

COMMUNITY VOICE FOCUS GROUP MINUTES
Held on Tuesday 20th January 2026
The Arc, blended style (face to face & via Teams)



Present:

Community Voice Members: Jill Milner, Tami Revell, Dawn Joshnson, Keith Lumbers, Marianne Sonksen, Simon Milner, Stewart Pearson, Paul Pearson, Tima Obo Omari

Ongo Staff: Wendy Wolfe, Jo Sugden, Mo Mathieson, Kevin Hornsby, Sarah Hardman, Sharon Wright

1. Welcome, Apologies & Housekeeping

- The chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- Apologies have been received from: Charmaine Mande, Eric Gosling, Jim Newcombe, Harry Jackson, Rhiannon Jeans, Sue Hickling, Trevor, Judith Thomlinson, Sharon Bernard-Earnshaw, and Tracey Bain.
- Members were reminded that personal issues should not be raised during the meeting. If a previously reported issue has not yet been resolved, they were encouraged to record it in the enquiry log for follow-up.
- Wendy noted the agenda had been updated after it was sent out to members and now includes the Rent Increase Consultation.

2. Rent and Service Charge Consultation - Kevin Hornsby

- Kevin explained he wanted member's views on the proposed Rent and Service Charge Increases for 2026/27, prior to the report being submitted to the Board next week. Kevin presented slides outlining the report and proposals / options.
- Background information was given on the rents, garage rents, affordability, service charges, and the potential option of a service charge cap. Figures were provided based on the 2025 Consumer Price Index plus 1%. It was noted that Ongo service charges are based on actual service charge costs and the cost to deliver services during 2025/2026. There are some historic tenancies which do not include service charges, but some of these will change when one of these tenancies are re let if it becomes empty. There was a recognition of the cost of living and the key drivers in the proposed increase.

Members questions and discussion:

- A member asked whether management fees are charged on top of rent and if these will increase. Kevin confirmed that the figures presented relate to general rent on our homes and garages service charges. Sarah agreed to look into individual cases.
- **ACTION:** Members details to be e-mailed to Sarah.
- Members raised concerns that rents for new properties, particularly those let at affordable rent, would be higher and not fully covered by Universal Credit. It was noted that while rents are proposed to increase by 4.8%, benefits and state pensions are increasing by a lower percentage, potentially pushing tenants to their financial limits.
- Kevin confirmed that new properties under affordable rent are based on 80% of the market value and that affordability checks are carried out before tenants sign for a property. He noted that most customers are not self-payers and that Ongo do have a

tenant sustainment fund in place to provide one off fund payments, money towards furniture, school uniforms, etc and are pro-actively supporting our customers.

- Sarah noted there has been a shift that has seen housing benefit decrease and universal credit increase and explained that she will look into local Housing Allowance and Universal Credits before the proposal goes to board.
- A member highlighted that Universal Credit does not cover service charges and that high service charges can place additional pressure on tenants. Kevin noted that the service charges effect a small proportion of people and work around service charge cost areas will be investigated such as Electricity.
- A member asked if the Consumer Price plus 1% increase would be fixed for 5 years. Kevin explained that the board will look at this annually.
- Members asked whether savings could be identified to offset a cap across the organisation, not solely within tenant services, and whether efficiencies could be explored in how services are delivered and charged. Jo explained that a Value for Money Assessment is conducted annually, and as part of the process the organisation will drill down into smaller cost areas to identify potential savings.

Panel feedback to board:

- Rent increase at the proposed Consumer Price Index + 1%: The panel agreed to support the proposal to board.
- Garage rent increase: The panel agreed on the increase as per above.
- Service charges: The majority of the panel members agreed that service charges should increase in line with costs, with one member abstaining.

Kevin confirmed that the next steps are that the proposals will be submitted to board at their next meeting.

3. Update from actions raised at the CV Away Day - Wendy Wolfe

- Wendy provided an update on the actions from the CV away Day meeting held in November:
 - The panel discussed focus groups to allow more time for discussion of items, these are now planned for 2026.
 - A SWOT analysis was completed and the action plan along with the minutes were sent out.
 - The Customer Engagement Team will conduct a quarterly profile report with all groups to show age, ethnicity, and location to identify what areas to focus on for recruiting new members to join groups.
 - Members were reminded if they are unable to attend meetings, to read through the paperwork and send any comments or questions to Customer Engagement.
 - The chair encouraged members to provide agenda items for the meeting or topic ideas for the focus group.

4. Format of Reports for Meetings – Mo Mathieson

- Mo discussed the draft report which had been sent out prior to the meeting, explaining that the original format could now be changed to make future reports less formal and include the information that is more relevant for members.
- The proposals are that all reports coming to Community Voice will use this template to ensure information is presented in a clear way and setting out the issue, what

options or changes are being considered and what feedback or decision is being requested.

- Members agreed to adopt the proposed format, and it will be reviewed going forward to see how effective it is.
ACTION: the new template will be shared with Ongo staff who prepare reports for CV meetings.
- Mo explained that IT have some loan kit / devices available for members to use if they don't have a device that enables them to access paperwork for meetings. A list has been created, and details will be taken later in the meeting and those who sent apologies will be contacted separately. If members to have use of a loan device, then a signed agreement would be produced.

5. Election of Officers roles & process – Wendy Wolfe

- Wendy reminded members about the upcoming election of officers, noting that the Chair and Vice Chair will step down in April and elections will take place. Information will be sent out to members, including the person specification and self-nomination form.
- Both the current Chair and Vice Chair can stand again for re-election if they wish to.
- If more than one person stands for each role, a secret ballot will be held at the meeting.
- Wendy reminded the panel that the process is set out in the Community Voice Terms of Reference (TOR). The person specifications for the roles cover what's expected in terms of commitment, and checks are made to ensure that people meet the criteria and have the right skills for the role and explain that support will be available if needed.
- The Chair explained she may not stand again this year but would remain for another year to support someone who may want to be trained or mentored for the post if needed. The Chair also mentioned she is happy to talk to members or answer any questions members may have.

6. Attendance from staff at CV meetings – Mo Mathieson

- Mo explained there have been several staff attending some meetings and asked the panel to consider whether they should be asked to leave after they have presented their agenda item.
- A Member suggested the senior officers should stay who are relevant for the meeting, but other staff could leave after presenting their item.
- Wendy noted that if there was a large number of tenant members due to attend a meeting then staff would be asked to join meetings via Teams and any new members of staff are encouraged to observe a meeting.
- Members agreed to Mo's suggestion.

7. Agenda item for next focus group meeting – Wendy Wolfe

- Wendy explained that the next focus group meeting in March will cover the Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards self-assessment. Becky Johns will present the information at the meeting.
- A member asked when they would receive the paperwork. Wendy explained that Becky may go through it during the meeting.

8. Any other Business

- Wendy provided members with details of two additional meetings taking place in February:
 - Homes Choice Lincs Allocations Policy Consultation on 12th February 2026, 2.00pm to 3.30pm-at Ongo House Board Room. A Consultant and staff from North Lincolnshire Council will present the information.
 - Asset Management policy on 17th February from 10.00am to 11.30am at The Arc. This will be a joint meeting with CV and Property services panel members. Due to room availability this meeting can't be held in blended format and will be face to face only. Anyone who may have questions and can't attend in person are asked to send these to Customer Engagement when they receive the paperwork.
 - Members are asked to notify Customer Engagement to register their names to attend the above meetings.
 - **ACTION:** Customer engagement to send out details.
- A member asked if the Property Services Panel meeting will still go ahead on the 10th of February. Wendy confirmed it will.
- Wendy updated members on the work at Ongo House. As no confirmed dates for the planned works are available, this may affect upcoming meetings.

9. Date and Time of Next Meeting

- Full meeting – Tuesday 3rd February 2026 at the Arc (face to face or via teams), 1pm-4pm.
- Focus Group – Monday 16th March 2026 at the Arc (face to face or via teams), 1:30pm – 3:30pm.