

COMMUNITY VOICE MINUTES

Held at 9.30am on Tuesday 18th February 2025
The Arc, blended style (face to face & via MS Teams)



Present:

Community Voice Members: Jill Milner (Chair), Anita James, Dawn Johnson, Heather Gregory, Eddie Stringer, Stewart Pearson, Paul Pearson, Ron Weller, Keith Lumbers, Angela Smith, Judith Tomlinson, Graham Lloyd, Jim Newcombe, Tima Omari

Ongo Staff: Karen Cowan, Wendy Wolfe, Jo Sugden, Mo Mathieson, Ollie Mortimer

Also Present: Charmaine Mande (trainee Board Member)

1. Welcome, Apologies and Housekeeping

- The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were given.
- Apologies were received from Tami Reevell, Jake Stockwell, Tracey Bain, Rhiannon Jeans and Eric Gosling.
- All attendees welcomed Mo Mathieson who will start her new role as Head of People, Culture & Engagement at Ongo from 1st April. She will take over Karen's current remit for Customer Engagement when Karen retires at the end of March.
- Members were reminded that they could report personal issues in the general enquiries log if they have previously been reported but haven't received any update.
- There were no planned fire drills, and the emergency exits were shown.

2. Minutes & Actions From Previous Meeting

- Keith and Jim proposed and seconded that the minutes were a true and accurate record of the meeting held in January.
- Wendy provided an update on the ongoing actions and reported that these were captured on a new style action plan as recommended by the Mock Inspection process.
 - Details of the recent issue with a decant request and out of hours service have been provided and will form part of an ongoing case.
 - A further focus on repairs has been added to the My Home roadmap for 2025.
 - It had been agreed to cancel the separate CV focus group to discuss the group's future, and it would instead be included as part of this main meeting.
 - Two of the tenant observers from January's meeting have since joined CV.
 - Details have been sent to the Income team in relation to a member not being able to sign up to Housing Perks, and an update will be provided directly.
 - Awaiting a response from Andrea Morley (Sustainability Manager) on Ongo's approach towards bees, the update will then be shared with the CV member.
 - The possibility of relocating the salt bin at Albion Grove (Epworth) is being investigated.
 - A separate focus group for CV and Tenant Inspectors to review the Neighbourhood Management Policy will be held on Monday 10th March 1.30pm, at The Arc. An invite has been sent to all members.
 - The next main CV meeting on Wednesday 12th March will include a buffet lunch before Karen's retirement. Members were asked to let Customer Engagement know if they are able to attend and if they have any dietary requirements. **ACTION:** CV members to notify Customer Engagement.

3. Board Observers

- Meetings taking place via the Board Room at Ongo House or via Microsoft Teams:
 - Ongo Homes Board meeting on 25th March at 1.30pm.
 - Ongo Communities Board meeting on 15th July at 2pm.
 - Three CV members can attend either or both meetings. Those interested to inform the Customer Engagement Team.
 - If members wish to observe digitally via Teams, then they can't be sent the paperwork to their personal email address for security purposes. Members were encouraged to attend in-person, if possible, as the paperwork would be loaded onto iPads for them and made available at the meetings.

DISCUSSION ITEM WORKSHOP

4. Community Voice and the way forward – Karen Cowan

4.1 Update on Customer Focus Committee (CFC)

- A previous Governance review carried out by external consultants recognised that Community Voice (CV) was an influential group and needed to continue, but it recommended introducing an Operations Committee to improve the level of customer representation at a strategic Board level.
- A workshop had taken place with CV members, where the group influenced the setup of the new Operations Committee, e.g. they suggested naming it as Customer Focus Committee (CFC) which has since been adopted. They also recommended that the Committee be a customer majority, for the chair to be a tenant (they understood that the chair must be a Board member too) and for CV to be involved in the recruitment of the independent tenant members. Again, these suggestions have been implemented.
- The CFC will be made up of seven members:
 - Three Board members - Judith Tomlinson (who is a tenant co-opted Board Member and will be the chair of the Committee), Matt Sugden (Board Member responsible for Complaints) and Michael Finister-Smith (who is on the Ongo Homes Board and Audit & Risk Committee)
 - To ensure the link between the Committee and Community Voice, it had been agreed that the CV Chair will have an automatic ex-officio place on the Committee. If they were to step down from the CV Chair role, then they would automatically have to step down from the CFC as well.
 - Three independent tenant committee members to be recruited.
- The advert to recruit the three independent tenants (tenants, leaseholders or shared owners) has been shared on social media, on the Ongo website, emailed to all current Ongo Customer Engagement volunteers and has been sent to all tenants via text. In summary, all tenant stakeholders have received notification of the opportunity. The deadline to apply is Friday 21 February at 5pm. A shortlist of candidates with the required skills will be agreed and invited to attend an interview. A small panel of CV

members will be involved in this process via a meeting with the candidates. Once the successful candidates have been appointed, it will mean there are eight customer representatives across all the Committees and Boards.

- A member asked if a successful candidate would have to accept the £3,750 per annum as remuneration. Karen said that they wouldn't have to accept it and emphasised the importance of ensuring that it is an impartial process with no potential barriers for customers applying. Another member asked why the role is paid. It was explained that Governance guidelines are being followed and that Board Members across housing organisations in the country are typically paid. A question was raised if people from other organisations / housing associations could apply. The response was no, the positions are just for Ongo customers, who will need to have the required attributes as they will be responsible for influencing and making decisions that will affect all customers. They will have the experience of living in an Ongo home, receiving services and living within the community.
- The Customer Focus Committee Terms of Reference has been agreed by Board. Karen read through the document which included the Committee's remit, roles and responsibilities, e.g.
 - The Committee will meet no less than six times per year. There will be a required commitment for members to attend a majority of meetings in-person.
 - They will be involved in at least one strategy away day each year, where future plans and strategies for the organisation are discussed.
 - The Committee will have overall responsibility in ensuring that the customer voice is being heard and acted upon. They will provide assurance, challenge and recommendations for improvement before feeding through to the Ongo Homes Board, who will still be responsible for final decisions.
 - CFC will discuss a range of performance information.
 - High-level Complaints will also go to the CFC for further discussion.
 - Recommendation reports from Scrutiny will be presented to CFC.
 - CFC will monitor compliance against the Regulator's Consumer Standards.
 - Customer Engagement strategic documents will be looked at by CFC.
 - Their priorities to begin with will be the Consumer Standards, Complaints Code, Tenant Satisfaction Measures and any particular service areas that are struggling.
 - Members will be loaned an iPad to use for their involvement, so there are able to receive and read meeting papers securely.
 - A member asked if there was a specific amount of time (a term) that a CFC member will serve for. It is for a maximum of six years, which is the same as other Boards and Committees, and there will be a succession plan developed to ensure an effective future.
 - A fellow member enquired if a successful candidate could still be involved with the other CE groups / structures. Karen confirmed that they could.
- **Recap of previous CV recommendations for their own group**
 - At CV's focus group meeting in November, members had stressed a desire to have continued involvement in the recruitment process for front-line leadership positions

- note members have recently been involved in the recruitment for the Head of Maintenance & Building Safety (Jordan Barr), and also in the interviews for the Head of Assets & Sustainability role (John Hughes).
 - CV wanted to be involved in the recruitment of independent tenant committee members for the new Customer Focus Committee.
 - CV had also wanted to remain as the umbrella group for the other Customer Engagement structures of involvement.
 - CV had asked for more focus group / workshop opportunities and to carry out Scrutiny work on specific topics.
 - They wanted to still be consulted on major policy areas (feedback going through to the Customer Focus Committee).
 - The six-monthly performance workshop to continue.
 - CV to still be involved in the self-assessment of the regulator's consumer standards.
- **Proposed changes for Community Voice going forward**
 - Karen went through each point of the existing CV constitution to discuss and agree proposed changes, to ensure it is fit for purpose in line with the needs and aspirations of CV members, along with the requirements of the CFC too. Members' input and suggestions were encouraged.
 - Rather than a constitution and an Annual General Meeting, it was suggested to have a Terms of Reference which would be reviewed annually.
 - CVs remit of being the main tenant umbrella group for all customer involvement structures would remain.
 - CV would take on the new role of scrutiny, recommending improvements to the CFC. Moving forward a representative of Ongo's Assurance team would be invited to present to the group topic areas that they may want to consider, but suggestions from CV would also be encouraged, and CV would take the final decision as to the area they want to review. Once an activity was chosen, a scrutiny subgroup would be set up consisting of volunteers from CV. This group would be responsible for carrying out research etc. Findings of the review would be fed back to the wider CV group for full discussion and recommendations for improvements would be agreed. A CV scrutiny report would then be passed onto the CFC for consideration and approval.
 - CV will continue to review, monitor and discuss service provision and other operational customer-facing issues. Their feedback will go through to the CFC.
 - Membership, diverse needs and the application process to become a Tenant Shareholder (to vote on major matters) would remain.
 - Wendy asked that the new Terms of Reference should make clear where non-tenants could be members of CV, e.g. those living within Ongo's communities that were a Chair of an Ongo recognised residents' association or community group.
 - A member asked if up to three CV members would be able to observe CFC meetings, like they can do with other Board meetings. This was confirmed.
 - It was proposed to change the number of CV Officers from four to two (a Chair and Vice-Chair). Customer Engagement would take the minutes of meetings (the Chair and Vice-Chair would still check these), process mileage claims and book taxis for the group.
 - Due to the CV Chair being a member of the CFC, if they were to step down from the CV role then they would step down from the CFC as well. If this happened mid-term,

then the CV Vice-Chair would be asked if they were happy and able to become Chair until the annual election and to take on the CFC role. If they weren't, then they would remain as the CV Vice-Chair, and it would be advertised to recruit a new Chair.

- A proposal was made to stagger the election of the CV Chair and Vice-Chair to either two or three months apart, rather than them taking place at the same time.
- For future Officer elections:
 - All members would receive a self-nomination form and a copy of the person specification. The group agreed that an Expression of Interest form would also be beneficial, which will be created. If a member felt they met the specification and had the required skills for the role, then they would need to complete the two forms and return them to Customer Engagement by the agreed deadline. **ACTION:** Expression of Interest form to be created for Officer roles.
 - The applications would then be looked at in line with the specification, if any applicant didn't meet the standard then an informal conversation would take place to notify them. If there was only one applicant who met the requirements, then they would be elected with a majority approval of all members present at the meeting. If there was more than one, then the applicants would be asked to present their case to the CV meeting and then a secret ballot would take place before the successful applicant being announced.
 - If either Officer role wasn't filled, then Customer Engagement would take on the role for a short period of time whilst targeted promotion took place.
 - Another proposal was for the CV Officers to serve for a maximum six-year term. CV Officers had previously suggested four years to encourage others to stand for election, but six years was agreed to match the maximum term on the CFC.
 - A discussion took place about how long an individual would need to be a member for before they can apply for an Officer role. A minimum of two meetings or six months was debated. All agreed that two meetings wasn't sufficient with the majority favouring the latter option.
- For the frequency of meetings, CV will be feeding through to CFC who will meet every two months, so a proposal was put forward for CV to meet every two months (on alternate months to the CFC) rather than monthly. Additional meetings could be arranged if required.
- Customer Engagement to contact CV members who haven't attended or given apologies for three consecutive meetings to discuss their future intentions. If it is unlikely that they can commit to the group, then they can be taken off the group in agreement with the CV Officers. They can rejoin if their future circumstances change, and they can commit to regularly attending meetings.
- A member asked if the number of votes would be included in future meeting minutes. Karen confirmed that yes, except where the vote relates to individual people, e.g. if there was a secret ballot to vote for the next Chair, then just the winner's name would be announced and not the number of individual votes given.
- Members were asked if they wished to keep the section about only tenants being able to vote on tenant matters. All present agreed for it to remain.

- It was raised about the online meeting etiquette to be included as part of the Volunteers Code of Conduct. **ACTION:** to be looked into when the document is due to be reviewed.
 - Any proposed amendments to the Terms of Reference would be discussed by Customer Engagement and the two CV Officers before being brought to a main CV meeting for discussion and approval by a majority of members present.
 - Mo suggested adding to the Terms of Reference about not raising personal issues during the meeting (post note - this is actually stated in the Volunteers Code of Conduct and so a decision not to include in the Terms of Reference was made).
- **Decision** - CV members were asked to give their approval of the proposed changes detailed above. All members in attendance gave their approval.
 - Karen will produce the revised CV Terms of Reference which will be sent to all members to ensure the changes made are in line with what was agreed at the meeting. This will then be taken to the March CV meeting for approval. Meeting dates for future CV meetings can then be scheduled and shared. The Chair encouraged all members to read through the minutes of the meeting and to contact Customer Engagement if they are unsure on anything or would like further clarification.
ACTION: updated document to be sent to all members.
 - Customer Engagement will send out the self-nomination and Expression of Interest forms, along with the specification, for the Vice Chair election which will take place at the next meeting. **ACTION:** information to be sent to all members.
- 5. Any Other Business including Reflection on Meeting**
- Wendy gave a reminder of the Neighbourhood Management Policy workshop which will take place on Monday 10th March 1.30pm, at The Arc.
 - The annual Tpas Conference will take place on Wednesday 9th and Thursday 10th July in Coventry, travelling to the venue together on the 8th. Wendy explained that there are a range of workshops (which haven't been made available yet) and the conference is an ideal opportunity to network with other tenants and organisations.
 - A member raised an ASB issue where they live. It was agreed that a Tenancy Officer would be in direct contact with the member to arrange a meeting to discuss further.
ACTION: meeting to be arranged.
- 6. Date and Time of Next Meeting**
- Wednesday, 12th March 2025 at The Arc, 9.30am to 12.30pm (buffet lunch 12.30pm – 1.30pm).