



COMMUNITY VOICE MINUTES

Held at 9.30am on Monday 12th November 2024

The Arc, Westcliff and via MS Teams

Present:

Community Voice Members: Jill Milner (Chair), Dawn Johnson (Treasurer) Tami Reeve, Tracey Bain, Judith Tomlinson, Eddie Stringer, Heather Gregory, Ron Weller, Stewart Pearson, Harry Jackson, Jim Newcombe, Rachel Cook (in part via Teams)

Ongo Staff: Bev Miller, Steve Hepworth (Teams), Karen Cowan, Wendy Wolfe, Becky Johns, Andy McFadden, Kevin Hornsby (Teams), Jo Sugden (Teams), Mo Mathieson (Teams)

Also present: Diane Carney

Apologies: Keith Lumbers, Steve Ellard, Jake Stockwell, Kevin Yearnshire, Tima Omari, Rhiannon Jeans

1. Welcome, Apologies and Housekeeping

- Brief introductions were given from everyone for the benefit of the newer members in attendance.
- Apologies received from Keith Lumbers, Steve Ellard, Jake Stockwell, Kevin Yearnshire, Tima Omari, Rhiannon Jeans.
- The Chair reminded CV that the general enquiries log is for chasing anything that has already been reported.

2. Minutes & Actions From Previous Meeting

- Dawn and Eric proposed and seconded that the minutes were a true and accurate record of the meeting held in October.
- The link for the damp and mould policy was tested and worked on I pads and Smart Phones. Will also be added to the policies page on the website once approved.
- Housing Perks could be advertised on the My Home app in the future, there is a communication plan in place that this could be added to. An executive decision needs to be made whether housing perks could offer rent credit against accounts. The individual whose tenancy number didn't work was contacted directly.
- Ref the ASB group panel, there is a meeting to be held this week to discuss this.
- The change of time for the Christmas meeting was advised in the minutes.

3. Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer presented the latest accounts and invited questions on them. The group were updated that an invoice had been received for the EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) training which cost £1,020. This will be paid next month.

4. Board Observers

- Meetings will take 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 ITEM/S

5. Compensation Policy – Becky Johns

Becky gave a quick overview of the background of the policy and advised that Ongo has reviewed this in line with a Housing Ombudsman order. She advised that there are some key things that Ongo needs to show in the policy:

- Ensure the policy is clear, tenant accessible and easy to understand
- Make clear the aim of the compensation policy is to restore a person’s financial position before the service failure
- Show there are different remedies other than financial
- To be fair and proportionate
- Each case to be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.
- The severity of service needs to be looked in relation to the individuals’ vulnerabilities and how it impacts on their lives
- Set out where compensation is not appropriate and advertise how to claim and what the process is. Now include contact us details on the website
- Set out timescales (these are similar to the complaints targets) and show the various stages, acknowledgment, investigation and when the tenant can expect the monies to be input into their bank accounts.

Becky asked if anyone had any questions or challenges?

- A member asked that if Ongo had to pay compensation of an exceptionally large amount, would Ongo be able to claim this on any type of insurance. Becky advised no and that the compensation process is very different to public liability insurance. It was noted that compensation must come from Ongo money.
- It was asked if firms soliciting for business and adverts on the radio for “no win no fee” had an impact on complaints and claims made to Ongo. Becky stated that this may have led to an increase, but greater awareness around the complaints process means that tenants can access the system easier.
- 60% of complaints are upheld. A member asked if companies canvassing for business are all scams. The response was that a lot are, however if the property is in disrepair then there would be a case. Ongo would advise that in this instance a tenant could start the procedure off themselves rather than pay for an expensive service from an external business.
- A member noted that the link to the additional papers in the guidance did not work **ACTION** to be checked.
- It was asked that if a tenant reports something e.g. a bulging ceiling, and then it collapses, would compensation be paid immediately. Becky replied to say that compensation is only paid if Ongo has done or not done something that has caused

the damage. The first point of call for Ongo would be to make safe any potential danger and then how the case proceeds would be down to individual circumstances.

- Steve noted that under point 5.6 it could be worth noting that if it is accidental damage then this could be covered by a tenant's own contents insurance. However, Ongo couldn't recommend any particular insurance but could signpost to a few companies (including a pay as you go scheme), for the tenant to look at. **ACTION** add a section recommending that tenants purchase their own contents insurance.
- A member asked whose responsibility it is if a contractor undertakes work. The reply was that this would still be Ongo's responsibility as the company would be working for them.

The meeting gave approval for the policy, with the proviso of the few tweaks agree being implemented.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

6. Performance Report – Karen Cowan

- Complaint handling is a positive story seeing a reduction in those going to Stage 2. This shows that tenants are happy with the initial response they have been given. There are however elevated numbers going through to the Housing Ombudsman but these are mostly historic cases; this does show that Ongo is easily accessible. A member mentioned that they are on the complaints panel and have been involved in deep dives of live cases, looking at the process and are able to challenge decisions taken. Another member asked that if several people rang up with the same complaint would this be dealt with any quicker than just one complaint being received. The response was that Ongo would deal with all complaints individually but that the same timescales would be followed.
- The target to engage with younger people has been met.
- The number of calls made into the contact centre is still high. A CV workshop had been held a few months ago to look at how this could be improved. It was reported that the new working arrangements have been implemented and are working well. Staff are also feeling that the pressure has been lifted and that their needs have been listened to. A full report when available will be brought back to CV.
- Empty homes are taking an average of 26 days to relet which is below target and there are 108 empty properties.
- The number of empty garages has decreased once again. A question was asked if Ongo advertise empty garages on the MyHome app. The response was no but they are advertised on the website and on Home Choice Lincs (HCL).
- There has been an increase in rent arrears but compared to sector wide, Ongo is still in a good position. When the previous Guinness properties came across to Ongo, they came along with higher rent arrears than Ongo would normally operate with. However things are being put in place to target these arrears, such as Direct Debits being set up and payment plans agreed. Also the tenants are being signposted to obtain financial help and guidance to ensure they are claiming the benefits they are entitled to etc.
- Lots is happening on the repairs side to make improvements. It will take time to get to where these should be but Ongo is looking at everything, e.g. the internal systems to

see if they are fit for purpose or can be improved to work more efficiently, if the tools and parts being carried on the vans are correct, and to ensure that the right multi skilled person is used for the particular job so that the job can be completed right first time.

7. Executive Update -Kevin Hornsby

- Really good board strategy away day at Doncaster recently with all the executive team and board members. Some good discussions took place around Ongo's future growth and wider development plans, as well as a focus on the overall budget position and 30-year plan.
- A "CV - you said we are doing" has been achieved. Building on the work having been done with Scunthorpe United, Kevin has since visited Grimsby Town and will be launching a similar project in the future. If any members are interested please get in touch with the customer engagement team.
- Ongo is a finalist in the prestigious Urbanisation awards for the work carried out to regenerate Westcliff and the wider offer delivered by the Arc. The awards will take place on 13th November and a bespoke poem will be read out on the evening.
- Landlord services have seen nearly 1,000 tenant surveys completed. Dawn Hill, Head of Landlord Services will provide more detail at the CV December Meeting.

INFORMATION ITEM/S

8. Improving Lives Project – Andy McFadden

- Andy last came to CV at the start of this project. The project entails working with tenants and the SPD team (Skills and personal development). Often the tenant is supported to access some white goods funding through the sustainment fund and also through the Council. The age criteria for the project targets those under 35 typically as this is the demographic that is at risk of not being able to sustain their tenancies. The aim of the project is to educate and enable the tenants to continue to improve their homes. A member asked where the referrals come from. Andy stated that they usually come through via the letting's teams or sustainment coaches.

9. Customer Engagement Updates

- The Publications Panel had a meeting with the Development Team to go through articles for the Key News magazine. They were updated on the current new build property developments and were invited to go and see one of these. They also assessed and approved the new Damp and Mould handbook.
- EDI Training for CV took place. The members that attended found it interesting and their feedback was positive.
- Tenant Inspectors - Keith has stepped down as chair and the vice chair is no longer involved with the group; therefore Ongo will bring the chair role back in house with the customer engagement team chairing. The group discussed the various inspections that had taken place and noted that the majority of inspections are rated as green or amber; rarely having any red ratings. Tenant inspectors are looking to take part in a mystery shop exercise and as some of them are new to this remit, training will be provided beforehand.

- Networking and learning will take place between Ongo and Hull City Council in relation to Multi Storey Living.
- A CT workshop took place to discuss the board decision to establish a new operational committee (as recommended by the consultant who carried out the recent Governance Review). Steve stated that the setting up of this Committee doesn't change Ongo's commitment to continuing to put tenants at the heart of everything we do, and ensuring they are primary in decision making. Karen gave a quick recap from the workshop, identifying the recommendations that CV agreed on to be put to board:
 - To be known as the Customer Focus Committee (likely to operate on a two monthly cycle)
 - Tenants to be the majority on the Committee
 - Comprising of 7 members made up of:
 - 2 board members (one being a board member that is a tenant and the other being the board member that has specific responsibility for complaints).
 - The chair of the committee must be a board member. This board member should be a tenant
 - One independent professional (usually a Housing background)
 - One automatic seat for the CV chair, feeding through from CV. If the CV chair were to change the new CV chair would replace the previous one
 - Three other tenants to be recruited to the Committee (legal tenants are tenants, leaseholders and shareholders). Ongo to advertise to all
 - An agreed recruitment process would then take place to ensure the right people with the right skills get seats on the Committee. CV to be involved in the recruitment process

10. Any Other Business including Reflection on Meeting

- A member asked whether Ongo could try to engage with the younger people from the Caistor Rd, Barton area (utilising the Viking Centre). Karen said this could be looked at but then Heather advised that she wanted to talk to those on the estate first before progressing with the idea.
- Ongo was asked whether they would be providing Warm Spaces again this year. The response was that yes they would. The member then asked whether a full location list of Warm Space areas and times could be promoted. **ACTION** a list of Warm Space locations and times to be produced and promoted.
- A member asked if the new national insurance increases announced would affect pricing for any of Ongo's contractors. The response was that pricing is included in the tender agreement at the start of the procurement process but this could change for ad hoc jobs and new contracts.

11. Date and Time of Next Meeting

Monday 16th December 9.30am at Holme Hall Golf Club with lunch afterwards.

12. Mock Inspection Process

Staff left the meeting to allow the mock inspection consultant to speak with CV

members alone (as is the usual process when the regulator conducts their inspections).

Action Plan

	Action	Who	Update
1.	Check the link to the additional papers in the guidance for the compensation policy works	Becky Johns	
2.	Under point 5.6 of the compensation policy add a note recommending that tenants obtain their own contents insurance	Becky Johns	
4.	List of Warm Space locations and times to be produced and promoted	Customer Engagement	