



ONGO COMMUNITIES COMMON BOARD

**COMPRISING OF: ONGO COMMUNITIES LTD (Company Number 08619739)
ONGO RECRUITMENT LTD (Company Number 04750128)
CROSBY BROKERAGE LTD (07307333)**

**Held at 2.00pm on Tuesday 16 July 2024 in the
The Arc, Enterprise Suite, 2 Lichfield Avenue, Scunthorpe**

MINUTES

Present:

Common Board: Natalie Cresswell (Chair), Jan Williams, Karen Locking, Kacper Merta

Officers: Bev Lewis (Minutes), Kerry Copson, Carl Willerton, Kevin Hornsby, Andy McFadden, Sam Gilbert, Erica Sanderson, Steve Ellard, Karen Cowan

Apologies: Debbie Clegg

Absence: None

Observers: Mick Warner (YD Consultants)

The meeting was confirmed as quorate – three members are required as per standing orders item 15 and the specific resolutions agreed by the entities in November 2022.

Declarations of Interest: Kacper Merta and Natalie Cresswell declared they are members of Ongo Homes Board and Jan Williams is employed by Ongo.

Time meeting opened: 2.01pm

1. **Agenda item 3 – Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 February 2024 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

2. **Agenda item 4 – Action List**

The Action List was noted. The Board agreed to the request for Action 2/24 to be deferred to the next meeting in October.

3. **Agenda item 5 – Management Accounts**

Summary: This report presents the management accounts including financial golden rules of Ongo Communities, Ongo Recruitment and Crosby Brokerage for May 2024.



Discussion points/questions:

- The red sections in the Executive Summary were discussed. A Member asked if this was a concern or would they be back on track by the end of the year. Kevin Hornsby replied that these were mainly due to Recruitment Team issues with resources and was a temporary situation which should be rectified soon.
- A Member questioned why there was a spend of £678 on legal costs when there was no budget for this. Kevin Hornsby was unsure and would come back to Board with an answer. **Action 4/24**
- The downward trend on the Communities Cashflow was queried. The increase in December 2023 was due to gift aid received from Ongo Homes. The forecast reduction in cash is as a result of spending reserves on the Improving Lives project, as approved during the budget process.

Ongo Communities, Ongo Recruitment and Crosby Brokerage: approved the management accounts of Ongo Communities, Ongo Recruitment and Crosby Brokerage for May 2024.

4. **Agenda item 6 – Code of Governance Self-Assessment**

Summary: Annually a self-assessment of the NHF Code of Governance must be undertaken. This is a requirement of the code itself. The results of the self-assessment are reported in the annual report. The statement of compliance is agreed by the Group Audit & Risk Committee, as required by Standing Orders. The Governance & Remuneration Committee have had sight of this self-assessment and agreed for it to be forwarded to each individual Board for consideration. Each Board must agree its own self-assessment.

Discussion points/questions:

- Karen Cowan presented the paper explaining that we are compliant in everything except the number of Members of the Developments Board which has been kept at four.
- A Member asked why four members was felt to be the right level and Karen explained that for the size of our organisation and the fact that we are not based in a big city it was felt that we did not need more. Should we need to readdress this matter we would do and the external governance review being undertaken would highlight this if it was felt necessary.
- There was no narrative included against paragraph 3.6.3 in the self-assessment.
Secretary's Note - This was a sub section of 3.6, which is fully explained. 3.6.3 Board Remuneration is in line with the organisation's social purpose and wider reputation.

Ongo Communities, Ongo Recruitment and Crosby Brokerage:

- scrutinised and considered compliance against the National Housing Federation (NHF) Code of Governance 2020 for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 as per the self-assessment.
- Confirmed Ongo Communities, Ongo Recruitment and Crosby Brokerage are fully compliant with the Code.

5. **Agenda item 7 - Business Performance Report**

Summary: This paper provides performance management information on progress against the targets and highlights the year-to-date results on projects and business activities.

Discussion points/questions:

- Carl Willerton told the Board Ongo Recruitment had a slower start to the year than planned but actions were being taken to bring this back into line such as a soft rebrand and extra experienced consultants for quick wins.
- It was asked if providing recruitment services for the wider Ongo group was being used as a buffer. Carl Willerton explained this takes 80% of one consultant's time and consultants are still not at capacity. They are still building on external opportunities and actively seeking new clients all the time.
- There is one vacancy not filled within the Ongo Recruitment team which would be filled if the need arose.
- A concern was raised by a Member that being part of a housing association group could be a barrier to people using us for recruitment. Carl Willerton felt it could be but it can work both ways. Ongo is a known entity which can work in Ongo Recruitment's favour.
- Focus on work is within a 30 mile radius of Scunthorpe due to managing resources. It is important to carry out the promotional work and work in areas that have a smaller number of Ongo properties.
- Open days and the apprentice desk are key to getting the word out and these are frequently used in colleges and schools. There was a concern with this about access being restricted to the day but Kerry Copson explained that interested parties can refer themselves for a one to one meeting at any time.
- The partnership with Scunthorpe United was discussed as being a great initiative. The process for deciding who gets the 50 tickets will be finalised shortly. There is a back-up plan for allocating any unused tickets whereby they will be offered to staff.
- The Board congratulated Kevin Hornsby for his work in securing this partnership.
- With the Improving Lives project underway a Member asked where the 10% figure of helping existing tenants came from. Andy McFadden said this was kept low due to moving existing furniture and access to properties but this figure was flexible and each case is considered on its own merit.
- Jan Williams explained this project was formed mainly to help new tenants that move in with nothing in the way of carpets etc and upskilling them to be able to do some things for themselves.
- Karen Cowan added it was to help avoid short tenancies where tenants move in with nothing and receive no support so give up and move elsewhere.
- This was a new scheme and it was recognised there may need to be changes made as it progresses. The scheme focuses on younger tenants and should probably also consider vulnerable and isolated older tenants too.
- A Member felt the UK Shared Prosperity Fund was similar to the old Kickstart programme which resulted in participants ending up with no jobs at the end of the scheme and to be mindful of this not being repeated.

Ongo Communities, Ongo Recruitment and Crosby Brokerage:

- considered the content of the report and discussed and debated any performance issues.
- agreed that the report demonstrates sufficient progress against targets and outcomes, and that risks are understood and managed appropriately.

6. **Agenda item 8 – Post Office**

Summary: Ongo Communities operates a Post Office branch from The Arc building. An agreement was entered between Ongo Communities and Post Office Limited in 2018 to operate the Westcliff branch. This report provides background information on this and provides Board with information about a current piece of work around the governance of the Post Office function. Operating a Post Office branch does present risks to the business as it is a regulated operation. It also brings positives to our customers and the wider community by providing a service to the public around not only postal facilities but wider facilities such as banking services.

Discussion points/questions:

- Board Members were informed they are classed as responsible persons where the Post Office was concerned and Fiona Ruddick will go back to Trowers and report to Board what this exactly means for them. **Action 5/24**
- The Chair asked if the next Deep Dive report could focus on the Post Office and provide a full business report. **Action 6/24**
- Training for Board members will be arranged. Further information is awaited from the Post Office.
- Kerry Copson assured the Board that daily checks and double checks are carried out to pick up on any discrepancies.

Ongo Communities Agreed:

- The Board Members were updated on matters relating to the Post Office Branch operated by Ongo Communities as Westcliff Branch.
- The Board Members are aware they have duties as Directors of Ongo Communities in relation to the operation of the Post Office Branch.
- The Board advised what assurance around the Post Office's activities they would like to see in the future which was a deep dive report at the next meeting.

7. **Agenda item 9 – Health and Safety**

Summary: This report covers updates between 2 February 2024 – 27 June 2024. Incidents detailed are since the last reported incidents detailed in the last Board update. There have been 9 incidents reported since the last reported incidents. There has been 0 RIDDOR (reporting of incidents, diseases and dangerous occurrences regulations) reportable incidents within this reporting period.

Discussion points/questions:

- Concern was raised about the incident involving a bag containing blood and scissors at The Arc. After investigation no reason could be found for it being there. Kerry Copson

informed the Board that the police were called as per process and no further action had been taken.

- The drug use was also discussed and it was explained this was a known repeat complainant trying to get attention. He had since been banned from entering any Ongo buildings and had one point of contact for Ongo.
- The Health & Safety team have monitored drug use in Ongo buildings. They have also provided bespoke safety training to staff and rolled out the new lone worker system.
- The Tenancy Team are now involved immediately and support and guidance are provided to any staff involved. People and Culture are involved with debriefing after an incident and we are looking at training for managers.

Ongo Communities Ongo Recruitment and Crosby Brokerage: confirmed they are satisfied with the management of Health, Safety and Environment arrangements set out in the report.

12. **Agenda Item 10 – Ongo Recruitment and Crosby Brokerage Deep Dive**

Summary: This paper provides detailed information on the work delivered by Ongo Recruitment and Crosby Brokerage. It explains the different sectors, how we work, the outcomes achieved and staff responsibilities.

Discussion points/questions:

- Board commented this was an informative report. There was interest around bidding for the contract with North Lincolnshire Council around providing translation services but there was no more information about this at this time as it had only been a short conversation but will be investigated.
- Jan Williams pointed out that the Council had come to us for help with this which was an encouraging sign.
- The question was raised about Ongo Recruitment's presence in schools and colleges and Carl Willerton explained that we hold open days regularly and the apprentice desk also goes out and about.

Ongo Communities Ongo Recruitment and Crosby Brokerage:

- considered the content of the report and discussed and debated any issues.
- agreed that the report demonstrated a clear description of the services in the Recruitment team and Crosby Brokerage, the targets and outcomes achieved and that risks are understood and managed appropriately.

13. **Agenda Item 11 – Ongo Communities Strategic Risk Register**

Summary: Risk is the possibility of an event and the consequences it has on the achievement of objectives, at both strategic and operational level. Robust risk management is an essential element of effective governance and a strong internal control environment. The current Communities Strategic Risk Register was provided. It provides information on all the current identified sub-risks for Ongo Communities with status updates for each and the up-to-date risk score.

Discussion points/questions:

- Risks around the Post Office were the areas to focus on.
- Erica Sanderson explained that being new to the job she has plans to work on improving the information on reports and will be coming to Boards for their input on risk scores and sub-risk scores in the near future.
- It was decided now is not the time to reduce the score for Ongo Recruitment due to the slow start to the year and this would be addressed at the next meeting.
- Erica Sanderson intends to ask Boards for one or two relevant timely risk points each meeting that they would like to be included within risk reports.
- The Chair requested an extra meeting be arranged for the Board to receive a briefing from Erica Sanderson around the why, how and when of decisions made on risk scores and appetites so they can feel more assured when reading reports. **Action 7/24**

Ongo Communities Ongo Recruitment and Crosby Brokerage:

- considered the Ongo Communities Strategic Risk Register, paying particular attention to the reduction in risk score of CSR6 “Ongo Recruitment” and the new risk CSR7 “Non-compliance with the Post Office contract” being proposed.
- discussed the strategic risks to Ongo Communities and agreed this would be discussed at the extra meeting -to be arranged.

13. **Agenda Item 12 - Decisions Between Meetings**

Summary: Standing Orders allow the Chair and others to deal with decisions in between scheduled meetings and for those decisions to be reported to the next meeting.

Discussion points/questions:

- There was only one decision between meetings and this was noted by the Board.

Ongo Communities Ongo Recruitment and Crosby Brokerage: formally recorded in the minutes the Chair approved via Convene the following decision:
Approved amended costs relating to Ongo Communities Reserves - specifically an increase in £15,084 to the previously approved spend of reserves. The request for Chairs approval was for an amendment to the costs which have increased by £15,084 due to the staff hours required to deliver the Improving Lives Coordinator post and some cost increases and decreases.

14. **Agenda item 13 – Attendance List**

The attendance list was noted.

15. **Agenda item 14 – Time for Reflection**

There was discussion about Erica Sanderson’s new role and looking at things with fresh eyes has been beneficial and opened up new opportunities.

The Chair stated that future meetings should be in person with attendance by teams by exception.

With no further business the meeting closed at 3.25pm.

Signed by Chair: Date:
As a true and correct record of the Ongo Communities Common Board meeting held on 16 July
2024