ONGO CUSTOMER FOCUS COMMITTEE

Held at 1.00pm on Tuesday 13 January 2026
The Enterprise Suite, The Arc, 2 Lichfield Avenue, Scunthorpe, DN17 1QX

MINUTES

Present:
Committee: Judith Tomlinson (Chair), Rhiannon Jeans, Marianne Sonksen, Keeley McCahey (Teams), Sarah Roxby,
Officers: Steve Ellard, Kevin Hornsby, Louise Usher, Bev Lewis (Minutes), Jo Sugden, Steve Hepworth, Gemma Willey
Apologies: Matt Sugden
Absence: None
Also Present: Becky Johns, John Hughes (Teams)
Observers:

Time meeting opened: 1.05pm

Quorum: It was reported that proper notice of the Meeting had been given in accordance with the Terms of Reference (quorum is 3 with one of these being a Board member and two being Independent tenant committee members), the Chair declared the meeting open.

1. **Welcome, introduction and apologies.**

The Chair opened the meeting, and apologies were noted as received in advance for Matt Sugden

2. **Declarations of Interest**

Declarations were made by Judith Tomlinson who is a Member of Ongo Homes Board.

3. **Agenda Item 3 – Minutes from previous meetings**
Agenda Item 3.1 – Minutes from meeting held 11 November 2025

Minutes of the open meeting held on 11 November 2025 were agreed to be a true record.

4. Agenda Item 4 – Action List

The action list was noted and Becky Johns gave a brief summary of her action around call waiting times.

5. **Agenda Item 5 - Update from Community Voice Chair**

Summary: The report provides Customer Focus Committee with details of tenant feedback from the Community Voice group and how this will help to influence improvements to service delivery.

Discussion points/questions:

- The key points from the last meeting included the fact that appointing a dedicated officer for each region increased visibility, and improved engagement within neighbourhoods to enhance communication. Topics were discussed in depth, with customer feedback informing ongoing improvements. Members of the Community Voice group agreed that these initiatives are positive developments, noting that incorporating tenant feedback has helped refine the model and drive meaningful change. Improvements are being made to the MyHome app to improve accessibility and fix some user problems.
- An Away Day in November included an activity which demonstrated participants who reviewed materials before meetings were more prepared, asked better questions, and engaged more meaningfully than those who did not. The experience highlighted that reading agendas and documents in advance improves participation and understanding, while lack of preparation can cause confusion. Overall, feedback reinforced the value of being well-prepared.
- It was felt that links between Customer Voice and the Customer Focus Committee have improved, supported by joint participation and revised seating arrangements that increased engagement. Customer Voice now holds online focus groups between bi-monthly meetings, helping members prepare more effectively and stay updated. The new approach has been productive.

Agreed: Committee

- confirmed this report provided relevant information in relation to providing regular updates from the Community Voice group and other tenant groups.

6. <u>Agenda item 6 – External Impacts Update</u>

Summary: Presentation of slides by Jo Sugden detailing some external factors that may be helpful to Members.

- At the last meeting the committee requested more horizon scanning on current and upcoming developments. The main focus at the moment is on tenant engagement, communication, and consultation, which will be key during our next inspection—expected soon, likely in spring or early summer, as inspections are increasing sector-wide.
- A Member asked if we were prepared for the inspection. Jo replied that this is something that is regularly discussed. A mock inspection by DTP consultants last year led to an action plan that we continue to address, focusing on items needing board review or approval. Our gap analysis shows where improvements are needed, especially regarding ensuring customer voice is prioritised within our governance framework.
- Another Member asked if AWAAB’s Law had brough about more reports of damp and mould. Jordan Barr reported that we have seen a slight increase in reports, though not significant compared to other housing providers. The rise may be due to our encouragement for residents to report damp early so we can address issues before they escalate. There was particular interest in the reporting statistics referenced in the report.

Currently, most reports are submitted by customers, though operatives on site can flag issues like damp and mould, which are added to the case management system. Contractors conducting stock condition surveys also contribute, but the majority of cases originate with tenants contacting the call centre or using the online portal.
It was noted that an increased number of reports indicates that the web portal is functioning effectively. Efforts have been made within the community to encourage tenants to report any signs of mould or damp immediately rather than allowing problems to worsen over time.

- A Member asked if cases involving damp and mould in green-rated homes are monitored for rapid escalation, suggesting that some cases might need a higher risk rating. Jordan Barr responded that the risk rating system includes four categories (white, green, amber, red), and all reports are reviewed by a qualified surveyor within 10 working days, regardless of initial rating, to ensure proper assessment-it was pointed out that this leads into the next agenda item.
- The Members agreed the layout was good and the prompts at the end were helpful and requested more prompts like it on other papers going forward.

ACTION 1/26 Suggested prompts and questions to be included in future packs - similar to the suggested prompts included on this presentation. GW

Agreed: Committee
- Noted the slides and narrative given and discussed and debated any issues

7. **Agenda Item 7 – AWAAB's Law progress report**

Summary: This report provides an update on Ongo's performance and compliance with Awaab's Law, which came into effect on 27 October 2025, and outlines key trends in damp and mould management across our housing stock.

Discussion points/questions:

- Jordan Barr reported strong performance since AWAAB's Law began, with inspections at **98.6%**, rising to **100%** from early November. Emergency hazard attendance is **92.1%**, improving to **93.1%** in December. Repeat cases are low (**1.9%**), though based on a small dataset. Case levels by region are in line with stock distribution. Most damp and mould cases occur in **1950–1979** properties, mainly due to **c**ondensation. Mitigation actions include increased resident communication, trialling IoT sensors for early detection, and reviewing ventilation across the stock, including possible upgrades or installation where needed.
- A Member asked about the sensors, mentioning uncertainty over ideal humidity levels and costs. Jordan explained the sensors track temperature and humidity to prevent damp and mould, allowing remote monitoring and interventions when needed, with priority given to vulnerable properties. When asked about numbers, Jordan said several hundred sensors are currently deployed in a trial, but a decision on wider adoption and costs is pending feedback from their provider. Most damp and mould cases are found in homes built between the **1950s and 1970s**, which are the first priority for monitoring. He explained that

further analysis is needed to identify the specific property types most affected so that a smaller, higher-risk group can be targeted effectively. Steve Ellard commented that while performance under Awaab's Law has been strong, the next priority is ensuring repairs are effective and cases are properly closed. He also highlighted difficulties accessing homes when hazards are identified by the organisation rather than residents, which can lead to decent homes failures. He suggested this may become a recurring issue that needs further exploration.

- A Member asked for clarification on section 4.6, noting that while the report explained the six failures outside of Ongo's control, it did not give examples for the three failures that were within Ongo's control. She requested that future reports include brief explanations of why those three failures occurred, in the same way the external reasons had been outlined. Jordan Barr explained that the team already knows the reasons why the three failures were within Ongo's control and that work is underway to understand what actions have been taken to prevent similar issues in future. He added that training has been implemented for operatives and officers where processes were not followed, and automated processes are being tightened to reduce the risk of repeat failures.

Agreed Committee:

- reviewed and acknowledged the contents of this report, including the outlined plans to ensure full compliance with Awaab's Law. They provided comments, feedback, and any recommendations on the proposed approach and implementation strategy to support continuous improvement and effective delivery.

8. **Agenda item 8 – Operational Performance Report**

Summary: On 16th December 2025, CFC members who volunteered for the performance workshop met with Officers to discuss future approaches to the Operational Performance Report at subsequent meetings. The workshop began with an agreement to concentrate on principles and themes rather than individual measures. Members received a brief overview of the committee's current terms of reference and considered the responsibilities held by other committees within the governance structure. The committee's overarching priorities were proposed as Customer Voice & Insight, Operational Performance, and Risk.

Discussion points/questions:

- Steve Ellard announced that the new performance report will highlight customer feedback, operational metrics, and risk, with a move toward clearer, presentation-style reporting. Key indicators—such as repairs, voids, lettings, complaints, arrears, tenancy sustainment, neighbourhood concerns, ASB, and aids/adaptations—will be featured, while building compliance is tracked separately; around 20 indicators will be benchmarked.
  Kevin Hornsby said the team will refine these themes based on committee input, presenting an updated draft after review.
- Outstanding repairs are at a record low, boosting overall performance. More jobs are completed on time, and repair satisfaction is at its highest in years. The service is set to reach its year-end goal of fewer than 3,500 outstanding repairs. While voids and lettings

dipped slightly due to the repairs focus, they remain above sector benchmarks; further regional analysis is forthcoming.

Income collection and tenancy sustainment remain strong, with arrears at **1.09%** and evictions halved through increased prevention and support. Tenancy turnover is stable, and early failures are below target, case studies detail tenant support. **10 out of 12** tenancy satisfaction measures are green, with ASB satisfaction meeting targets and improving via better communication.

- A Member suggested adding sustainability as an additional performance theme. Steve Ellard responded that Ongo is already close to achieving **90% of homes at EPC Band C** and that wider sustainability and net-zero planning would be better overseen by the forthcoming Development and Investment Panel. He added that sustainability updates could still be referenced in reports where relevant, but the main responsibility should sit with that panel.
- A Member asked whether a scorecard would sit behind the presentation. Steve Ellard confirmed that one would, explaining that the indicators had not yet been finalised. He added that he and Kevin Hornsby planned to develop them over the coming weeks and that a more detailed appendix would be provided once the indicators were agreed.
- A Member commented that sector benchmarking was extremely useful because it showed clearly where the organisation stood and helped ensure future targets were realistic. The Chair thanked those involved in the workshop.
- A Member asked whether the terms of reference would need updating due to the committee's changing priorities. Gemma Willey confirmed that a full review of the Customer Focus Committee is planned in the coming months, carried out by DTP, which will include revising the terms of reference.

Agreed: Committee • Noted their satisfaction with the new layout of the report

9. **<u>Agenda Item 9 – Complaints and Learning Update</u>**

Summary:_This report provides an overview of complaint handling performance for the quarter, highlighting key trends, operational improvements, and areas of concern. It aims to inform the Customer Focus Committee of progress against service standards, emerging risks, and opportunities for enhancing customer experience.

Discussion points/questions:

- Becky Johns reported an **18% fall** in complaints this quarter, though year-to-date figures remain **15% higher** than last year. Stage 1 and Stage 2 response times continued to improve, reaching **98%** and **94%** compliance. Most complaints (**63%**) related to maintenance, and overall volumes have been unstable. Customer satisfaction showed a slight improvement, while **23%** of complaints escalated to Stage 2, often due to follow-up issues or compensation expectations. She confirmed compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's code, noted no significant changes in complainant demographics, and highlighted the launch of the new Service Improvement Forum to ensure operational teams act on tenant feedback.

- A Member asked for clarification on whether **72% of Stage 2 complaints were upheld**. The officer explained that the **72% figure applied to Stage 1 complaints**, while Stage 2 upheld rates were lower, at around the **mid-50% range**. She added that Stage 2 outcomes rarely overturned the Stage 1 decision; instead, they usually resulted in an increased resolution or higher compensation.
- The Member then asked whether compensation levels at Stage 1 needed reviewing, noting that many Stage 2 cases were still being upheld. Becky Johns explained that the complaints team had been asked to look into this and were expected to offer compensation that met guidelines at Stage 1, rather than under-offering and prompting escalation. She added that even when compensation was increased at Stage 1, some customers still chose to escalate, sometimes aiming to reach the Housing Ombudsman. She confirmed that further work was underway to understand the reasons behind rising Stage 2 escalations and that an update would be provided in Q4.
- A Member said they found the root-cause list useful, noting it was the first time the committee had seen this level of detail, and commented that some of the call-centre-related causes were surprising, particularly references to staff attitude. They also noted that the report stated these issues would be addressed through training, and, after reviewing the training content, remarked that it included communication skills and a section on "how to say no."
- A Member asked why tenants who escalate complaints to the Housing Ombudsman sometimes receive higher compensation than what was initially offered, and whether offering that amount at stage one could prevent escalation. The officer explained that Ongo has updated its compensation policy to align with the Housing Ombudsman's Remedies Guidance and now sets compensation at levels the Ombudsman would expect. At stage one, complaint officers check similar past Ombudsman cases to inform their decisions. She assured the committee that compensation is not intentionally undervalued, and any differences identified through Ombudsman determinations are reviewed through lessons-learned processes to improve future decision-making.
- Steve Hepworth noted that some stage-two complaints are upheld not because the original decision was wrong, but because compensation is increased. He asked for this to be tracked separately so the committee can see whether issues relate to decision-making or compensation levels, and to help prevent unnecessary escalation to the Ombudsman. The Chair then asked whether compensation could be increased before escalation to avoid a stage-two complaint. The officer confirmed this already happens, but some tenants still choose to escalate despite reasonable offers.

  ACTION 2/26 Track and report separately the cases where compensation amounts are changed at Stage 2, distinguishing between changes in decision and changes in compensation, and include this in future reporting. **BJ**

- A member queried whether compensation could be reduced on review. It was noted that this had occurred in one case, which is now under investigation. Concern was raised that reducing compensation at stage two could negatively affect complaints culture. It was agreed that any compensation offered should normally be honoured unless fraud or deliberate misrepresentation is involved. It was noted the policy does not currently cover this situation and suggested it be discussed internally.

ACTION 3/26 Update and clarify the compensation policy to ensure offers are honoured unless fraud or criminal activity is involved and discuss with management. BJ/KH

Agreed: The Committee

- considered the content of the report provided assurance that complaints handling is in with Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling code and our regulatory responsibilities.
- Provided scrutiny and challenge on the contents of the report ensuring we are listening and acting on our customer's feedback.
- agreed to the reporting of the demographics 6 monthly rather than quarterly

10. **Agenda Item 10 – Customer Service Training**

Summary: This report provides an update to the Customer Focus Committee (CFC) on enhanced customer service training that Ongo is embedding as a mandatory requirement across the organisation. The training has been developed in response to tenant feedback, complaint themes, and recommendations from the Tenant Complaint Panel. It aims to improve communication, embed service excellence, and ensure equitable access for all tenants.

Discussion points/questions:

- Becky Johns gave the Customer Focus Committee an update on Ongo's new mandatory customer service training. Developed in response to tenant feedback and complaint themes. The training aims to improve communication, service quality and fairness. It supports regulatory requirements and helps manage risks linked to customer expectations.
- The committee was asked to note the mandatory training and its role in improving satisfaction, reducing complaints, strengthening staff skills and supporting transparency and continuous improvement.
- Becky Johns explained that Ongo had previously delivered STAR customer service training, but it was not maintained as a rolling programme, aside from a brief induction for new starters. The new approach introduces a more robust, organisation-wide programme focused first on effective communication, based on complaint themes, followed by training on meeting tenants' needs, including vulnerability and reasonable adjustments. The training will be delivered in-house for better value for money.
- A member asked whether the training covered how staff should handle tiredness or frustration after difficult calls. Becky explained that although it doesn't appear in the slide deck, the training does address this, reminding staff to manage their behaviour and take a moment to reset after challenging conversations. She added that tiredness is not an excuse for poor service, and staff are expected to remain professional throughout the day.
- A member asked whether contractors would receive the training. Becky explained that contractors would not be included in the first phase but agreed it should be offered later. She noted the practical challenges of training full contractor teams, especially where

subcontractors are involved, and said she would explore options. She also confirmed that service level agreements already set customer-service expectations for contractors.

- Becky explained that the training is delivered as a half-day session because full-day courses reduce engagement. Morning sessions have worked well and received positive feedback. She added that the section on how to say "no" was especially helpful, as staff sometimes struggle to decline requests clearly and professionally. The aim is to ensure clear communication when a service cannot be provided, something highlighted in recent Housing Ombudsman findings.
- She explained that all existing colleagues will complete the programme through the learning system, and a rolling schedule—will be used to train all new starters. unlike previous one-off campaigns, the training will now continue permanently so every new employee receives it.
- The chair asked whether operatives should be sent for customer-service training if complaints were received. Steve Ellard confirmed he fully supported this, noting that operatives are frontline and central to delivering repairs, a top resident priority. He noted their performance is already monitored through satisfaction scores and feedback, and the training would complement current improvements and further strengthen service. Kevin Hornsby agreed with Steve, emphasising that all colleagues—especially operatives and neighbourhood teams—should complete the training because they have the most customer contact. As sponsor for the customer focus strategy, he supported a consistent, organisation-wide approach. He noted that new dashboards help monitor individual performance, allowing good practice to be recognised and issues addressed.
- Becky added the training had first been piloted with the new regional teams and that its impact would be measured through satisfaction scores, complaints and tenant feedback. She noted that "attitude" was a theme they should be able to reduce and hoped the training would also help improve TSM scores.
- The committee expressed reassurance from a customer perspective and felt the training was important. They recommended including a section in the report to the Board explaining its significance and impact. The committee thanked Becky for the update.

ACTION 4/26 Update to Homes Board to include CFC assurance on Customer Service Training and the impact the committee believe this will have. Governance Team to work with Chair of CFC for update prior to next Homes Board. GW/JT

Agreed: The Committee

- noted the approach to customer service training as a mandatory requirement across the organisation
- acknowledged the training's role in mitigating strategic risks, specifically related to customer expectations, while providing assurance that we are actively contributing to regulatory compliance under the Consumer Standards.

11. <u>Agenda Item 11 – Sector Risk Profile</u>

Summary: This report provides awareness for the Customer Focus Committee of the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) annual Sector Risk Profile (SRP). The aim is to highlight key areas of risk for the committee to understand and provide challenge when discussing future reports.

Discussion points/questions:

- Louise Usher highlighted the regulator's annual Sector Risk Profile and outlined four key risks for the committee: safe and decent homes, data, energy/net-zero, and reputation.
- A Committee Member queried why risks for quality homes and net-zero are assigned here; Louise Usher clarified the strategic risk registers had been updated, with relevant customer-related risks to be monitored by this committee.
- Steve Ellard noted the new strategic risk was introduced because the previous repairs only risk was poorly defined and always off target. He explained that a broader "existing homes" risk is more appropriate and naturally includes net zero and energy efficiency elements, with some sub risks sitting outside CFC's remit. He agreed the issue should be reviewed to ensure everything aligns before implementation and thanked members for the feedback. Only risk was poorly defined and always off-target. He explained that a broader "existing homes" risk is more appropriate and naturally includes net-zero and energy-efficiency elements, with some sub-risks sitting outside CFC's remit.
- Louise Usher advised that customer insight, operational performance and risk will be combined into a single report going forward.
- Louise outlined the four risk areas linked to providing safe and decent homes and asked whether the committee feels assured on compliance with consumer standards and if there are areas to focus on in future meetings.

  ACTION 5/26 26 Review what performance measures/KPIs CFC can track to have oversight of risks and associated sub risks - aligned with Board SE/LU

- A member suggested adding a line to strengthen the link between CV and CFC, noting that compliance is supported by the CV Chair's membership of CFC and CFC members attending CV meetings. The committee agreed this should be reviewed and added.
- The importance of data in delivering fair and equitable air quality services was discussed and asked whether members felt sufficiently assured or required anything further. The Chair confirmed that data needs had already been discussed and that work was underway to ensure the required information is included in the final draft.-quality services was discussed and asked whether members felt sufficiently assured or required anything further. The Chair confirmed that data needs had already been discussed and that work was underway to ensure the required information is included in the final draft.
- The Committee noted the links to efficiency and net zero requirements and highlighted related themes within the Strategic Asset Management Plan. They emphasised reputational risk and asked how CFC can ensure tenants' views are integrated into decisions and whether further assurance is needed. Members discussed sharing committee activity more widely with tenants, suggesting a short summary or meeting count could be included in Key News or the publications magazine. Zero requirements and highlighted

Agreed: Committee

- The Chair agreed this could work and noted that quarterly engagement figures could also be shared. It was agreed that Judith and Kevin would meet with PR & Comms (Sarah Wilson) to explore options for communicating and promoting the work of the Customer Focus Committee and will report back. They agreed it would support compliance to include the additional information.

ACTION 7/26 Meet with Sarah Wilson from PR and Communications to discuss options for communicating the work of the Customer Focus Committee/CV to the wider tenant base and report back with proposals. KH

12. **Agenda Item 12 – Neighbourhood Standard**

Summary: The Neighbourhood Standard has been consulted upon with all Managers and Heads of Service. The Neighbourhood Standard has been presented to Community Voice members October 2025, following this it has been submitted for to Leadership Team for sign-off prior to seeking Customer Focus Committee approval.

Discussion points/questions:

- Kevin Hornsby reported that the Neighbourhood Standard had undergone a light health check with only two main changes. The term "sterile" was confirmed as deliberate, reflecting sector wide language on keeping communal areas clear of fire risks. The standard has been through the usual approval process and is now presented for final comments and approval. Wide language on keeping communal areas clear of fire risks. The standard has been through the usual approval process and is now presented for final comments and approval.
- Members queried the use of the term *sterile*, noting it may be unclear or sound clinical. They suggested clearer wording to explain that communal areas must be kept free of items such as doormats and plant pots. Some members felt most tenants understood the policy, but wording could still be improved for clarity. The term is not very customer friendly and should be clarified with a brief explanation. Kevin Hornsby agreed to amend the wording and update the document accordingly and report back to the Committee at the next meeting on completion. Friendly and should be clarified with a brief explanation.

ACTION 6/26 Explore alternative wording in the Neighbourhood Standard to clarify the meaning of "sterile" for tenants, and report the update back at the next meeting KH

Agreed: Committee:

- approved the Neighbourhood Standard document which has been reviewed in line with the Policy Review Framework with a small change to wording to explain what is meant by *sterile*
- noted that Ongo Homes Board has delegated approval of this policy to the Customer Focus Committee as detailed in the Standing Orders H1.3

13. Agenda Item 13 – Governance Update

Summary: The Customer Focus Committee will undergo an Effectiveness Review in January 2026, led by David Tolson Partnership, to assess its impact, identify strengths and gaps, and ensure compliance with best practice and governance standards. The process will include a document review, meeting observation, member interviews, and culminate in a final report for the May meeting. Members are reminded that the appraisal process is separate and any queries regarding proposed changes to working practices should be directed to the Governance Team or Chair.

Discussion points/questions:

- Gemma Willey introduced the report saying that an external committee effectiveness review will be carried out by DTP. This will include a review of key documents, observation of the next meeting, and interviews with members and officers. A final report will be presented at a future meeting. The review is separate from the appraisal process. The review is timely given the committee's first full year, and findings will support future development. The skills matrix completed before and after training later in the month will help identify learning needs, and an action plan will follow the final report.
- Members were reminded that the Ongo Homes Chair had issued guidance on ways of working, including using Ongo devices and Ongo email for all organisational business. Any concerns should be raised with the Governance Team, who are addressing queries received. IT related issues will be managed by Governance Team alongside Des. Related issues will be managed by Governance Team.

Agreed: Committee

- noted the plans for the upcoming Committee Effectiveness Review
- noted other Governance Updates

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

Members reflected positively on the meeting, noting a more relaxed atmosphere, improved participation and better balance between officers and committee members. Reducing the number of officers present helped create space for fuller discussion. Officers agreed the meeting was productive, with good challenge and engagement.

With no further business the meeting closed at 3.41pm

Signed by Chair: Judith Tomlinson Date: 13 January 2026

As a true and correct record of the Ongo Homes Board meeting held on 13 January 2026