ONGO CUSTOMER FOCUS COMMITTEE

Held at 9.30am on Tuesday 10 March 2026
The Enterprise Suite, The Arc, 2 Lichfield Avenue, Scunthorpe, DN17 1QX
(Teams by exception)

MINUTES

Present:
Committee: Judith Tomlinson (Chair), Rhiannon Jeans, Marianne Sonksen, Keeley McCahey (Teams), Matt Sugden
Officers: Steve Ellard (Teams), Kevin Hornsby, Louise Usher, Bev Lewis (Minutes), Jo Sugden, Steve Hepworth (Teams), Gemma Willey, Wendy Wolfe, Becky Johns, John Hughes (Teams)
Apologies: Sarah Roxby
Absence: None
Also Present:
Observers: Leah Gillot (Ongo staff), Angela Lomax (DTP) (Teams) and Ovidiu Staicu (Board member)

Time meeting opened: **9.30am**

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 introductions were made around the table for Angela Lomax benefit. The Chair also pointed out that this would be Jill Milner's last meeting with us and thanked her for her hard work over the last year and wished her all the best for the future.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

Declarations were made by Judith Tomlinson and Matt Sugden who are Members of Ongo Homes Board.

3. **Agenda Item 3 – Minutes from previous meetings**
Agenda Item 3.1 – Minutes from meeting held 13 January 2026

Minutes of the open meeting held on 13 January 2026 were agreed to be a true record.

4. **Agenda Item 4 – Action List**

The action list was noted with one action not yet due. The remaining actions were complete.

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

Summary: Community Voice meets on a bi-monthly basis. The most recent meeting took place on 3 February 2026, supported by an additional focus group session in January 2026. These forums provide tenants with the opportunity to influence decisions, review performance, and contribute to continuous improvement.

Discussion points/questions:

- The Committee received updates on the five-year plan, including a proposed 4.8% rent increase and variable service charges by area. Updates to the recharge policy were reviewed and found clear, and the major planned works communication procedure was approved to move to the Board.
- Social value activities were discussed, with a presentation from Josh and possible support for Maya's House and it was noted that the current year's budget for community funding has been fully allocated. Planning is underway for the new financial year, and potential support for Maya's House will be considered; requested items include craft materials for residents and the possibility of funding a day trip (e.g., seaside or garden centre). Josh indicated a positive approach and will explore options. Community Voice members were invited to propose further ideas for future community funding and Josh confirmed he will attend future meetings to keep them updated.
- Members agreed that recent reports were too formal and will trial a clearer format in future. Updates covered tenant inspector activity, a proposal to restart mystery shopping, and progress on the scrutiny subgroup's Aids and Adaptations report, which is nearing completion and will be presented to Community Voice in April and the Customer Focus Committee in May.
- The Committee discussed customer engagement planning, noting issues with retirement living scheme event invitations that lacked contact details and feedback options for absent tenants. Dates for future visits are pending, but a new manager will refresh the approach to include more presence in communal areas. Communication about recent service charge increases needs improvement, and the process is being reviewed.

Agreed: Committee

- Noted the activity and outcomes of Community Voice and associated tenant involvement groups.
- Confirmed that the report provided appropriate assurance and insight into customer views.
- Provided feedback on any additional information required in future reports, particularly around outcomes, impact, and follow-up actions.

6. **Agenda item 6 – Social Housing Sector Update**

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

Discussion points/questions:

- The Committee received a horizon-scan update on external social housing developments. It noted that the Regulator's inspection regime continues to evolve, and that recent C4 gradings (including one issued to a local authority provider) underline increased regulatory expectations and reduced tolerance for non-compliance as the consumer standards become embedded. Members also noted the Competence and Conduct Standard due to come into effect from October 2026, and an update on Ongo's preparation, including ongoing customer service training for colleagues. The Committee further noted forthcoming transparency requirements, with proactive publication duties from 1 October 2026 and additional provisions from April 2027 to enable tenants to request more information, and that work is underway to map the required publications and implementation actions.
- A member asked about the implementation of the STAIRS (transparency) requirements and how tenants will be involved to ensure published information meets tenant needs. It was confirmed that a steering group is in place and is currently undertaking a gap analysis against the publication scheme (Chapter 1), with completion targeted for 1 March. An action plan has been established and includes tenant engagement to support both the identification of required information and awareness of the publication scheme. The Committee requested regular progress updates, and it was confirmed that this has been recorded as an action for future meetings.
- **ACTION 8/26 CFC Bring an update on progress from the steering group on STAIRS to a future meeting JS**

Agreed: Committee

- Noted the slides and narrative given and discussed and debated any issues

7. **Agenda Item 7 – Operational Performance Presentation**

Summary: Steve Ellard and Kvin Hornsby gave a presentation including a mixture of operational, transactional and perception-based topics.

Discussion points/questions:

- Kevin Hornsby gave an update on the Operational Performance report and apologised that Appendix 2 (a draft performance dashboard) had been added to the meeting pack late. It was confirmed that the dashboard has been developed following member feedback and an earlier workshop on proposed performance themes/metrics (including repairs, complaints, income/tenancy sustainment, neighbourhoods, ASB and aids & adaptations). It was noted that the dashboard will be further developed and, from April, will enable drill-down to regional performance data.
- Steve Ellard gave an update on repairs. Outstanding repairs reduced from c.6,500 (April) to just under 4,000 (end of January), with a recent winter-related increase linked to higher sickness over the Christmas period. Reduced capacity over the festive period (including contractor shutdown 19 December to 5 January and annual leave) during January's peak demand was estimated to have left c.750–1,000 repairs incomplete. Performance is improving, with a target of c.3,500 outstanding repairs by end of March, alongside improved completion within target timescales and satisfaction; service changes since September include a new materials supplier, the regional model, and increased contractor investment and efficiency measures.

- A member queried the recent increase in sickness levels impacting repairs performance. It was reported that analysis undertaken with HR has identified no single underlying trend; absence appears to be driven by a combination of seasonal factors (including a peak over the Christmas period), musculoskeletal issues and general colds/flu. It was confirmed that both short-term and long-term sickness absence is being actively managed, and that the impact was compounded by reduced capacity over the festive period (including contractor shutdown between 19 December and 5 January and annual leave), contributing to the temporary deterioration in performance.
- A member asked if repairs data could identify which jobs missed target timescales; it was confirmed that regular detailed analysis is conducted by Jordan and regional managers. Previously, trades like glazing contributed to higher outstanding volumes, but most trades saw reductions since August/September. Emergency repairs perform strongly (over 90%), though non-emergency repairs are behind target due to volume and limited resources, not specific trade issues.
- Members noted an increase in outstanding repairs during winter, linked to higher demand from November to January. They recommended future reports include trends in incoming jobs for better planning. Management confirmed January is the peak month for new repairs, with elevated staff sickness causing 750–1,000 incomplete jobs over two to three months. Performance has since improved, rebounding faster than last year.
- The Committee noted better customer satisfaction for transactional measures and positive trends in overall perception. Updates on voids and lettings highlighted the challenge of balancing resources between repairs and returning empty homes to use. Since adopting the regional model, re-let performance has declined—currently at 41 days (target: 32), and 49 days in January—though still above sector average despite seasonal pressures. New tenant satisfaction remains strong, but void/re-let targets are unlikely to be met this year. Efforts will continue next year to improve performance by reallocating resources.
- **Income and tenancy sustainment:** Rent collection/arrears performance was reported as strong at **1.2%** against a target of **1.75%** and noted as performing significantly better than the sector. Customer satisfaction with support services was reported as **100%**. Tenancy turnover was reported as **8.1%** against an internal target of **8.5%** (and below the sector average). It was further noted that the proportion of tenancies ending within the first 12 months remains well below **5.5%**, indicating effective tenancy sustainment.
- It was requested that sector averages/benchmarks be included in performance reporting to provide context. Management confirmed that benchmarking (including sector median comparisons) will be incorporated into the revised performance dashboard where possible, and that this will be reflected in the next report.
- The Committee reviewed customer dissatisfaction with the lettings process, noting that transactional feedback helps address specific cases. Customers giving negative feedback are contacted and insights are used for service improvements. Poor communication during the lettings journey was highlighted as a main issue, especially with current repair resource pressures. Management is working to improve communication and the overall process using a neighbourhood approach.
- A member raised concerns about re-let properties not being move-in ready, noting that some tenants received keys and paid rent but couldn't occupy due to unconnected gas for several days. Members questioned charging rent when utilities aren't connected, and Kevin Hornsby will investigate and report back. It was noted gas reconnection usually takes 24 hours if properly arranged.

ACTION 9/26 CFC Investigate cases where new tenants have been given keys but cannot move in for some time due to utilities not being available and bring details back to Committee at a later date

- **Tenant satisfaction measures**: In February, 8 out of 12 tenant satisfaction measures were on track, though some—including repairs and overall satisfaction—fell slightly below target, and two were off track. The Committee noted subjectivity in perception-based measures and will further investigate drivers and improve communications. Overall satisfaction increased from 59.3% to 79.4%, reflecting service improvements, especially in repairs.
- Members were asked to review the draft performance dashboard (Appendix 2) and provide feedback within 7–10 days; the dashboard will be updated and brought back with refreshed measures/data and benchmarking. Members requested additional regional breakdowns (including complaints) and further benchmarking (including use of Housemark), and sought clarity on ASB performance (e.g., cases per 1,000 homes).
- Members discussed benchmarking and confirmed that Housemark continues to be used; it was noted that meaningful comparisons can be affected by differences in provider size/scale and survey methodology. It was also noted that Housemark comparative reporting can be time lagged. It was agreed that a further peer comparison update (drawing on publicly available data, including TSMs and global accounts) will be brought to a future Customer Focus Committee meeting. Kevin Hornsby also agreed to bring the Annual Comparison Report from Housemark when available.

ACTION 10/26 CFC Members to submit feedback on the proposed metrics for analysis

ACTION 11/26 CFC Include comparative ASB data in future reports
ACTION 12/26 CFC Bring to Committee results of the Annual Review by Housemark when available

Agreed Committee: • Noted the details of the presentation and challenged several points that require feedback at future meetings

8. **<u>Agenda item 8 – Quarterly Customer Engagement Performance</u>**

Summary: Customer Engagement is embedded across the organisation and plays a key role in strengthening customer involvement and driving continuous improvement in service delivery. Customer Engagement is aligned to the Corporate Plan 2024–29 and the Customer Charters, supporting the delivery of improved customer experience, stronger communities and the effective use of resources. This report evidences progress against key strategic commitments, including performance monitoring, resident scrutiny, complaint handling, consultation and partnership working, demonstrating how customer feedback is used to address local neighbourhood issues and inform service improvement. The engagement activities detailed in this report reflect Ongo Homes' vision and values to create thriving, empowered communities where everyone feels valued and heard. By being open, actively listening to the customer voice and using feedback to inform decision making, customer engagement supports transparency, accountability and meaningful customer influence.

Discussion points/questions:

- Wendy Wolfe gave an update on key customer engagement activity during Oct–Dec, including work with the Publications Panel and Digital Tenants Group to review customer communications and improve website/Myhome accessibility. The complaints panel reviewed case studies and updated the complaints acknowledgement letter for clarity. Neighbourhood engagement events were reviewed and will be refreshed and aligned to neighbourhood plans. Youth engagement will continue via surveys and project/focus groups (a new officer starts 1 April with relevant experience), and Community Voice has introduced interim focus groups between bi-monthly meetings (including a March session on the consumer standards self-assessment). An update was provided on TPAS Exemplar re-accreditation activity and award shortlisting for the Ongo Carnival with the ceremony due in April.
- The Committee requested greater forward planning and improved communications for retirement living engagement, noting that some tenants had not received hand-delivered invitations and that correspondence did not include contact details or an alternative way to provide feedback for those unable to attend daytime events. It was confirmed that dates for upcoming scheme visits are not yet set and that the approach will be refreshed under the new retirement schemes manager including increased engagement in communal areas rather than relying solely on annual focus groups. Feedback was also noted regarding a recent service charge increase letter, which will be reviewed and the process improved for future communications.
- The Chair noted that, over the past year, joint working between the Customer Focus Committee and Community Voice has strengthened and that both groups now have a clearer understanding of their respective remits. It was acknowledged that any initial concerns within Community Voice about being "taken over" by the Customer Focus Committee have been resolved and that current collaboration is positive and effective. Members further noted that this demonstrates the strength of the tenant voice within Ongo and how it informs Board-level discussion. Thanks were recorded to the team for their support and work to date.

Agreed: Committee

- noted the progress made in delivering meaningful Customer Engagement activity during Q3 2025/26 and the positive impact this has had on service improvement, governance and customer experience.
- gained assurance that customer feedback is being effectively captured, considered and acted upon through established engagement and scrutiny structures, supporting compliance with Consumer Standards.

9. **<u>Agenda Item 9 – Neighbourhoods Approach Update</u>**

Summary: Kevin Hornsby gave a presentation of slides to update the Committee on the progress of the Neighbourhoods Approach to date.

Discussion points/questions:

- Kevin Hornsby gave an update on implementation of the neighbourhood model. The purpose of the change was noted as improving customer satisfaction and supporting compliance with regulatory standards, moving from a single operating approach to a regional structure (three regions and 29 neighbourhoods). It was noted that a neighbourhood officer role has been introduced as a single point of contact (combining allocations and tenancy functions) and that maintenance/repairs services have been aligned to the three regions. In response to questions, it was confirmed that repairs resources are organised by region, with trade teams allocated to each region (e.g., glaziers/roofers), and that resources may be flexed between regions where pressures arise.

- **Regional communications / maintenance model:** Members noted the move to regional communications (including regional stories/updates and introductions to new regional maintenance managers). An update was provided on the maintenance regional model (live 1 September), including strengthened supervision/management, creation of a dedicated damp, mould and disrepair team (ahead of Awaab's Law), and a focus on flexible working across repairs/voids. It was noted that while re-let performance has marginally deteriorated, repairs performance has improved significantly since August, with reduced average completion times and lower work-in-progress across all regions.
- Members reiterated the request of including sector averages/benchmarks in performance reporting. It was noted that the Regulator's published sector benchmark for repairs work-in-progress (WIP) as a percentage of annualised repairs indicates a median of c.5%. Members noted that, even if Ongo achieves its current target position, this would equate to c.8–8.5%, and therefore further reductions would be required to align more closely with the sector median. It was agreed that benchmarking will continue to be strengthened over the coming months, including ensuring like-for-like comparisons and reviewing whether performance measures are defined/recorded consistently with the wider sector.
- The Committee reviewed updates to the neighbourhood model, including improved customer feedback systems and a new service improvement forum. Administrative tasks have been centralised, allowing officers more time in communities, and triage support has helped lower workloads. Satisfaction rates increased from 57.7% to 79.4% since September, and the model will be formally reviewed. Plans include creating three regional neighbourhood plans based on customer feedback, refining methods, and setting measures to track visibility and data-driven resource planning. The model is also being recognised as sector best practice with other associations expressing an interest.
- Members discussed how success of the neighbourhood model will be defined and measured from a tenant perspective, noting the model is innovative and a significant organisational investment. It was suggested that clear, tenant-focused success criteria and practical measures be agreed (e.g., visibility/recognition of key contacts and service standards), and that feedback loops should ensure issues raised by tenants are acted upon. Early positive feedback was noted (including improved regional communications and increased awareness of named local managers/staff), while acknowledging it is too early to evidence full impact and that a longer review period may be required.

Agreed: The Committee • Noted and understood the presentation and raised any appropriate questions.

10. **<u>Agenda Item 10 – Complaints</u>**

Summary: Becky Johns gave a verbal update the on two Ombudsman maladministration cases with documentation provided in the pack to support.

Discussion points/questions:

- The Committee received an introduction to two Housing Ombudsman determinations (one maladministration and one service failure/redress) and the associated lessons-learned work. Members were taken through a case concerning cracked floors and walls reported from the start of the tenancy (October 2022) and again in January 2023, and issues with complaint handling (delays, lack of updates and failure to escalate when requested), including concerns about heating costs and the impact on wellbeing. The Ombudsman found maladministration in both repairs handling and complaint handling, and ordered an apology, £1,200 compensation and an evidence review regarding heating costs.
- **Move-in / repairs communications:** Members noted that issues often arise at move-in and that feedback given to officers does not always result in a clear feedback loop and confirmation of actions. Members also raised the need to capture vulnerabilities/reasonable adjustments at sign-up. Management confirmed a post-let checklist is in place and that vulnerability information is captured, with improvements enabling neighbourhood officers to record details on iPads and tenants to update/request adjustments via Myhome. Members further reported that tenants still chase repairs updates and that multi-visit repairs can show as "complete" in Myhome; management agreed to review repairs tracking and strengthen proactive communications via the repairs customer journey work.

ACTION 13/26 CFC Look at ways to make the customer journey on MyHome more accessible/clearer to be able to track progress

- A member queried the clarity of the complaint timeline within the second case study and requested that key dates/sequence be made clearer. The Committee also discussed the decant process, noting the need to minimise disruption and avoid leaving tenants in limbo when repairs take an extended period; members suggested that, where appropriate, tenants should be offered a choice to remain in the decant accommodation rather than being required to move back, with confirmation that removal costs and reasonable support (including for vulnerabilities) would be provided. Concerns were also raised regarding historic failures to action Stage 2 escalation requests.
- Members agreed that the decant process should include a clear decision point and, where appropriate, offer tenants a choice to remain in decant accommodation. It was confirmed that decants should be supported by clear communication/single point of contact and that reasonable expenses will be covered. Management also provided assurance that Stage 2 escalation requests are now being actioned in line with the Complaint Handling Code, including where the tenant requests escalation without providing reasons.
- Matt Sugden, Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC), provided positive feedback from a recent complaints/lessons-learned meeting and welcomed the open culture of learning and improvement. A second Housing Ombudsman case (March 2025) was noted (damp and mould), with findings of no maladministration and reasonable redress; redress included £350 compensation (already offered) and an offer to replace the carpet/inspect the bedroom if required, alongside clearer written schedules of works and expectation management. Assurance was provided that the complaint handling met required timescales.
- Members clarified whether the proposal was for case-by-case discretion (allowing tenants to choose to remain in decant accommodation) or a formal

policy change. It was agreed this would be taken away for consideration, with a follow-up action recorded.

ACTION 14/26 CFC Look at how we can improve the decant procedure and the options of the tenant being offered to return to their property or staying permanently in the decant property

Agreed: The Committee

- Noted the explanations and lessons learned from the update and raised any appropriate questions in order to gain assurance.

11. **Agenda Item 11 – Update from NHF Conference Breakout Session**

Summary: Judith Tomlinson gave a verbal update from her session at the NHF Conference.

Discussion points/questions:

- The Committee received a report from the National Housing Federation Conference breakout session. Judith Tomlinson, Chair, attended as an invited speaker and outlined Ongo's approach to complaints and tenant involvement, including scrutiny arrangements and how learning and recommendations are captured. It was noted that recent improvements include an updated complaints acknowledgement template and ensuring responses reference vulnerabilities and reasonable adjustments where applicable. Judith also shared learning from discussions with a Housing Ombudsman representative regarding delays in Ombudsman determinations, and noted positive feedback from the TPAS Chair regarding Ongo's tenant involvement and accreditation. The Committee noted the value of conference attendance for Board/committee members, and received an introduction to the Service Improvement Forum and its role in tracking and implementing learning from complaints:
  Service Improvement Forum meets quarterly to review complaints themes across service areas, agree actions and track implementation to prevent recurrence; service heads attend, with oversight from the Executive team. It was confirmed that outcomes and evidence of implementation will be reported to the Committee through the quarterly complaints report. Members noted the importance of this approach in demonstrating learning, transparency and an audit trail in line with Housing Ombudsman expectations.
- Judith also commented that Ongo's complaints approach and outcomes were well received, including improved transactional complaints satisfaction (20.4% to 51.2%) and rising monthly TSM satisfaction (TP09) to 51%. Thanks were recorded to Becky Johns for support in preparing the presentation content and case study. Members also noted positive external feedback on the Judith's contributions.

Agreed: Committee

- Noted the update.

12. **Agenda Item 12 – Update on BDA Training**

Summary: The Members of the Committee undergoing the training with BDA gave an update on what they had learnt from the course.

Discussion points/questions:

- Tenant members provided positive feedback on the Board Development Agency training, noting it was valuable and improved understanding of social housing and governance; it was also noted that BDA has referenced Ongo as an example of good practice. Members noted four modules have been completed with one remaining, and that recorded sessions are helpful for those unable to attend live. It was agreed that a short feedback questionnaire will be issued and that learning will be captured via the skills matrix; officers will consider whether the programme should form part of future induction, noting optional finance content was not included as it is outside the Committee's remit (risk having been covered separately).

Agreed: Committee:

13. Agenda Item 13 – Policies/Frameworks for Approval

Summary: Several Policies/Frameworks were presented to the Committee for approval.

13.1 Customer Engagement Framework: The Committee considered the policies framework item and reviewed the Customer Engagement Framework (previously reviewed by Community Voice and signed off by the Leadership Team). Members requested that Community Voice be explicitly referenced within the Roles and Responsibilities section for clarity; it was agreed this will be amended.

ACTION 15/26 CFC Add Community Voice into section 3 as a separate entity

13.2 Vulnerable Persons Policy: Committee had no questions/comments on this policy

13.3 Tenancy Management Policy: The Committee noted the policy review and a member sought clarification regarding the position on converting a sole tenancy to a joint tenancy. Becky Johns explained that the organisation has removed the option to add a party to an existing tenancy in order to protect the original tenant's security of tenure, as joint and several tenancies can be terminated by one party and have led to adverse outcomes in some cases. It was confirmed that the policy does not prevent someone living with the tenant; it only restricts changes to the legal tenancy, and succession provisions apply where relevant. Members also noted that elements of the policy are time-bound in light of forthcoming legislative change (including the Renters' Rights Act), and that the policy will require review/update ahead of commencement (noted as April 2027). Members also sought clarification on the term "mesne profit". It was explained that this refers to a use and occupation charge applied where someone is living in a property without a legal tenancy while checks are completed (e.g., succession enquiries, post-termination occupation, suspected unlawful occupation/subletting). It was noted that rent is not charged in these circumstances to avoid implying a tenancy. The volume of cases and timescales to resolve them are monitored, with outcomes being either regularisation to a tenancy or the occupant being required to leave.

13.4 Maintenance Policy & Customer Journey: A member queried whether the priority categories (including a 12-week category) are clear to tenants and provide sufficient transparency. It was clarified that the 12-week category is intended for complex structural works (e.g., reroofing) and supports tracking against requirements, and that the damp and mould policy should be read alongside the wider response times. Members noted difficulty finding information on the website and provided feedback on search/accessibility; this will be considered as part of ongoing transparency and website information improvements. It was agreed that the damp and mould policy and the emergency repairs definition/table will be updated to confirm that damp and mould emergencies will be responded to within 24 hours.

Agreed: Committee
- Noted and approved the policies/frameworks after discussing any relevant issues and recommended any changes

14. **Agenda item 14 – Governance Update**

Summary: The National Housing Federation (NHF) Code of Governance 2020 sets standards for housing associations to achieve excellent governance through four core principles:

1. *Mission and values*
2. *Strategy and delivery*
3. *Board effectiveness*
4. *Control and assurance*

Under Principle 3, Boards must regularly review their composition, skills, diversity and overall performance, including annual self-assessments and formal independent reviews at least every three years. The code mandates a full, rigorous and documented appraisal process for all individual board members and its committees.

Discussion points/questions:
- Gemma Willey gave an update on the appraisal process and were reminded of the appraisal policy. It was confirmed that the governance team will coordinate the process and support members and the Chair, with skills forms and 360 feedback to be completed by Friday, ahead of appraisal meetings being scheduled for w/c 16th March 2026.

Agreed: Committee
- Members noted the information provided concerning relevant Governance matters including the upcoming appraisals.

With no further business the meeting closed at 12.20pm

Signed by Chair: Judith Tomlinson Date: 10 March 2026

As a true and correct record of the Ongo Homes Board meeting held on 10 March 2026