collecting recharges where necessary also. Tenancy agreements need to be enforced a little more, there are going to be workshops planned to discuss this in September.

Steve advised that it is not sustainable to keep spending money this way and things will need to change. Ongo wants to deliver a great repairs service and not try to shirk landlord duties but it needs to be clearer about what is Ongo's responsibility and what is a tenants. If an Ongo tradesperson turns up to a fist hole in a door and it is hanging off hinges, it needs to be monitored that they put the door back on the hinges and leave it, not order a new door for the property.

A member said that the tenancy agreement needs to be enforced/reminded to tenants. A member asked if we work logistically smart i.e., go to Barton, back to Scunthorpe, to Doncaster to Winterton to Epworth? This needs looking at in reviews to work better and not waste time travelling unnecessarily.

A member noted that on occasions some tenants would leave their property in a dreadful state, do we get any money back in recharges once they have left. Former tenant arrears/recharges need more focus, often the tenants will come back to Ongo and then must face up to the debt. Host com (AR augmented reality) can be used to tighten this up, ie hole in

bath, this is not normal and an opportunity to see the issue is available, the tenants' expectations then can be managed from the very beginning. This may lead to queues at the first point of call in the contact centre but will over time prove useful and show we want to get things right first time.

Information Items

8. Executive Update – Kevin Hornsby

Performance is looking good with the number of empty homes being at its lowest and turning them around to be re-let quickly. Income is great and arrears remain low.

The Citizens Advice Bureau report has come through and due to Ongo's referrals have raised £400k extra for our tenants.

Rent arrears have gone up since the purchase of the Guinness properties, however since we have amalgamated them into our finance systems, we have already seen a reduction with 2 officers specifically working on these properties. A member asked if those properties could receive the same benefit advice as other tenants? All tenants can access these services. Another member asked about the tradespeople from Guinness and could we use them? The response was yes we did Tupe some staff across at the time.

A Landlord Services workshop was held with CV. This commenced a consultation exercise that will take place with all tenants during September and October. A member noted that the Resident Scrutiny Panel is also looking at this and so Kevin will be able to use their feedback too.

We have started giving away Scunthorpe United tickets now, one member from CV won tickets to watch a match. There is an offer to CV members who can be added to a reserve list for tickets, there is a particular space for Ongo so this can be adapted if we have any additional needs requests from tenants.

9. National Housing Federation Tenants Charter – Karen Cowan

Karen shared the Together with Tenants Charter on the screen. The Charter consists of seven sections which Ongo signed up to initially in 2019. The intention of the Charter is to strengthen tenants' rights and ask what is most important to them, what should the relationship be etc. The National Housing Federation last year asked if this was still fit for purpose and then revised it following tenant feedback, to incorporate a section on equality, diversity and inclusion. Karen asked if CV were happy to re-sign the revised Charter. All members agreed. This decision will be shared with the Ongo Homes Board in the next Customer Voice report.

10. Customer Engagement Framework – Wendy Wolfe

This information was in the packs and is just a health check as it is not due for a full review for a couple of years. There were a few amendments that Wendy went through with the group.

11. Customer Engagement Activity Update - Tenant reps

- Tenant Inspectors (Keith) - they have acquired some new members. 19 inspections took place in May and June, only 1 was rated red which is looked at in detail. The group had

their impact assessment and 6-month update. The members have also been involved shadowing operatives on the neighbourhood services team. Karen noted that it's encouraging that most inspections are now rated as amber, green and gold star, which shows how things have improved. If any themes are picked up by inspections the team can then action something in that area to raise awareness of how to resolve this issue.

- Complaints Panel (Becky) – this panel has been involved in the CRT (customer resolution team) changes; the temporary position has been filled so now fully resourced. Compliments were passed on to the officers about their work.
- Resident Scrutiny Panel (Dawn) – met with management and tenancy services staff to discuss relationships, language and job titles, now ready to do some research as have agreed the scope and remit. This will be brought back to CV to look at.
- Publications Panel (Jill) - they discussed the results of Key News and had a meeting with the planning and development team which went really well. Jill asked if members had any interesting things that can be put into Key News, if so please do talk to either a member of the publications panel or a member of the customer engagement team. **ACTION** get a forward agenda item on planning and development team in to talk to CV.
- Property Services (Dawn) – Met Steve Ellard, the new Director of Property Services and discussed current performance. The group also received information on the Communications and No Access procedures.
- A Performance Workshop was held for CV looking at TSM (Tenancy Satisfaction Measures) and transactional measures. Discussed performance and agreed what CV wants to see going forward in their new Balance Scorecard report and what performance information the wider tenants should be able to see on the Ongo website.
- The RSH Neighbourhood & Community Consumer Standard – Tenant Inspectors and CV members attended a workshop where they fed into the self-assessment process. Karen used a quiz, doing things differently, which helped to identify what tenants knew of Ongo's services now and what needed to be communicated. They also raised suggestions as to what to include in the self-assessment.

12. Customer Engagement Updates (July & Aug) – Wendy Wolfe

There were 2 reports in this pack as the July meeting had to be cancelled, Wendy quickly ran through some of the figures mentioned in the reports.

13. Any Other Business

- Tracey updated the groups from the recent TPAS conference that some members attended. Lots of new learning and connections were made however it still highlights that Ongo do so much for their tenants, more than other councils and other Housing Associations. It was noted that Councils had a big attendance at TPAS this year, they seem to be finally getting their tenants involved. We may get contacted by Councils and other HA to show what they can learn from us.
- A member asked about the CV evening meeting that was cancelled and has this impacted on this meeting. It was suggested to hold an evening meeting in May or June rather than the peak summer holiday months but still in the lighter nights season.

14. Reflection of Meeting

Several people noted it was a good meeting. Judith advised that she had been co-opted on to the Ongo Homes Board but will continue to attend CV meetings as this is important to her.

15. Date and Time of next meeting

16th September 9.30am at the Arc.