

COMMUNITY VOICE MINUTES

Held at 1.30pm on Wednesday 16th October 2024
The Arc and via MS Teams



Present:

Community Voice Members: Jill Milner (Chair), Dawn Johnson (Treasurer), Tracey Bain, Judith Tomlinson, Rhiannon Jeans, Stewart Pearson, Ron Weller, Tami Reeve, Eddie Stringer, Jim Newcombe

Ongo Staff: Karen Cowan, Wendy Wolfe, Bev Miller, Becky Johns, Steve Hepworth, Kevin Hornsby, Mark Tasker, Mark Perrin

Also present: Charmain Mande (observer)

Apologies: Eric Gosling, Heather Gregory, Lee Coulson, Jo Sugden, Harry Jackson, Paul Pearson, Tima Obo Omari, Keith Lumbers, Rabul Ibrahim.

1. Welcome, Apologies and Housekeeping

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and brief introductions were given from everyone for the benefit of the new members in the room.

Apologies had been received from those listed above.

The Chair reminded members about using the general enquiries log and that it's for chasing anything that has previously been reported.

Members were informed that the acting secretary has stepped down and that the customer engagement team will now take over the production of the minutes of the meetings.

2. Minutes & Actions from Previous Meeting

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

Wendy provided an update on the actions and progress made.

Members were informed about the venues for the CV Christmas meeting, and it was agreed that Holme Hall golf club would be booked for the morning meeting on 16th December, followed by a lunch. Customer engagement will provide an attendance list at the meeting in November.

3. Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer presented the last two months of accounts and invited questions on them. Unfortunately, as the post office at the Arc was closed, she would not be able to pay expenses at this meeting.

4. Board Observers

Meetings taking place via the Board Room at Ongo House or Microsoft Teams:

- Ongo Homes Board on 27th November at 2pm

- Ongo Communities Board on 30th January at 2pm.
- Three CV members can attend either of, or both meetings. Those interested to inform the Customer Engagement Team.

DECISION ITEMS

5. Damp and Mould Policy

Mark Tasker gave a summary of the policy and background information, explaining that the Residents Scrutiny Panel recommendations have now all been taken on board, with the exception of one which is in progress (re social media).

It was noted that the risk rating has now been changed so that Ongo have “eyes on” an issue before determining the ratings of Red, Amber, Green and White.

Questions were raised these included:

A member asked about tenants taking some responsibility for damp and mould, how are tenants going to be informed about this. Mark explained that part of Ongo’s social media campaign shows two videos; one shows how Ongo approaches damp and mould, and one shows how to manage condensation in the home and gives handy hints for tenants to use. Ongo can also provide this in a leaflet format for those not wishing to use a digital platform. A member commented that the damp and mould policy is not showing online using her Smart Phone.

A member asked about tenants who may have sight difficulties and what provisions would be made for them. Becky explained what the advisors would do when individuals contact them and the support that is available for tenants. Becky stressed that no one would be left behind, and that Ongo would ensure information is in a format suitable for an individual.

Steve referred to designing the policy to meet Awaabs Law, which is what Ongo will focus on to achieve. Inspections can be carried out through video facility or sending out inspectors to visit a property.

A member asked what happens if a tenant will not engage with Ongo on eradicating damp and mould. The response was that the Tenancy Coaches would be used to gently remind tenants of their responsibilities and the Tenancy Agreement. If for example a tenant was advised to address but then refused to get rid of a large number of fish tanks in their flat which was causing condensation and moisture, then Ongo would have to use tenancy enforcement to resolve the issue.

A member complimented Ongo from recently moving into a property and the pack that included information on damp and mould which was really useful to read.

Members approved the revised policy.

6. Resident Scrutiny Panel (RSP) report and recommendations

A member from the panel provided an update on the latest RSP review which looked into tenant contact (language and relationships) with Tenancy Services, which include the terms used for job titles and structures of the tenancy services teams.

This particular topic was chosen for review because tenants experience confusion when dealing with differing job titles that seem to make no sense to wider tenants.

The Transparency Influence and Accountability Standard states very clearly that plain language should be used by the housing provider. Research was carried out with 13 other housing associations including some local ones, the majority of these organisations identified that they worked in dedicated housing patches with a named officer who were known as housing or neighbourhood officers. The idea of a housing patch was well received within the group, but this wasn't within the RSP scope and so they hadn't made any formal recommendations on this.

The report included details of the findings and recommendations from the panel, and CV were asked to provide their approval.

Kevin advised that he mostly agreed with the raised points and stated there is some wider consultation ongoing for this service area. When all the feedback is received it will be collated into a report and brought back to CV.

Approval was given by CV on the recommendations made within the RSP report.

DISCUSSION ITEM/S

7. Ongo Homes Year End Accounts

Mark explained the process for having the accounts audited, referring to the two main documents included within the report for the meeting which includes: statement of comprehensive income and statement of financial position. Mark had condensed the information into a more readable document that had been audited externally with no errors found.

Mark stated there had been a big increase in borrowing due to acquiring the Guinness properties and investment in new roofs, kitchens etc. Grants make it financially feasible for Ongo to undertake maintenance of all their properties and build new properties.

A question was asked if when money is borrowed from banks, it costs Ongo more in the long run with interest rates. Mark advised that ideally Ongo would use its own funds as first choice, but loans are always secured on good terms with low interest rates and that these monies still generate more money coming in than interest on the loans. The loans enable Ongo to expand to generate more income, growth and sustainability for the future. Mark stated that Ongo are not here to pay shareholders, but to keep rents at a reasonable level and keep the properties to a decent standard.

He referred to the 30-year business plan which looks at surplus against spend and shows how Ongo will remain financially stable. Ongo are aware that more money needs to be spent on repairs, damp and mould and this will be managed.

When Ongo are looking to invest in new build schemes these will only be approved if the scheme will contribute to a positive surplus of money for the company. A member asked if new builds rent was higher because of building costs. Mark explained that the rents are dictated by the government as grants will have been received. The rent on a new build is set at 80% of the market value reflective of the geographical area.

A member asked when does a new build stop being a new build in terms of rent. Mark advised that the rent increase is dealt with the same as others, and then every 5 years there needs to be a market rent assessment carried out which would be built into this.

8. New service Standards

Becky explained about the existing Customer Charters and the change in customer regulation and the introduction of new RSH Consumer Standards. This has all resulted in the creation of a first draft of new Ongo Service Standards. These have been developed to be aligned to the Consumer Standards and Ongo's new Corporate Plan.

Becky wanted to know if the proposals provided enough information to the level of standards of service that customers expect, bearing in mind time restraints.

A member asked about the quality and safety of properties and stock surveyors. Becky explained properties will be surveyed every 5 years by Ongo staff. The purchase of the Guinness properties have put pressure on the surveyors but they are working hard to bring this back into the timescales required.

A member asked if there was anything included in the document about tenant permissions. Becky explained there isn't anything included because these aren't part of the Consumer Standards. Karen explained a big piece of work will be carried out in the near future to look into this topic, and that a CV workshop will be held along with wider consultation with tenants at large.

A member noted that item 4 in the tenancy section stated about letting homes in a fair and transparent way, with there being no reference to the local community. Becky provided an explanation on how Ongo let properties, and that this is included in the policy. Karen mentioned the opportunity to use local lettings policies where there are large issues with ASB etc. These have been successfully used in the past to help regenerate areas and protect existing tenants.

A member referred to 4.3. and asked whether specific property types can be advertised, e.g. those purpose built for wheel chair users. Becky explained these need to go through the Home Choice Links process.

Members felt the document was clear and easy to understand. Becky confirmed this had gone out for wider consultation, on the website, social media, and that she would provide feedback to CV once the information from consultation had been collated.

INFORMATION ITEM/S

9. Policy Review Schedule Progress Report

Karen explained the report included details of what customer facing policies had been through a health check or review over the last six months and asked if there were any questions. All were happy with the explanation given.

10. Executive Report

Kevin updated members that income collection remained at a good standard, the improving lives project is also going really well, 33 carpets have been cleaned and 21 properties decorated. Feedback from this has shown that this kind of support really can transform a tenant's outlook.

The call handling change in times has been implemented and so far, well received.

Currently Ongo have given out 410 tickets for the Scunthorpe United football matches and are looking to explore rugby club options in the future. A question was asked about looking at clubs out of town, maybe Doncaster or Grimsby. Kevin agreed this could be looked at. Kevin explained the main reasons for doing this is to encourage tenants and families to encourage children into sport, spending time outside which is good for their wellbeing.

Kevin talked about the Housing Perks app that is offered to both staff and tenants. There has been a saving of £5k so far and asked the group how take-up could be improved. It was mentioned that when using this people may have money left over in the apps wallet if you don't know how much you are going to spend. It was advised that you can do this at the till when you get your amount you can type it in and it tells you how much you need, although it needs to be rounded up or down to the nearest pound, then you pay the difference in cash.

One member noted that her tenancy number says it's not valid. **ACTION:** to be looked into.

A member suggested that the housing perks app could be promoted on my home **ACTION:** to be followed up.

11. Customer Engagement Activity Update

- Resident Building Safety Group – the membership has increased in terms of representation for the different property types. The group now have membership from high rise blocks including a younger person (Under 30) on the group. This group is currently looking at no access and how to try and combat this.
- ASB Focus Group – there were two focus group meetings held, both being really useful and informative especially for non-involved tenants. Staff involved said they

received some good suggestions and would like to form an ASB panel in the future.
ACTION: Wendy to meet with staff and agree on the details and remit for a panel.

- Property Services Panel - Steve Ellard has attended this since being in post. Information was given on “right first time” jobs which will now be included in the performance reports. Panel members were asked to share any recent experiences of the repairs service (experiences since the last meeting), so that these could be used to learn from to influence improvements in the future.

12. **Any Other Business**

The group were reminded about the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) training, taking place on 7th November at 1.00pm at the Arc, and to notify customer engagement to register names for attending.

Karen updated members on the website and how this has been updated by the PR team which includes the performance information which was agreed at a CV performance workshop recently. This information will be updated every month. Karen thanked members for their involvement with this and the feedback given to help improve the performance information made available on a monthly basis to tenants at large.

Reflection on meeting – really enjoyable meeting very informative and lots of in-depth conversations. Karen also referred to the recent workshops which have taken place and how these have been beneficial to enable more detailed debates on topics.

13. **Date and Time of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 12th November 9.30am at the Arc.

Action Plan

	Action	Who	Update
1.	Damp and mould policy to show online using a smart phone	Mark Tasker	Provide update at the next CV meeting in November.
2.	Housing Perks - can this be promoted on My home app	Kevin Hornsby	Provide update at the next CV meeting in November.
3.	Check tenancy number on housing perks	Customer Services	Contact the tenant directly with further details on this.
4.	The remit for an ASB tenants panel to be investigated	Wendy Wolfe	Meeting due to be held in November to discuss this further.