

COMMUNITY VOICE MINUTES

Held at 9.30am on Wednesday 12th March 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, Rhiannon Jeans, Keith Lumbers, Angela Smith, Judith Tomlinson, Graham Lloyd, Jim Newcombe, Tima Omari, Tami Reeve, Tracey Bain, Eric Gosling, Charmaine Mande

Ongo Staff: Karen Cowan, Wendy Wolfe, Jo Sugden, Mo Mathieson, Steve Hepworth, Becky Johns, Claire Coyle, Emma Patrick, Hayley Fiteni, Kevin Hornsby, Steve Ellard

1. Welcome, Apologies and Housekeeping

- The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- Apologies were received from Paul Smith (observer).
- 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 Eddie proposed and seconded that the minutes were a true and accurate record of the meeting held in February.
- Wendy provided an update on the ongoing actions from the previous meeting:
 - An investigation has been conducted following a member not being able to access Housing Perks and a session has been booked in with a Customer Engagement Officer this afternoon to provide one to one support.
 - Further enquiries were made around the response to dealing with bee infestations. The policy states: 4.15.3 If an infestation occurs at a location that is identified as a common or communal area and not part of a tenant's home, such as shared corridors, lifts, garden areas and shared drainage routes, Ongo Homes will take steps to eradicate the infestation and prevent it from recurring. The response time for responding to infestations will depend on the type of infestations and the severity, however Ongo will respond to all reports within 10 working days. Where a statutory nuisance exists, we will respond within 24 hours. Our contractors have said: They will not kill the bees and follow the British Beekeepers Association guidance for removal. They would, wherever possible, remove the bees and relocate them. If there are risks to health in removing the bees, then a decision will be made on how to treat the infestation on a case-by-case basis. This is what happened with the case raised at the previous meeting. The bees were in the cavity wall, a hard place to treat. There were risks of sub-contractors on site being stung which could result in anaphylactic shock. So, on this occasion, the bees were killed.
 - There is already a salt bin in situ at the location where it was requested one be sited. If Ongo had plans to remove a salt bin they would consult with tenants first.
 - Members were informed of the buffet after the meeting today.
 - It has been agreed that the online meeting etiquette document will be included in the Volunteers Code of Conduct when it is next reviewed in 2026.

- The revised Terms of Reference document was sent to all members prior to the meeting.
- The CV Vice Chair documents were distributed prior to the meeting.
- The Tenancy Services Triage Officer has tried to contact the member who raised an ongoing ASB issue, however they have not been able to make contact to date, but they will continue to try.

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.

Decision Items

4. Terms of Reference (ToR)

- Following the creation of the Customer Focus Committee (CFC) it has been agreed that Community Voice (CV) will move from a constitution to a ToR to keep in line with the other board structures. Feedback from customers was considered when writing the new ToR for the group.
- Community Voice will still be the umbrella group for all other Customer Engagement groups. Resident Scrutiny will now come under CVs remit. A different short term CV sub-committee would be formed for each specific scrutiny topic and would be supported by Wendy and the Business Assurance and Risk Team. CV would agree their recommendation report to be put to the CFC.
- 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 (an Ongo Homes Board member)
 - To ensure the link between the Committee and Community Voice, it had been agreed that the CV Chair will have an automatic Ex-Officio seat 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. The Vice Chair of CV would not automatically take the place of the Chair should the Chair step down. The Vice Chair would be offered the position of Chair which would mean they would also need to take on the Ex-Officio position on the CFC. Should they wish to take this on then this change would happen, however they could choose instead to remain as the CV Vice Chair. Should they remain as CV Vice Chair then a new CV Chair would be elected from the wider CV membership.

- Three independent tenant committee members have successfully been appointed following an interview with both a staff and tenant panel.
- CV meetings will move to bi-monthly starting in April. The CFC will meet monthly starting in May. **Action: CV members to be sent revised meeting dates for the remainder of 2025.**

5. Election of Vice Chair

- Nomination forms were sent out following the last meeting and members were given the opportunity to nominate themselves for the Vice Chair position. Karen, Wendy, and the CV Chair Jill went through the expression of interest forms and shortlisted two individuals.
- Both shortlisted members presented their cases to the group and a discussion was held about the presentations. Following the discussion a secret ballot took place.
- Following the votes being counted, Jill announced the new Vice Chair of CV to be Tami.

6. Service Standards

- The service standards will replace the current customer charter that Ongo currently adheres to. The standards have been consulted on by CV and the wider tenants and the feedback collated has been considered when putting together the service standards document.
- The service standards document has been created in line with the Social Housing Regulation Act and will be the new standards set against the consumer standards. Ongo are required by the regulator to publish the document to customers.
- CV members unanimously passed the service standards.

7. Lettable Standard

- The final draft of the lettable standard document was brought to CV for approval. The main changes from the current lettable standard are
 - Kitchen doors no longer need to be an exact match - Ongo will provide the closest match of those available.
 - Kitchen floors will be a wipeable surface.
 - Ongo will no longer have to provide a shower in properties.
- It was explained to the group that showers will be added when the decent homes upgrade is completed and if customers require an adaptation this will be accommodated through the usual process.
- A member asked why we are still providing shower curtains and lightbulbs as tenants feedback at the focus group was that Ongo were going above and beyond in supplying these. It was explained that if Ongo don't provide a shower curtain then people may not buy one themselves but still use the shower which could cause damp and mould or

issues with the flooring further down the line (incurring increased costs to Ongo). Lightbulbs will continue to be provided as if a property is let in the winter when the days are shorter, it could lead to avoidable trip hazards with people not being able to see properly.

- A member asked when Ongo will ensure tenants have bathing facilities. It was explained that all customers have bathing facilities when the property is let. The property being referred to is already being investigated by Ongo staff. It was explained that if any trends are identified then tenant inspectors could do some spot checks on specific areas, however nothing has been picked up on empty homes inspections on this to date.
- Steve Ellard thanked the group for their involvement in the lettable standards review. Steve explained that the purpose of the review isn't just to strip back the offer from Ongo, emphasising that the review has also made some improvements to the lettable standard. The group were reminded that the lettable standard should be considered alongside the repair's procedure.
- The lettable standard was passed with a majority vote. Two members abstained from voting.

Action: A member requires a hard copy of the current lettable standard.

Action: A member requires a one-to-one session re the website.

8. Anti-Social Behaviour Policy

- As part of the ASB Policy review Ongo want to ensure the service is meeting the needs of tenants. This includes providing clarity around what is and isn't classed as ASB. The purpose of the policy is to empower staff to have difficult conversations with customers when an issue is raised that isn't classed as ASB. This will manage the customer's expectations regarding the outcomes that Ongo can achieve.
- The policy was informed by feedback from a number of sources including:
 - A Resident Scrutiny Panel Report into ASB.
 - A digital survey in which 758 tenants responded.
 - 2 focus group including involved tenants and tenants who had recently dealt with ASB.
 - Customer satisfaction.
 - Complaint learning.
- The feedback was collated and showed that customers had a positive experience when they felt it was easy to report the ASB, the issue was resolved quickly and they were kept up to date. Customers had negative experiences when they had a lack of contact regarding the case, the case wasn't resolved quickly or customers had unrealistic expectations of the action Ongo could take.
- Key changes to the policy include:
 - Having a clear definition of what constitutes ASB as well as defining hate crime/incidents, providing examples of what is/isn't ASB as well as focusing on a

harm centred approach, considering what is reasonable and unreasonable behaviour.

- There will be a focus on early intervention with a view to reduce the amount of time ASB cases are open.
 - The policy will outline how anonymous complaints are dealt with due to the challenges of not having contact with the information source.
 - It will be made clear to new tenants on how to be a good neighbour and show new tenants what that looks like.
 - It will increase the positive communication and share success stories of what we've done well and what we've achieved.
- Feedback was given that the policy is well written. A member who has recently dealt with ASB passed on praise and said she couldn't fault the response she got.
 - The majority passed the ASB policy with two members abstaining.

Discussion Items

9. Executive Update

- Front Line Services Review - Kevin updated CV members on the progress so far with the review that has included consultation with over 900 tenants in addition to CV. The Executive Team have been reviewing all the feedback and are now looking at how we can improve services to meet the needs of tenants, colleagues, and wider partners. The review is likely to lead to some operational changes to Landlord Services, Customer Experience, and our Maintenance teams with more detail to be discussed at a future CV meeting.
- Complaints have seen a spike in the months of January and February 2025 with 132 stage one complaints being received which is a 46% increase. There is not one specific theme or reason for this, and they cover a range of repairs and customer experience issues but mainly relate to trends around appointment times, not being kept informed or repairs not being completed. Ongo are continuing to work hard to reduce this trend and get things right first time. Steve Ellard mentioned some Housemark sector knowledge that is showing complaints across the sector at the highest levels ever known. From a Housing Ombudsman (HO) perspective Ongo has had two recent determinations, one around a boundary issue where the HO found maladministration and a second case around Ant Social Behaviour where the HO found **no** maladministration or service failure and that Ongo had acted in line with its own policies and procedures.
- North East Lincolnshire Council - Ongo recently hosted Councillors and Officers from North East Lincs Council to highlight the services we provide as Ongo with a specific focus on the work we do around homelessness and the wider offer from our Housing and Communities teams. They were also able to see our community café, post office and allotment. North East Lincs Council are considering how they best deliver services and may want to collaborate with a forward-thinking landlord in the future. Kevin advised he would keep CV appraised with any feedback or opportunities as a result of this visit.

10. Key Performance & Satisfaction Results

Karen highlighted key performance points:

- Customer Engagement have exceeded their target for engagement with young people.
- Customer Experience satisfaction was down slightly this month however the short-term trend is still showing improvement.
- The number of empty homes has increased however tenancy turnover has reduced. A member asked how this is possible, and it was explained that several properties have required 'major works' which has increased the current number of empty properties. The flats at Alvingham Road that are due to be demolished are also still showing in the figures for empty homes which has contributed to the increase in numbers.
- 95% of tenants let a new property were satisfied with the lettings process.
- A member questioned the increase in the number of garages available and asked if Ongo can advertise these. Kevin explained that the Ongo website is used to advertise the garages and that there has been a significant increase in the number of garages let. Several members commented that the garages are no longer big enough to fit a modern car in, which could be why people are not wanting to rent a garage.
- The percentage of properties not meeting the decent homes standard has reduced from 1.3% to 0.34%
- Income have seen an increase in arrears and a specific team have been put in place to tackle arrears from the former Guinness properties.
- A member raised concerns about the process for internal transfers, explaining that they have to pay for both their current property and the advanced rent on their new property meaning both accounts have a credit. Becky explained that this is because Rent Accounting have to audit the accounts before refunding/transferring outstanding balances. **Action: Kevin to look into the situation further.**
- Satisfaction with communal cleaning undertaken by neighbouring services is at 69%. Cleaning rotas have been adjusted following consideration of customer feedback with an aim to increase satisfaction.
- Repairs figures showed an increase in performance on out of hours and emergency repairs. Steve E explained that the figures need rationalising to enable CV to understand the change in performance.
- A member asked why some of the boxes in the scorecard report are blank. Karen explained that the wrong Balanced Score Card had been sent to Customer Engagement and shared (the management scorecard rather than the CV scorecard had been provided). **Action: Follow up with the Performance Team regarding the wrong BSC being sent.**

Information Items

11. Customer Engagement Activity Update

- Tenant Inspectors was the only meeting held since the last CV meeting. The meetings are going well with new members joining the group. The inspections have been coming back Green for all inspections. The theme of fly tipping has come up and Neighbourhood Services are addressing this. The mystery shop exercise has been completed and Ollie

will be meeting with the inspectors to go through the feedback.

12. Customer Engagement Update

- Neighbourhood Management Policy Focus Group will take place on 31st March. This is open to CV members and Tenant Inspectors, if members want to attend, they need to contact Customer Engagement.
- There are three Neighbourhood Engagement Events planned to start in March. These events will replace the Ongo Action Days as residents were reluctant to approach the gazebo and Ongo staff ended up door knocking to engage tenants. The events will be attended by staff from Ongo Homes, Ongo Communities, Board and the Executive Team with an Estate Inspection completed alongside a planned door knocking exercise. The first 3 events will take place in the following areas:
March – Crosby
April – Allenby Close, Lincoln
May – Overton Court, Barton
A member asked how it has been decided which areas will be door knocked. It was explained that data from Tenancy Services and Neighbourhood Services has been considered to make the final decision.
A member said they would want notice if Ongo were to be door knocking. It was explained that the event will be advertised on Facebook and via email. Kevin explained that we don't legally have to give notice to do a door knocking exercise as we are not looking to gain entry to the property. Lots of background work will be completed to ensure staff are aware of customers vulnerabilities prior to the day.
- Dates of the CV meetings have been changed to reflect the implementation of the CFC. A meeting schedule will be provided with the updated dates.
- Messages will be going out on Facebook and emails will be sent for expressions of interest to attend the TPAS conference in July. Two spaces have been ringfenced for the Chair and Vice Chair of CV, plus two other CV members and two other members of Customer Engagement groups.
- The vacant Customer Engagement Assistant role is currently being advertised. It was also noted that Emma (Customer Engagement Officer) has secured a different position with the organisation and so her position will become vacant from April.

13. Any Other Business

- A member raised concerns that properties are being let to people who are not using their property as their principal home. Claire explained she is due at the April CV meeting to discuss Tenancy Fraud and the process for tackling this will be explained there. Kevin reiterated that Ongo aren't powerless in these situations, however Ongo need to collect the relevant evidence to prove that a property isn't being used as someone's principal home.
- A member raised about tenants that go into permanent residential care and that they are preventing properties being let to other people that need housing. It was explained

that there is a backlog from social services in deciding whether care is temporary or permanent and each case is judged on its own merits.

- Members were reminded about using the correct process to report issues concerning their tenancy. All contacts should be made through the Customer Experience Team to ensure that all concerns are logged correctly. Becky reiterated that there are timescales that must be adhered to and if concerns are not logged correctly, it can cause issues with meeting these timescales. A member asked if Ongo are looking to provide SMS texting as a method of making contact **Action: Becky to look into the possibility of using SMS contact.**
- A member asked what happens if they miss a 'call back'. It was explained that the advisor will leave a voicemail but they will not make another attempt to call the customer.

14. Date and Time of Next Meeting

- Tuesday, 15th April 2025 at The Arc, 1pm to 4pm.