



# **Ongo Homes Resident Scrutiny Panel**

## **Investigation into**

### **Tenant contact (language & relationships with Tenancy Services)**

**(27 September 2024)**

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## 1.0. Introduction

This report is a result of an investigation into the language and terms used in the tenancy services team when communicating with tenants.

The RSP (Resident Scrutiny Panel) started their investigation in May 2024.

Throughout the duration of the investigation, the RSP endeavoured to uphold the key principles relating to its scrutiny work, namely that the group would:

- a. Work on behalf of Ongo and its tenants to ensure that Ongo provides services to the highest standard.
- b. Provide an independent check and offer critical challenges to drive and influence improvements to standards, processes, performance, and time management.
- c. Ensure that Ongo complies with the RSH Transparency, Influence and Accountability standard when delivering services to tenants.
- e. Provide an effective but independent part of the Governance structure within Ongo, together with Community Voice (CV), to provide the fourth line of assurance to the Executive Leadership Team and the Ongo Homes Board.
- f. Ensure Ongo is a well-managed, viable organisation which places tenants at the heart of its business, delivered through tenant led scrutiny and other forms of involvement.

The RSPs decision to investigate tenant contact (language & relationships with tenancy services) was chosen from a number of topics and themes. Some provided for consideration by Ongo staff, some further to information and discussion at Community Voice meetings, with others from themes considered for review at previous RSP meetings.

The scrutiny panel made their decision independently of any outside influence.

The following people engaged in conducting this investigation:

Scrutiny Panel Members

Tracey Bain  
Dawn Johnson  
Eddie Stringer  
Keith Lumbars  
Stewart Pearson

Supported By

Karen Cowan  
Wendy Wolfe

## **2. Scope of the investigation**

The following aspects were considered as part of the investigation:

- Obtain an understanding of what Tenancy Services is and the services within it
- Obtain an understanding on the roles and responsibilities within the different teams, the terms (names) used for job titles and the names of the individual teams

- Understand who has responsibility for front line job titles and the process for changing these
- Are tenants clear on who to contact currently (are the team names and job titles easily understandable to tenants)?
- How do tenants want to contact those in Tenancy Services and what type of relationship do they want with them (what do other organisations have that Ongo may want to consider, e.g. triage system, named housing officer who manages a patch etc.)
- Is there any complaints information on this?
- Consideration of the RSH Consumer Standards

The following services and departments involved in the investigation were - Customer Experience (customer services/customer contact centre) and Tenancy Services.

The following theme was not included in the scope for investigation: The detailed workings of each team.

The RSP would like to thank and acknowledge the help and support from the members of staff involved during this investigation.

### **3. Background**

Members of Community Voice and other tenant volunteers had previously raised concerns and questions in relation to the terminology used by Tenancy Services in relation to job titles and team names. The general feeling being that the terms used are confusing for customers, especially for those who don't have any background knowledge about the service, e.g. those who aren't tenant volunteers.

The RSP decided to investigate this area to gain more understanding of the roles and responsibilities within the different teams and terms used, to see if any improvements could be made from a tenant's perspective.

### **4. Methodology**

The RSP used the following fact-finding methods in order to gain more understanding to help with the review:

- 4.1.1 The requirements of the RSH Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard were discussed, with considerations being identified for this particular review.
- 4.1.2 Desktop consideration of the Tenancy Services current structure chart including team names and job titles.
- 4.1.3 Background presentation provided by Ongo staff that included an understanding of their roles/functions along with job titles etc.
- 4.1.4 Research into peer organisations to see how they operate.
- 4.1.5 Various meetings held by the RSP, minutes taken and distributed. Information and documents shared by email.

4.1.6 A final meeting was held to identify, discuss and agree good practice and to formulate recommendations.

## 5. Findings

At the meeting with staff, the RSP identified that staff (apart from one individual, who at the time explained their reasons) had similar views to themselves in terms of the language used for job titles; and that indeed job titles are as important to front facing staff as they are to tenants.

Research conducted by the RSP showed that the majority of organisations refer to either the Housing Team or Neighbourhood Team. Best practice identified that many have dedicated housing patches with a named officer (note, information gained from 13 housing providers – LHP, Beyond Housing, Yorkshire Housing, Believe Housing, Jigsaw Homes, Bernicia Group, Great Places Housing Group, Edinburgh Council, Greatwell Homes, Orbit, Riverside, Housing Plus Group, Moat).

The organisations that do show this information on their website provided a link to select the geographical area required, which then shows the name and photograph of the relevant Housing/Neighbourhood Officer, along with a contact link.

The RSP acknowledged customers don't always find it easy to communicate with Ongo, e.g., not having an identified individual to contact and not being able to identify who exactly they need from the existing job titles used, e.g., Community Resolution, Customer Resolution, Customer Experience, Customer Engagement, Wellbeing etc.

The panel agreed that a change of terminology in job titles is required in order to benefit a wide range of stakeholders, e.g., front line staff and staff right across Ongo, involved tenants and tenants at large. This will in turn improve communications for both new and existing customers when contacting Ongo, avoiding confusion.

Using plain language will also better cater for the needs of Ongo's diverse customer base (in line with the requirements of the RSH Transparency, Influence and Accountability consumer standard).

## 6. Conclusions

The RSP is confident that the brief/scope for this investigation has been met. Relevant documentation, including minutes of meetings and research findings can be made available upon request.

## 7. Recommendations

Number	Recommendation	Anticipated Outcome / Comments	Priority
1.	Job Titles to change from:		High

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tenancy Officer to Housing Officer</li> <li>• Tenancy Sustainment Coach to Support Officer (or could be known as Tenancy Support Officer or Housing Support Officer)</li> <li>• Community Resolution Officer to remain as is or change to Community Safety Officer</li> <li>• Wellbeing Officer to Independent Living Officer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve customer understanding of who does what at Ongo</li> <li>• Improve communications between Ongo and its customers</li> <li>• Increase customer satisfaction</li> <li>• Meet the requirements of the RSH Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard in terms of providing clear information that is appropriate to the diverse needs of tenants</li> </ul>	
2.	Overarching Team name to be known as Housing Services, Tenancy Services or Landlord Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve communications between Ongo and its customers</li> </ul>	<b>Medium</b>

	High
	Medium
	Low