

# BUSINESS PLAN

## 2011-2012

[www.freebridge.org.uk](http://www.freebridge.org.uk)

DEVELOPING HOMES AND CREATING OPPORTUNITIES  
FOR PEOPLE WITHIN WEST NORFOLK

**Freebridge**  
COMMUNITY HOUSING

THE FREEBRIDGE 2011 TENANT AWARDS  
HELD AT KING'S LYNN TOWN HALL



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# BUILDING ON OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

As we look to the future and the delivery of our business plan objectives for the coming year, we have achieved many successes which have allowed us to develop into a robust and effective organisation.

The last year has seen us continue to enhance our services so that we respond to our customers' needs. Customer care was a big theme for 2010-2011 with all staff taking part in the Mary Gober™ customer service training. This customer focus was further reinforced by the establishment of our First Contact Centre. The commitment that we have made to customer care is clearly having an impact with the latest customer satisfaction figures revealing a rise to 88.2% from 79.9% in 2010. We have also been delighted that staff satisfaction has increased to 81% and we will continue to value and support our staff.

Another highlight from the past twelve months was the completion of a new

development of sustainable homes for local people at Great Massingham. This was our first new build development commissioned by us. We are also set to construct a further 34 new homes, supported by a £1.4m grant from the Homes & Communities Agency.

In the last five years we have improved around 3,700 homes and built or acquired 74 new properties. We are investing around £8m in the local economy annually and we employ around 200 staff across our sites. We are working with local residents, our partners and renowned designer Wayne Hemingway on the regeneration of Hillington Square. We want to make it a better place to live, work and visit. And we are working with our partners to meet the needs of different communities. An example of this is our work in helping to set up the Norfolk Credit Union in West Norfolk.

We are having a big impact in West Norfolk, bringing real benefits to communities.



# LOOKING AHEAD

The purpose of this plan is to set out the vision for the organisation to 2014 and demonstrate how the strategic objectives support its delivery.

The original tenants' promises plan is due to be completed in 2012 and therefore the Board decided to conduct a more in depth review this year resulting in a new three year plan of which this is the first year.

Following discussions with customers and partners, and in the context of a new national framework, the Board has reaffirmed its vision and values, but refocused its plan on four strategic objectives:


- Improving Satisfaction
- Community Focussed
- Appreciating Assets
- Increasing Capacity

Feedback from our tenants has provided emphasis on improving both customer satisfaction and the repairs and maintenance

services; these aspirations form the 'local offer' and they feature strongly within the plan. Our commitment to our Customer Care Strategy 'Ask, Listen, Act and Learn' remains crucial in the development of our values.

The Board's aspiration to provide much needed affordable housing remains strong and in a more challenging economic environment, the need to maximise our capacity through the best use of our assets has never been greater.

We hope you find this document informative and we welcome any feedback on its content.



Tony Hall  
Chief Executive

THE EXECUTIVE TEAM - TONY HALL,  
ABIGAIL ELLIS & SEAN KENT



# INCREASING SATISFACTION

We are committed to providing services which continue to improve and put our tenants at the heart of everything we do. We are committed to developing an organisational culture which listens to what our tenants want and seeks to meet and exceed those expectations.

There is a strong link between 'staff satisfaction' and 'customer satisfaction', and unless our people are happy and motivated they will be unable to perform to their potential and deliver excellent services. Therefore, in order to achieve our mission and demonstrate our values, we need to develop an organisational culture where employees will be motivated to work with enthusiasm and commitment and deliver high performance through appropriate actions and behaviours.

We will measure the implementation of this objective through independent feedback from our employees and customers.

ASK  
LISTEN  
ACT  
LEARN

FIRST CONTACT CENTRE MANAGER CLAIRE GOFF WITH ADVISOR LOUISE THOMPSON



# INCREASING SATISFACTION

## ACHIEVEMENTS 2010/11

- 79% tenant satisfaction with views being taken into account
- First stage of Tenant Empowerment Service Review completed
- 81% staff satisfaction
- Revised pay and benefits package for Property Services Department combined with new appraisal systems
- Completion of Mary Gober Customer Excellence training, introduction of Mary Gober coaching and cascade induction scheme in place.

## ACTIVITIES 2011/12

- Implement the Local Offer to tenants
- Reduce complaints response time
- Re-launch Mystery Shopping
- Establish Tenant Panel
- Develop Mary Gober training
- Development plan for First Contact Centre
- 'Behavioural Influencers' pilots
- Revise customer profiling survey.

## TARGET FOR 2011/12

- |                                      |
|--------------------------------------|
| • 90% Customer Satisfaction          |
| • Average days lost to sickness 10.7 |

# COMMUNITY FOCUSED

It is our vision to support communities through working with people in ways which will help them to have a greater influence over decisions which affect their lives. We understand that in order to achieve this aspiration we need to work in partnership to improve our residents' economic and social well-being.

In the early years of investment we have focussed on the requirement to bring our properties up to the Decent Homes Standard. It is equally important that we create neighbourhoods in which people want to live.

Where we feel other organisations are working to deliver services that support our vision we will find ways to work in partnership to create mutual benefits.

CHILDREN ENJOYING THE NEW PLAY AREA AT THE DISCOVERY CENTRE



# COMMUNITY FOCUSSED

## ACHIEVEMENTS 2010/11

- 88.2% customer satisfaction achieved
- New customer care strategy developed
- Every member of staff taken part in Mary Gober customer service training
- Service review completed for Welfare and Support
- Local service standards agreed.

## ACTIVITIES 2011/12

- Community Development Strategy in place
- Programme for tenancy visits pilot
- Revised Financial and Digital Inclusion strategy
- Hillington Square pilot starts on site
- Existing Local Charters are working well and new ones supported
- Agreed approach to estate walkabouts
- Tenants benefit from relationship with local organisations.

## TARGET FOR 2011/12

- Conclude tenancy visits pilots (500 tenants)
- 85% satisfaction with views taken into account

# APPRECIATING ASSETS

We are committed to developing an effective Asset Management Strategy which will guide us in developing and improving our housing stock through a range of different approaches. Through improved asset management, we will be able to make sure that our stock remains sustainable and continues to be a valuable investment.

Our vision is to develop new affordable housing where need and opportunity exist. Through increased understanding of our existing housing stock, we will be able to identify where affordable housing is required, and meet this need through new development.

We are committed to improving our tenants' overall satisfaction in the quality of their homes. To help to increase this satisfaction, we will seek to maximise energy efficiency measures within tenants' homes.

OUR WORK WITH HEMINGWAY DESIGN AND MAE ARCHITECTS WILL CONTINUE TO MOVE FORWARD



# APPRECIATING ASSETS

## ACHIEVEMENTS 2010/11

- 22 new homes constructed
- 85% of stock decent
- An Asset Management Strategy underway
- Research carried out into successful mergers
- Hillington Square project moving forward with appointment of architects.

## ACTIVITIES 2011/12

- New Asset Management Strategy approved
- Under-occupancy Strategy agreed
- 18 new homes
- Decent Homes Programme on target
- European Union bid for retrofit project is successful and work has commenced
- Plan wider energy efficiency pilots.

## TARGET FOR 2011/12

- |                    |
|--------------------|
| • 95% Decent Homes |
| • 18 New Homes     |

# INCREASING CAPACITY

Our vision is to achieve cost reductions across the organisation. To enable us to do this, we will develop a clear understanding of our operating costs. We will seek to maximise our income, and carefully review our costs to maintain affordable services. Where appropriate and where opportunities arise, we will look to generate further income through offering commercial services.

Trained and knowledgeable staff are absolutely crucial to the overall success of the organisation. We will continue to ensure that we have a skilled work force through improving internal capacity.

A robust governance structure enables Freebridge to deliver effectively and efficiently and as such, we will continue to improve our governance and support the development of our board.

FREEBRIDGE'S AWARD WINNING  
APPRENTICE DANIEL WOODHOUSE



# INCREASING CAPACITY

## ACHIEVEMENTS 2010/11

- First Contact Centre set up and functioning effectively
- Website review carried out ahead of redevelopment of the site
- Communications strategy produced and being implemented
- Annual health and safety plan produced
- Sheltered housing service charges implemented
- Stock condition survey update carried out
- £330,000 out performance
- Complied with funders' requirements
- Explored new funding opportunities
- Efficiencies delivered.

## ACTIVITIES 2011/12

- Identify cost reductions
- Agree and implement succession planning and skills development programmes
- Re-shape Sheltered Housing service
- Build capacity to deliver stock management opportunities
- Implement PSD Business Plan
- Develop excellence in governance.

## TARGET FOR 2011/12

- |                                  |
|----------------------------------|
| • 200 New Skills                 |
| • £333,000 Cost Reduction Target |

# GOVERNANCE

We remain committed to putting customers at the heart of what we do by offering opportunities for tenants to get involved in shaping services.

In addition to tenant representation on the Board, we are in the process of setting up a Tenant Panel which will provide a new formal structure for tenant involvement. The Panel will provide an independent forum for tenants from different backgrounds and different communities in West Norfolk to look at which key areas of Freebridge's work could be improved. The Panel will be linked to the Board by giving, and receiving, feedback.

Our Local Standards were launched in 2011 and they underline our commitment to tenants and what they can expect from us. We will monitor the delivery of the Local Standards through working with the Tenant Panel.

The Tenant Empowerment Service Review will allow us to revise and develop the ways in which we involve our tenants. It is our aim to provide meaningful opportunities for involvement which meet the diverse needs of our tenants.

Our voluntary board members are made up of tenants, independents and councillors. A board review has been carried out and we will continue to support and develop the Board so that it can continue to function effectively and efficiently.

# FINANCE

Freebridge Community Housing has a committed £110 million long term funding facility with the Royal Bank of Scotland.

Although the drawn facility was only £57 million at the start of April 2011 we expect to borrow most of the remaining £53 million over the next five years. The plan currently includes funding for the remainder of the improvement programme and for 228 new homes to be built. With the continued increased costs of funding we are working to make the best use of the benefits of our current funding for as long as possible as the pricing of any new loan will be a key issue for future development.

The plan continues to be tight financially but also cautious due to the residual uncertainties around the costs associated with regenerating Hillington Square and the remaining sheltered housing schemes. The key risk for the plan is increased maintenance costs, with rising interest rates or a reduction in future rent increases also having a significant impact. We therefore continue to proactively manage these and other risks within our plan.

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