

## COMMUNITY VOICE MINUTES

Held at 1pm on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2025  
The Arc, blended style (face to face & via MS Teams)



### **Present:**

**Community Voice Members:** Jill Milner (Chair), Anita James, Eddie Stringer, Stewart Pearson, Keith Lumbers, Judith Tomlinson, Eric Gosling, Tami Reeve, Jim Newcombe

**Ongo Staff:** Karen Cowan, Wendy Wolfe, Jo Sugden, Kevin Hornsby, Steve Ellard, Jan Williams, Mark Perrin, Erica Sanderson, Ollie Mortimer, Gemma Willey

**Also Present:** Graham Lloyd (observer), Bobby Smith (observer), Angela Smith (observer), Charmaine Mande (trainee board member)

### **1. Welcome, Apologies and Housekeeping**

- The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were given.
- Apologies were received from Heather Gregory, Paul Pearson, Rhiannon Jeans, Dawn Johnson, Tima Omari, Nicola Haywood-Cleverly (Board) and Matt Sugden (Board).
- Members were reminded that they could report personal issues in the general enquiries log if they have previously been reported but haven't received an update since.
- There were no planned fire drills, and the emergency exits were shown.

### **2. Minutes & Actions From Previous Meeting**

- Tami and Eddie proposed and seconded that the minutes were a true and accurate record of the meeting held in December.
- Wendy provided an update from the actions, with one outstanding that referred to the December meeting where a member asked why a job wasn't showing on the MyHome app. Wendy said that further details are required to progress, e.g. address it was for. No members at the January meeting could provide a response.

### **3. Treasurer's Report**

- Wendy explained that Dawn had resigned as Treasurer, therefore the CV accounts will be collected and the CV budget will move back under Customer Engagement (CE). Any future expenses for members need to be submitted to CE on a monthly basis and can be included with other travel expenses they may claim for other engagement meetings.
  - Several members asked about outstanding payments from December, and asked if they needed to send these to Customer Engagement. These had already been submitted to Dawn so don't need to be re-submitted. CE will arrange for the payments to be made direct from the finance team to individual members.
  - Another member raised an issue with a taxi journey to and from the December meeting. Wendy assured them that all journeys are checked when the invoices are received, to ensure everything is correct before payment is processed.

### **4. Board Observers**

- Meetings taking place via the Board Room at Ongo House or via Microsoft Teams:
  - Ongo Homes Board meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> January at 2pm.

- Ongo Communities Board meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> January at 2pm.
- Three CV members can attend either or both meetings. Those interested to inform the Customer Engagement Team.
- If members wish to observe digitally via Teams, then they can't be sent the paperwork to their personal email address for security purposes. Members were encouraged to attend in-person if possible, as the paperwork would be loaded onto iPads for them and made available at the meetings.

## DISCUSSION ITEMS

### 5. Executive Update – Kevin Hornsby and Steve Ellard

- **Christmas Opening Hours** – Ongo offices were open on 27<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> December to ensure services continued to be provided for tenants during the festive period. There were 766 calls, over 250 digital contacts, 302 new repairs logged and over 200 repairs completed. A couple of safeguarding referrals were also resolved.
  - Becky Johns (Customer Experience Manager) will be leading on wider tenant consultation on whether tenants think Ongo should remain open in future years. A full report will then be presented to CV.
  - A member expressed their satisfaction at the number of jobs completed, and the importance of carrying on the good work.
- **Complaints and new Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC)** – work has continued on complaints and improving the service. Since the last meeting there has been two service failure cases from the Housing Ombudsman, the recommendations are being reviewed and implemented.
  - A member queried what areas the cases related to. One was anti-social behaviour (ASB) and the other was relating to a tree issue. These could have been avoided with improved processes put in place, and learning from these cases will lead to future improvements.
  - Matt Sugden (Board member) has recently taken on the role of MRC (Member with Responsibility for Complaints) and was inducted in December. He will attend a future CV meeting and a Complaints Panel meeting and will work with Kevin and Becky on a new quarterly complaints report.
- **Sport, Health and Housing** – in January Ongo launched a partnership with Doncaster Rovers Football Club, which included staff and three customers attending the game. In September they will be launching a similar project with Scunthorpe Rugby Club, building on the partnerships already established with Scunthorpe United and Grimsby Town.
- **Changes within Property Services** – Jordan Barr has started as the new Head of Maintenance & Building Safety, and Adam Quickenden has been recruited as a Maintenance Operations Manager. A vacancy is due to be advertised for a new Property Services Support Manager.
  - Work is ongoing to review and improve the service for tenants. This includes a health check of the planning system. This has led to many recommendations being worked on, a review of the Lettable Standard and a review of diagnosing jobs to ensure maximum efficiency.
  - Between August – December 2024 there was a gradual increase in the number of jobs completed in target and jobs completed on the first visit. Based on the gaps identified in the service, themes of work with longer waiting times and where

improvements could be made, Ongo will be recruiting 10 additional in-house staff. Property Services Panel were involved in reviewing and identifying these themes. The interview process for the new roles will begin soon.

- Plastering and bricklaying are two areas that are being particularly focused on, as these are not currently working how they should be and there are large waiting times for these jobs. Satisfaction levels are quite high for most trades, but they are much lower at the moment for these two trades.
- A member asked if these are full-time roles, Steve confirmed that they are. Ongo are aware that they are spending too much on contractors, though it has been reducing recently and will continue to lessen with the new in-house staff.
- Following a query about flexibility and supervision in the role, Jordan will be tasked with exploring further and ensuring that the operatives have everything in place so they can help to deliver an improved service.
- A member explained a recent issue with the out of hours service not having anyone available to approve a decant request and the way they were spoken to on the phone.
- **ACTION:** further details to be provided and then investigate.
- An issue was also raised about My Home and not being able to report certain jobs.
- **ACTION:** look further into.

#### **6. Governance update – Jo Sugden**

- The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) regulate registered providers (such as Ongo Homes) on their governance, financial viability and the new consumer standards which have been publicised over the past year. Inspections against these consumer standards are carried out to gain assurance they are being met.
  - An external auditor, DTP, did a recent mock inspection that mirrored what the RSH's inspection will be. This included observing a CV meeting and independently speaking to members after the main meeting.
  - DTP have since issued their report and findings. They identified areas where Ongo were performing well and areas for improvement. Overall, they feel that Ongo are in a strong position.
  - They were complimentary about CV in the report, including the chairing of meetings. Suggestions for improvements to the group are already being implemented.
  - A member raised a query about point 4.4.3 in the report. This recommendation has been taken on board and rather than included the action plan at the end of the meeting minutes as before, a separate document containing the action plan has since been created and ongoing actions will remain on the action plan until completion. This mirrors the way action plans are used for Board meetings.
  - Another member asked about the action included under point 4.4.8. This is a proposed improvement for the staff member who has presented their report to hand back to the chair to sum up and take a vote if for decision. A vote of all present members will then take place as normal.
  - It was agreed to include the number of votes for and against in future minutes, which will improve transparency and record-keeping.
  - Wendy gave updates on the actions that were included at the end of the report.
  - Reminders have been provided through the internal Managers Forum and to Heads of Service about ensuring the customer voice impact section of each report is

completed. They have also been reminded that all report authors highlight what customer voice has been sought and how this has provided an impact, or what is going to be done as a result of the feedback.

- From February onwards, the Customer Engagement activity reports will outline what the customer voice is telling Ongo and how this has been used to influence services.
- Updates will be provided at future CV meetings, along with regular updates in the tenant magazine (Key News) and on the Ongo website, about how feedback (from CV, the Complaints Panel and other feedback is used for learning and influencing services.
- Every opportunity will be taken to demonstrate how customer feedback has been used to influence and improve services e.g. updates at CV meetings, within reports, Key News, website and social media.
- Karen added that proposals for the Customer Focus Committee (the name had been recommended by CV) had been approved at Board. Three tenants / leaseholders/ shared owners will be recruited from the wider tenant base. A tenant Board member will chair the Committee, and there is a guaranteed space for the CV chair. There will be a majority of tenants on the group. A promotional advert has been designed and is due to be shared on all platforms towards the end of January. The closing date for applications will be in February, with recruitment at the end of February, before the first informal meeting of the Committee to take place in March.
- A focus group will take place with CV members to discuss the impact and to shape the future of CV.

**ACTION:** to be arranged and details shared.

#### **7. Rent and Service Charge report – Mark Perrin**

- The associated reports had been included in the meeting paperwork to provide further information. These included the report that will go to Board for final approval after discussion with CV, and a specific item on communal electricity service charges.
  - In summary, the proposal was to increase all existing social rents and Affordable rents (including all Supported) by 2.7%. The figure is based on the rate of Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation as of September 2024 + 1%. It will take effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025.
  - The proposal to raise rents is due to financial pressure from inflation, plus a separate rent reduction and rent cap over previous years. Ongo wish to continue offering the range of services, support and opportunities to all customers, and to improve its offer.
  - All Affordable rents will continue to be rebased when a property becomes void to 80% of Market rent or Formula rent (whichever is the greater) as directed in the Rent Standard.
  - It was also recommended to remove the current policy of reviewing Affordable rents at the five-year anniversary of the tenancy.
  - A review of the communal electricity service charges has also taken place along with an external audit. Due to several reasons, including the continued increase of electricity prices and the potential impact to tenants, two proposals were put forward to CV.

- The chair asked members to vote for either applying the full increase from April 2025, or to apply the full increase with a cap to protect those tenants most affected from excessive increases. The cap would either be £5 or £10.
- Following a query, it was explained that there will be a minimal impact for those who receive Housing Benefit. Self-payers will be affected more but, if anybody struggles, then support will be available.
- A member asked if the 2.7% rent increase includes garage rents, Mark confirmed it is included.
- Members present unanimously favoured the second proposal and a £5 cap to be applied.
- Members also unanimously favoured the 2.7% rent increase. The feedback will be provided to Board for final approval.

#### **8. Communities Outcomes (presentation) – Jan Williams**

- A copy of the presentation will be shared with all members following the meeting.  
**ACTION:** send to all members.
  - The Communities offer is split into three areas – Community Development (which includes the two community hubs, The Arc and Viking Centre, plus raising aspirations through youth mentoring), the Skills and Personal Development team (employment support), plus the Enterprise and Economic Social Value team (wellbeing support including Ongo Talk).
  - There is also Ongo Recruitment, which is the internal social enterprise recruitment agency for customers and businesses to benefit from.
  - Jan went into further detail about funding, and explained how it is now more difficult to access external funding compared to previous years.
  - Information was provided about the Ongo Journey to Work, which customers can access at any part of the journey depending on their individual needs.
  - Ongo Talk is the counselling service which is free to Ongo tenants and their family members, plus those on the Journey to Work. There is a small fee for non-Ongo tenants to access the service. There are currently five paid counsellors, and some students in the final year of their Counselling degree also help out.
  - Ongo Recruitment is paid for by the revenue that they generate, any profits are fed back into Communities so more support can be provided to more customers. They also have a contract with Ongo Homes to fill all the internal vacancies that they have. 54 jobs were filled last year.
  - The Viking Centre (Barton) offers a range of support and activities to help local people and families.
  - There is also the annual Community Grants initiative which offers funding to local groups and good causes to benefit tenants and the community. Funding is supplied by Ashbridge Roofing, Hales & Coultas and the Boiler Fund. Applications are due to open again in February.
  - Current projects include the Improving Lives project and Stop Smoking (which has supported 23 people to quit so far).
  - Stats and figures, including targets and outcomes, were shared. Jan emphasised the importance of the offer being consistent for all tenants, whether they are based in Scunthorpe or out of town. The services are all available either in-person, digitally or via phone calls.

- It's important that Ongo measure the work that they do and the impact it has, so an example of Social Value was provided. For every £1 spent at The Arc last year, the social return was £20.58 (the national average is between £5 - £9).
- A member said it is amazing what Ongo do, and that there's a lot of tenants who may not be aware of what their rent goes towards. It is imperative to continue raising awareness across all platforms of the support and opportunities available.
- Another member asked, with the expense of using the Cole Street (Scunthorpe) premises, if it would be more beneficial and cost-effective to have drop-ins at local hubs throughout the region. Jan explained that the pros, cons and potential impact would need to be looked further into. A fellow member queried why the drop-in sessions had stopped at The Arc. Jan said she would check and update the member.

## INFORMATION ITEMS

### 9. Quarterly assurance review (update) – Erica Sanderson

- Erica had attended a previous meeting to consult on and influence the new Corporate Plan. The three objectives (being a great landlord, being customer focused and to grow and be sustainable) include strategies on how these will be achieved. However, with it being a five-year plan (2024-2029), there are annual plans which were agreed by the Leadership Team with quarterly assurance reviews taking place as part of the monitoring progress.
  - Due to the Plan being agreed later than originally planned, the report and appendixes in the meeting pack included a review of the six months from April 2024 – September 2024. The information is progress against the annual targets, and then the October 2024 – March 2025 review will be delivered to CV in their April meeting.
  - Erica gave further information about the abbreviations, including the Customer Resolution Team and Customer Experience Team. In the included appendixes, green meant that the target is being achieved, amber meant it is on target for the end of the financial year and red meant that it is not on target.
  - Items 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 of the covering report, along with appendix 2, detailed progress against the annual targets, areas that have achieved and areas to be improved.
  - A member explained how they are sometimes asked for their feedback on a service that hasn't yet taken place. Steve agreed, work has taken place to reduce these but some are still occurring so work will continue to resolve the issue. This had been raised at Property Services Panel and CV, so Karen asked for details to be included as a 'You said, we are doing' article in Key News.  
**ACTION:** to be included in the next edition.
  - Another member asked if Ongo had consulted with other housing associations about successful methods to get feedback from those who answer surveys that they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. It was agreed that more focus needs to be given on reaching out to those tenants, and how to communicate about the results from the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM).
  - A member asked how those who don't have digital access can complete surveys and provide feedback. Last year the TSM surveys were sent by text message but, for this year, those without digital who have basic English will get a written survey. Those who struggle with literacy will get a phone call, so there will targeted communication

based on the individual's preference.

- There will be wider communication planned for Key News, website and social media to make the wider tenant base aware of progress against the targets.

#### **10. Customer Engagement Activity Update (verbal)**

- **Tenant Inspectors** – Ollie provided an update. 27 inspections were completed in November and December (one green space, eight estate, 15 ready-to-let homes, two retirement living and one high-rise). None were rated red, one amber, 22 green and four gold star. The group are due to be involved in a mystery shop exercise, and a networking session with Hull City Council's multi-storey living group has also been arranged for March. Jo asked for future updates to include specific outcomes from the inspections so that CV are made aware.

#### **11. Customer Engagement Updates – Wendy Wolfe**

- The report had been included in the meeting paperwork.
- The three expressions of interest in December were in attendance at this meeting, CE will contact them afterwards to see if they would like to become full member of CV.  
**ACTION:** CE to contact observers.
- Karen explained that she had recently tasked PR with reviewing some older document letter templates that Ongo still use. These will be shared with the Publications Panel for their feedback.
- A member asked for more information about Housing Perks. It is an app that tenants can download for free that offers a range of discounts on many brands and high street stores. Kevin explained that a specific session or 1:1 support can be provided to any tenant who would like to be shown how to sign up and use it. Another member had been involved in a recent video promoting the platform, which is due to be shared online over the coming weeks. An attendee raised that they are unable to register for Housing Perks as it doesn't recognise the reference number.  
**ACTION:** to be investigated.

#### **12. Any Other Business including Reflection on Meeting**

- A member asked what Ongo's process was for bees when work was being carried out, or if an issue with bees at a property was reported.  
**ACTION:** specific details to be sent and to be looked into.
- Another attendee raised a query about Ongo's responsibility towards gritting during the winter season. There is a winter weather plan in place which covers certain areas (including the retirement schemes and high-rise flats). Salt bins have been provided in several locations, and the attendee asked if they could have one where they live so residents could grit their own area. Kevin suggested an item is brought to the next meeting about the current approach, Ongo's responsibilities and what CV members thoughts were.  
**ACTION:** Agenda item for Winter Weather Plan (Neighbourhood Services) at the next meeting.
- The March CV meeting has changed slightly. It will take place on Tuesday 12 March, 9.30am – 12.30pm, with a buffet lunch afterwards between 12.30pm – 1.30pm as it will be Karen's final CV meeting before retirement. Names for the buffet and any dietary requirements will be taken at February's meeting

**ACTION:** send updated list of 2025 meeting dates.

- An update will be provided at the next meeting about the plans for Karen's Head of Service role after she retires.
- All agreed it had been an informative and worthwhile meeting.

**13. Date and Time of Next Meeting**

- Tuesday, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2025 at The Arc, 9.30am to 12.30pm.