



Board Meeting 17 January 2011

Minutes and Associated Reports

Developing Homes and Creating Opportunities for People within West Norfolk

FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING (FCH) BOARD

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Board held on
Monday 17 January 2011 at 6.30pm in the
Conference Room, Juniper House,
Austin Street, King's Lynn**

PRESENT:

Ray Johnson (Chairman)
Matthew Brown
Nigel Donohue
Irene Gammon
Bill Guyan
Geoffrey Hipperson
Michael Jervis
Paul Leader
Colin Sampson

IN ATTENDANCE:

Tony Hall	-	Chief Executive
Sean Kent	-	Executive Director (Resources)
Abigail Ellis	-	Executive Director (Operations)
Jo Whaley	-	Assistant Director of Human Resources and Governance (minute numbers 01/11 - 08/11)
Michelle Playford	-	Assistant Director of Communications and Customer Engagement (minute numbers 01/11 - 11/11)
Angus MacQueen	-	Company Secretary

01/11 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Lesley Bambridge and Sylvia Calver.

02/11 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2010 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

03/11 MATTERS ARISING

(a) Serious Fire (Minute Number 165/10(a))

It was noted that an email had been circulated to all Board members giving an update on the situation relating to the serious fire at Ten Mile Bank.

(b) Thornage (Minute Number 165/10(b))

It was noted that the Board's visit to Thornage had been rearranged for 17 March 2011.

04/11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Matthew Brown and Nigel Donohue declared interests in the item at minute number 15/11 – European Development Growth Fund Competitiveness Programme 2007-13 – as they were employees of Construction Skills, one of the partners working with FCH on the project. At the invitation of the Board, they remained in the room during the item, but did not vote.

05/11 CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

The Chairman gave an update on his activities as Chairman since the last meeting, as set out below.

The Chairman had attended weekly meetings with the Chief Executive.

The Chairman had attended Governance training, along with most other Board members and the members of Management Team, held on 13 December 2010.

The Chairman had completed the Board member appraisals during December 2010.

Shortly before Christmas, the Chairman had visited the new First Contact Centre. He had been very impressed by the efficiency and effectiveness of the staff, particularly as they had been extremely busy at the time, owing to the freezing weather conditions.

On 10 January 2011, the Chairman had taken part in a conference call, along with the Chief Executive and the Assistant Director of Human Resources and Governance, with a consultant regarding a review of the three Executive contracts.

On 12 January 2011, the Chairman had attended a meeting of the Hillington Square Steering Group, followed by an event to launch the Hillington Square Charter. The event had been a great success, achieving excellent media coverage. Residents and local agencies had signed up to the Charter.

The Chairman reported that each member of staff had received £200 in shopping vouchers from FCH just before Christmas. This had been funded from savings achieved within the establishment budget and had not affected front-line service budgets. It had been made against a background of no pay award this year. The gesture had received a hugely positive response from the staff, including a letter of thanks from one of the trade unions.

(a) Hillington Square

The Chief Executive said that over 70 expressions of interest had been received from firms regarding the tender for the architectural work at Hillington Square. Some of these were from Europe, but most were from the United Kingdom. Hemingway Design had indicated that there were a number of very strong contenders. It was hoped to make an announcement on the identity of the successful tenderer at the end of March 2011.

In answer to a question, the Chief Executive advised that FCH's legal advice had been that it would be limited in how far it could insist on sustainable employment and apprenticeship initiatives in the tender specification. Nigel Donohue undertook to supply the Chief Executive with some Government guidance he had received on this issue through his employment.

(b) Email from Campbell Tickell

The Chief Executive read out an email that he had received from Debby Ounsted, the consultant from Campbell Tickell who had assisted with FCH's recent Board appraisal process. The email praised FCH for its "courtesy, thoughtfulness and supreme efficiency", and made particular mention of the Company Secretary.

(c) Key Message Briefings

The Chief Executive stated that, with effect from this meeting, all Board members would receive a key message briefing following each Board meeting. The briefing would contain key points arising from some items considered at the Board meeting which Board members could use if approached. The briefing would be prepared by the Assistant Director of Communications and Customer Engagement. This was an outcome from the Governance training held on 13 December 2010.

(d) Membership of the Chartered Institute of Housing

The Chief Executive explained that Paul Leader had previously been a member of the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) through his membership of the National Tenant Voice (NTV). As the NTV was currently no longer operating, Paul Leader had requested that he be appointed to membership of the CIH in his capacity as a tenant Board member of FCH. The cost to the Association would be around £50-60 per year.

RESOLVED: That Paul Leader be appointed to membership of the CIH in his capacity as a tenant Board member of FCH.

07/11 ANNUAL RENT INCREASE (report not available – confidential)

The Executive Director (Resources) presented a report which sought approval for the Association's annual rent increase.

The Executive Director (Resources) advised that a communications plan for the rent increase was being prepared. He also reminded the Board that, following its decision on 18 January 2010 (minute number 07/10(b) refers), with effect from 11 April 2011 service charges would start to apply to sheltered scheme tenants who had transferred to FCH from the Council. These would be introduced gradually, on the basis of £5 per week per year. Consultation meetings at all sheltered schemes were now almost complete, and this increase would also be included in the communications plan.

The Board was extremely concerned at the impact that the rent increase would have on tenants, particularly at a time when other costs, such as for petrol and heating, were rising. It was acknowledged, however, that, under the Government's rent restructuring regime, the Board had little choice but to make the increase. It was also noted that the increase should be seen in the light of the fact that last year most rents had received a zero increase or even a decrease. The Board was assured that officers would make every effort to support tenants with advice and support, including encouraging the take-up of benefits and maximising energy efficiency in homes where possible. The Board would need to ensure that the income was effectively and efficiently spent.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the proposed annual rent increase of 5.1%, in accordance with the Government's rent restructuring policy, be accepted.
- 2) That other income should be charged in accordance with the relevant agreement or should increase by 5.1% if no specific agreement exists (for instance garages).

08/11 REVIEW OF LONE WORKING AND PERSONAL SAFETY POLICY (click here to go to report)

The Assistant Director of Human Resources and Governance presented a report which reviewed the Lone Working and Personal Safety Policy.

The Assistant Director of Human Resources and Governance advised that one further amendment was required to the revised Policy, namely, under "5.2 Office-based Risk", replacing "7.30am" with "7.00am" as the time that office working was normally permitted. This would better reflect the working patterns of some staff in Property Services.

The Assistant Director of Human Resources said that it was not intended to seek Board approval each time that the procedures (attached as Appendix 1 to the Policy) required amendment. The Board endorsed this approach. The Assistant Director of Human Resources and Governance added that some

minor amendments to the procedures would be made, following feedback from members of the Health and Safety Committee.

In answer to a question, the Assistant Director of Human Resources and Governance stated that all relevant staff had received a high level of training in lone working and personal safety.

Differing opinions were expressed as to whether all policies should need Board approval. The Company Secretary explained that this was currently required by FCH's Rules.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Lone Working and Personal Safety Policy be adopted as presented, subject to the amendment under "5.2 Office-based Risk" stated above.
- 2) That the Policy be reviewed every two years, in line with most of FCH's other policies.
- 3) That the Governance Working Group be requested to consider the merit of requiring all policies to be approved by the Board.

09/11 CONDUCT ISSUE

Confidential item

10/11 TENANT PANEL (click here to go to report)

The Assistant Director of Communications and Customer Engagement presented a report which considered the establishment of a Tenant Panel.

In answer to questions, the Executive Director (Resources) made the following points:

- Consideration had been given to recruiting to the Tenant Panel in conjunction with recruiting to the Board, but it had been decided that this would delay the Board recruitment exercise.
- TOWN was considering how its role would develop in light of the establishment of the Tenant Panel.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the establishment of a Tenant Panel, as described in the report, be approved.
- 2) That the Panel's draft terms of reference, as set out in the report, be approved, in advance of being issued to wider tenant consultation.

11/11 BRAND DEVELOPMENT (click here to go to report)

The Assistant Director of Communications and Customer Engagement presented a report which provided an update on the development of the FCH brand.

In answer to a question, the Executive Director (Resources) said that the new branding would be introduced gradually, so as to minimise costs.

The Chief Executive highlighted that the consultants engaged to undertake the brand development exercise had suggested that the FCH strapline “Developing Homes and Creating Opportunities for People within West Norfolk” may not be fully in line with FCH’s Empowerment value. This would be considered as part of the forthcoming business planning exercise.

The Board indicated its approval of the proposed new branding and noted the report.

12/11 BOARD APPRAISAL AND REVIEW – OUTCOME REPORT
(report not available – confidential)

The Company Secretary presented a report which introduced the outcome report for the recent Board appraisal and review process, written by Campbell Tickell, the consultancy firm that had assisted with the process.

The Company Secretary highlighted that the report contained a few training suggestions for Board members; he intended to raise these with the Governance Working Group.

The Board acknowledged that the process had been more thorough than in previous years; this had largely been the result of following the good practice guidelines set out in the National Housing Federation’s Code of Governance 2010.

The Chairman thanked all Board members for their cooperation with the appraisal and review process, and expressed his gratitude to Debby Ounsted of Campbell Tickell, who had worked closely with him on the process.

The Board noted that one of the recommendations in the outcome report was to take into account diversity gaps when recruiting to the Board. The Board recognised that, whilst it was important to maximise the skills on the Board through recruitment, FCH’s strong equality and diversity principles must also be borne in mind.

The Board noted the report and

RESOLVED: That the Governance Working Group consider the “areas for development and further thought” as set out in the outcome report.

13/11 **BOARD MEMBER RECRUITMENT (click here to go to report)**

The Company Secretary presented a report which set out a process by which it was intended to fill the current vacancies for independent and tenant Board members.

The Board noted that an advertisement had been booked for the Lynn News on 21 January 2011, and that a press release would also be issued. In answer to a question, the Company Secretary explained that it had been decided to place the advertisement within the recruitment section of the Lynn News, as there had been a concern that it could be “buried” if it appeared elsewhere in the paper.

The Board stressed the need to publicise the vacancies as widely as possible. As well as the local media, this could include direct approaches to individuals, groups and companies and using social networking. It would also be advisable to point out in publicity that Board membership provided a significant training and development opportunity.

The Board was of the view that, although the Campbell Tickell outcome report on the Board appraisal and review process had indicated some possible skills gaps, these should not be referred to when advertising the vacancies, in case this resulted in limiting the pool of people who applied. It was also suggested that using the term “Board Members” in the title of the advertisement might deter some people from reading it.

RESOLVED: That the Board member recruitment process be agreed as outlined in the report, subject to the comments stated above.

14/11 **DEVELOPMENT UPDATE** (report not available – confidential)

The Chief Executive presented a report which provided an update on recent resubmissions of development schemes to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and sought approval for the revised schemes.

In answer to a question, the Chief Executive said that FCH would resubmit the Lady Jane Grey Road scheme as and when there was an opportunity to do so.

The Board was delighted that funding had been received for three schemes, providing a total of 32 new affordable homes in West Norfolk. It expressed some disappointment that this had been achieved partly by reducing the properties from Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4 to Level 3. It was acknowledged, however, that Level 3 was still a very good standard, and that these would be high quality properties. The Chief Executive said that it may still be possible to negotiate with the contractors raising to Level 4.

It was noted that the Government’s plans to allow housing associations to charge 80% of market rent on some properties would need detailed consideration by the Board. It was not yet clear how much funding this could provide for new development.

The Board requested that its thanks be passed on to the staff involved in the successful funding bid.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the revised schemes for Fernlea Road, Fairstead, and the Kia Garage site, Wisbech Road, King's Lynn, be approved.
- 2) That the Ferndale scheme be approved.
- 3) That the required land acquisition for the Ferndale scheme be approved.
- 4) That it be agreed to comply with the HCA standard funding conditions for the Ferndale scheme.

15/11 **EUROPEAN DEVELOPMENT GROWTH FUND –
COMPETITIVENESS PROGRAMME 2007-13 (Click here to go to report)**

The Chief Executive presented a report which described a project concept put forward by FCH to the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

The Chief Executive advised that, since he had written the report, FCH had been informed that it had been successful in the first round of bidding and had been asked to produce a detailed business case. This was one of six projects across the eastern region to reach this stage.

The Board was pleased to note that the project involved working with some key local partners, would improve the sustainability of homes and would help tenants to address issues such as fuel poverty.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That FCH's participation in the project be approved.
- 2) That a further detailed report be prepared for the Board now that FCH has been successful in reaching the next stage.

16/11 **APPOINTMENT OF SHAREHOLDERS** (report not available – confidential)

The Company Secretary presented a report which requested the Board to consider an application for tenant shareholding. He explained that, since the agenda had been issued, one further application for tenant shareholding had been made. He tabled the list of applications which had been updated to include this.

RESOLVED: That the two applications for tenant shareholding contained in the tabled list be approved.

17/11 **GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION PAPER – “LOCAL DECISIONS: A FAIRER FUTURE FOR SOCIAL HOUSING”**
(click here to go to report)

The Chief Executive presented a report which advised the Board of the emerging implications for FCH and its tenants of the Government’s proposed reform of social housing.

The Chief Executive said that the closing date for responses to the Government’s consultation paper had been that day, and so he had sent in a response on behalf of FCH, in consultation with the Chairman. The response had made two main points:

- Consideration should be given to enabling higher rent to be charged for properties with high energy efficiency which were, therefore, cheaper to heat than other properties.
- The New Home Bonus received by local authorities should be ringfenced for affordable housing provision.

The Board noted the report.

18/11 **WORK UPDATE** (report not available – confidential)

The Governance Officer presented the work update, which included the following:

- Action Sheet
- Future Work Programme of the Board.

The Board noted the update.

19/11 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- **“Secret Societies”**

A Board member raised the requirement to declare membership of “secret societies”, which was contained in the Board Member Code of Conduct and, therefore, on the Board Member Declaration of Interest form. He suggested that it was not appropriate to require such a declaration to be made, and that it may be illegal.

RESOLVED: That the Company Secretary be asked to investigate the requirement to declare membership of “secret societies”, to report back to the Governance Working Group, which would then report its findings to the Board.

20/11 **NEXT MEETING**

The Board noted that its next meeting was scheduled for Monday 7 March 2011 at 6.30pm.

The meeting closed at 8.35pm.

CHAIRMAN

Freebridge Community Housing

Report to the Board

Author	Jo Whaley	Report Type		Impact		
Related Work Ref.		For Decision	√	High	Medium	Low
		For Information			√	
Consultation	The Health and Safety Committee, including union representatives and the external 'competent' advisor are consulted.					

Meeting Date: 17th January 2011

Report Title: Review of Lone Working and Personal Safety Policy

Purpose: To update the Board on the annual review of the Lone Working and Personal Safety policy
Policy/Strategy Implications: The policy has been updated and put into the revised format for Policy and Strategy
Finance and VFM Implications: None as a result of this report however since 2009/10 we have introduced a support service for our most vulnerable staff at a cost of approximately £2,400 per year (incl.VAT)
Customer Care/Equality and Diversity Implications: This revised policy has been reviewed in light of an Equality Impact Assessment to ensure no disadvantage to any individual with a Protected Characteristic. Having appropriate support mechanisms in place for our employees who work alone should ensure our customers receive an appropriate level of service at all times.
Risk Assessment (cross-reference with FCH Risk Map): 8.12 Out of Hours Duty Rota (Failure) – Impact Critical, Likelihood Significant 11. Health and Safety legislation not complied with – Impact Critical, Likelihood Significant
Recommendations: It is recommended that the Board: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Approve the revised Lone Working and Personal Safety Policy. (ii) Agree that the Policy is reviewed every two years.

Background

The Lone Working and Personal Safety policy is reviewed on an annual basis. This year it was also necessary to revise the Policy into the new format for Policies and Strategies. Whilst this meant moving text around the content of the policy at Appendix 1, remains largely unchanged. The procedures (Appendix 1 to the policy. Appendix 2 here) have been updated to reflect new practices within departments.

One amendment to the policy followed the Equality Impact Assessment. Originally the policy referred to a risk assessment for a pregnant or disabled employee, who might be more vulnerable and therefore at greater risk of harm when lone working. This has been extended to cover any protected characteristic, as someone could be targeted and therefore be at greater risk if working alone. This is a matter of personal perception and a discussion between the individual and their line manager should ensure no conclusions are drawn inappropriately.

Since last year we have introduced a new support services for our most vulnerable employees, the Care and Support staff who run the out of hours duty rota as well as visiting our most vulnerable customers during office hours. This team may be called out, outside of normal office hours, to attend sheltered schemes and other supported properties, where an alarm has been raised, either directly by a customer contacting an employee or by Invicta, the alarm service provider.

In addition they visit very vulnerable customers and potential customers, referred to Freebridge by other partner agencies, in their own homes or temporary accommodation. The member of staff may have little information to rely on and could be entering into a potentially dangerous situation. Where possible an employee of another agency will accompany the Freebridge employee but this is not always possible, nor is it always possible for two Freebridge employees to attend.

A badge, containing a microphone and GPS tracking system, is worn by the employee who can press the back at any time, either before entering a property or whilst in a property, to 'open' the microphone and enable the device. The service provider will then be listening to the conversation and can raise an alarm as necessary. Through training a series of 'code' words or phrases can be used by the wearer of the badge to alert the 'listener' to particular circumstances and their whereabouts can be pin-pointed using the tracker, if they are unable to speak or do not want to raise suspicion. This service is provided by Solo protect at a cost of approximately £800, per badge per year (we have three badges in operation, one for each of the Welfare officers and a third used by the out of hours duty Officer).

To date there have been no major incidents requiring use of the tracking facility although staff have on occasion made use of the listening device when they felt uncomfortable in a situation.

These revisions are the subject of consultation with health and safety committee members, so the Board will be updated at the meeting on 17th, should any amendments result.

This Policy has to date been subject to annual review. FCH's Health and Safety Adviser has suggested that the subject matter of the Policy is now a well managed risk, and so it is proposed to move the review of the Policy to a two-yearly cycle, in line with the large majority of FCH's other policies.

Objective 4 – Fit for Purpose



Policy 4o Lone Working and Personal Safety			
Last Reviewed	Jan 11	Next Review	Jan 13
Responsible Officer	Assistant Director of Human Resources		

1. Policy Statement

Freebridge is committed to providing an environment for our employees, Board members and visitors, which is safe and where possible provides a network of help and support for those working alone, in order to minimise risks wherever practicable.

Lone working may include driving, visiting empty property and development sites, other offices/organisations and visiting customers in their homes.

Freebridge also requires individuals to be aware of and acknowledge their part in not placing themselves in a threatening or otherwise dangerous environment, whilst carrying out their duties.

2. Definitions

Accident and Incidents – We define an accident as an uncontrolled, unplanned, random and unexpected event which could result in loss, harm or injury. An incident is an event that gave rise to an accident or had the potential to lead to an accident.

Work related violence - Any incident where persons are abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances connected with work, involving an actual or implied challenge to their safety, well being or health.

Verbal Abuse - Language, including tone and volume, that the recipient perceives as abusive, threatening or intimidating.

Zero Tolerance - Employees do not come to work at Freebridge to be threatened, intimidated, shouted at or abused. This type of behaviour from anyone is not acceptable and employees are empowered to obtain assistance from a colleague or manager or to refuse service should they be subjected to such behaviour.

Lone workers - Lone-workers are those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision. Lone workers may:

- Work alone at fixed sites, e.g. an office
- Work alone away from normal base
- Work outside normal office hours e.g. call-out staff, cleaners
- Travel as part of work

3. Policy Objectives

A number of general health and safety objectives are listed in the Health and Safety Policy, available on the Intranet under 'Health and Safety Resources'. In addition:

- All employees who could work in isolation at any time, receive training in lone working and dealing with conflict management wherever practicable as part of their induction or within 3 months of joining the organisation.
- All employees have the opportunity for regular update training and are issued with relevant training material and guidance on lone working.
- A risk assessment of lone working activities (Intranet – Health and Safety Resources) identifies everything in place to minimise risks.
- There is no longer a policy of cash rent collection by employees visiting property, guidelines within Housing Management outline actions to be taken should a customer offer money due (i.e. rent arrears) to an employee, to minimise the risks of assault or theft.
- Written procedures (attached as Appendix 1) indicate how employees whereabouts are monitored during the working day and what employees should do if they find themselves in difficulty whilst working alone and on returning to their place of work. The procedures also cover what to do in the event of breakdown or accident involving a vehicle and following any incidence of violence and aggression.
- In the interests of protecting both employees and others, the Freebridge tenancy agreement contains a clause advising tenants that they, or any person living in or visiting their home, must not injure, threaten to injure, or verbally or physically abuse any employee of ours, or any agent employed by us, or any person living in or visiting your home or the locality of your home.

4. Responsibilities

The Health and Safety Policy sets out the clear chain of responsibility for all health and safety matters. In particular, managers are responsible for ensuring that the procedures for lone working are implemented within their own areas of responsibility and in particular they must:

- Ensure that employees are aware of procedures.
- Ensure that all employees required to work alone are adequately trained and equipped to do so.
- Have in place appropriate arrangements which inform them of the whereabouts of their lone workers at all times.
- Devise any additional procedures as necessary, taking account of the activities undertaken and the needs of particular employees (who may be

more vulnerable for a number of reasons e.g. disability, pregnancy etc), in consultation with HR and the Health and Safety Advisor

If at any stage an employee has concerns about a particular task which involves lone working then they must raise it with their manager.

Board Members will not be put in a position of lone working.

5. Strategy

The Health and Safety Policy outlines the over-arching strategy for Risk Assessment and Management, dealing with Accidents and Incidents, Emergency Procedures and First Aid, Occupational Health, Training and Communication and Consultation. The following are specific points in relation to the risks associated with working alone.

5.1 Risk Assessment

The Lone working risk assessment identifies a wide range of activities and circumstances which could pose a risk to individual employees and others, whilst working alone. This includes being confronted by potentially violent and aggressive people and animals as well as carrying out potentially hazardous activities, such as working at height, working in adverse weather conditions, working with hazardous substances and so on, where the risks are increased when working alone. Each lone working situation is categorised as either High, Medium or Low Risk. A number of measures are in place at any time to minimise these risks.

This assessment is reviewed by the Health and Safety Committee on an annual basis and consideration is given to any changing risks or further measures to minimise risk.

5.2 Office-based Risk

Office receptions and ground floor interview rooms have a panic alarm button which can be used to alert colleagues and summon assistance during office opening hours. Where Freebridge does not own the office accommodation alternative procedures are in place for summoning assistance from within the building.

Employees who wish to gain access to office buildings before the normal start to the working day, or to work later than the normal end of the working day (8 a.m. to 6 p.m. as per the flexible working policy) must ensure their manager (or other departmental manager) is aware of their intention. Office working is not normally permitted before 7.30 a.m. or after 7 p.m., other than for attendance at evening meetings.

5.3 Visiting Property (tenanted or empty)

Managers ensure that employees have access to all necessary contact details for colleagues and managers who will provide support in case of emergency,

including outside of normal working hours. Appendix 1 details measures to keep 'track' of employees whereabouts. It is vital that employees provide HR with up to date emergency contact details.

We identify clients and customers who may pose a risk with a 'Red Flag' on the Housing Management system. This provides detail of the people/animals/properties where a risk has been identified by colleagues or other agencies e.g. Police/Social Services and the nature of the risk. This register will be kept under the rules of the Data Protection Act 1998 and persons named will be made aware of their inclusion on the system and reasons given. Inclusion is reviewed after 12 months.

Wherever practicable employees and other partner agencies, including contractors, will have access to relevant parts of this information i.e. direct access to the housing management system, job tickets, data sharing protocols etc.

External agencies are used to support our employees assessed as being at the highest risk, either outside of normal office hours e.g. when responding to out-of-hours emergencies, or during the working day, visiting particularly vulnerable customers or those already identified as a risk through the Red Flag system as described at 5.3 above. These agencies use mobile telephones contact and GPS tracking devices where appropriate. Training will be provided to those employees covered.

5.4 Travelling Alone

Appendix 1 also contains guidelines aimed at minimising the risks associated with travelling alone, such as car breakdown or accident. Preparing your car for winter weather and driving in adverse weather conditions are also covered in separate procedures under 'Health and Safety Resources' on the Intranet.

Vehicles provided by Property Services for use by operatives are appropriately serviced, checked and maintained. At least annual checks are made on driving licences and details of insurance and vehicle roadworthiness (MOT certificate if appropriate) of employees who drive their own vehicles on Freebridge business.

5.5 Other Hazardous Activities

The use of a variety of tools and equipment and work environments can pose risks to employees and members of the public and these risks may be greater when the employee is working alone. Examples would be working at height, working with electricity, gas and chemicals and working in empty properties.

Some highly dangerous activities are tightly controlled by laws and require 'permits to work', for others Freebridge has its own procedures which must be adhered to. Failure to do so will result in a disciplinary investigation. Where these rules apply, employees receive adequate training and guidance and personal protective equipment to minimise risks, where jobs must be carried out. Some activities will not be permitted for lone workers.

Safety equipment and personal protective equipment (PPE), including safety footwear, hard hats, protective gloves, masks and coveralls, is issued to employees assessed as at risk. Employees have a responsibility to maintain the effective working and condition of any equipment or PPE issued to them and to report any failure or damage immediately and not to continue to use defective equipment or PPE once identified.

Employees who are regular (daily) lone workers are issued with a car safety kit by HR, if they do not already have these items in their vehicle. This kit includes a torch, high visibility vest, warning triangle and drivers first aid kit.

Personal safety alarms and dog dazers are available for use by any employee who needs them.

5.6 High Risk Employees

Some employees will be more vulnerable to lone working risks than others. Employees working alone outside of normal office hours have already been covered at 5.2 (office-based) and 5.3 (emergency call-out).

Employees who are pregnant, have a disability or other 'protected' characteristic (e.g. ethnicity, sexual orientation) may be at greater risk when working alone, either because they may be targeted or they may be less physically or mentally able to deal with hazardous situations because of either, a long-term or short-term condition.

Employees who feel vulnerable because of a protected characteristic, or who are assessed as being more vulnerable, where their protected characteristic is known (employees have a duty to make their employer aware of any condition which may affect their ability to carry out their normal day to day activities), should discuss this with their manager and a plan for additional training or support may be required. Once aware of any medical condition, disability, pregnancy or other protected characteristic, managers carry out an individual risk assessment, with the employee concerned, to determine whether lone working, as well as other aspects of their job, is acceptable to both parties. This must be done in conjunction with HR or the Health and Safety Advisor and where appropriate the employee's GP or Occupational Health guidance is sought. The results of these individual risk assessments are written down formally.

6. Monitoring

The nature of any accident or incident reported and any actions subsequently taken by managers, is monitored by the Assistant Director of Human Resources and the Health and Safety Advisor and reported to the Health and Safety Committee. Appendix 1 details action to be taken by managers and HR following any reported incidence of violence and aggression.

Management Team will be made aware of any areas of concern or developing trends for consideration with recommendations for policy or procedure review

7. Review

This policy is reviewed annually by the Board, following consultation with the Health and Safety Committee. Further review will be carried out by the Assistant Director of HR following any incident or accident affecting a lone worker.

Appendix 1

LONE WORKING AND PERSONAL SAFETY AT WORK PROCEDURES

This checklist is to be read in conjunction with the Lone Working and Personal Safety Policy.

When conducting home visits, employees should choose a lone worker 'buddy' with whom to maintain contact throughout the duration of their visits; this 'buddy' should therefore be a colleague who will be office based (and available at their desk to take phone calls) for the duration of the visiting period.

In all instances of visits the following must be done:

- Tell your chosen lone worker 'buddy' in your team where you are going through the completion of the visits sheet <U:\Health & Safety\HO Visit Sheet.docx>) and what time you will be back, (copy and paste these details into an appointment in your Outlook Calendar too), and leave a contact number.
- Teams where employees regularly leave the office will have an outboard facility which must be updated by each individual before they leave the office and on their return. If your itinerary alters while you are out, contact the office to update your whereabouts.
- Telephone the buddy to advise when you arrive at each separate destination, and when you begin your journey home or back to the office.
- If you have a mobile phone you must carry it and ensure it is fully charged and the number is available to colleagues. If your phone does not work you must borrow one. (Mobile phones must not be used while driving). Numbers are kept on FCH information/ FCH staff contact details on the Intranet. If your personal mobile phone number alters and you have agreed to being contactable on this phone, please inform the HR department.
- Wear the appropriate clothing for the type of visit. A suit and tie may be threatening or a tie or scarf could prove dangerous if grabbed, expensive jewellery may cause unwanted interest. Inappropriate footwear could cause an accident whilst alone or impede a fast exit if necessary
- All employees who regularly travel in their vehicles during the working day must carry a first aid kit in their vehicle (available from HR).

- If at any time FCH issues you with any personal safety technology you will be expected to use it in compliance with the instructions given. Personal attack alarms and dog dazers will be available from HR.
- Keep notes of any potential hazardous situations and inform your manager promptly so that other members of staff can be made aware.

If someone fails to return or make contact within the specified time proceed with the following:

- The buddy will inform their line manager that they have not returned.
- The line manager will then try making contact with the person, if unsuccessful;
- Check their calendar/diary to find out where they went, if you have a contact number, telephone that address to find out when they left the property. If no contact possible;
- The manager or a colleague should visit the last known address to ascertain time of leaving. If no light shed on whereabouts;
- The line manager should then contact the employees home address or emergency contact person to see whether any recent contact has been made or whereabouts known.. The Finance department keeps a central log of all car details including registration numbers, for employees who claim mileage and HR keep home and emergency contact numbers (names in household and next of kin contact if applicable).
- After all attempts to contact the member of staff has been exhausted, the line manager (or available manager) will then make the decision whether they should call the police, home or take no further action. A Director can be contacted for advice if required.

Lone Visits

Typical visits could include settling-in interviews, neighbour nuisance visits, serving notices, arrears visits, and pre-inspections for repairs or planned works. Before you visit:

- Check information held on the housing management system or job ticket regarding the tenant, particularly regarding their vulnerability or potential violence or dangerous pets they have. Important information will be 'red-banded'. When appropriate check with other agencies including the Council regarding nominated applicants, to check information is up to date and known risks identified.
- If you have any other reservations about visiting alone, discuss with your manager or request a colleague to accompany you.

- If the tenant is known to be vulnerable and you are uncomfortable about being alone with them, speak to your line manager who may ask a colleague to accompany you or arrange for their carer or other agency to be present.
- If they have a known history of violence, your line manager may agree that they are seen at the office rather than at home. This information will be highlighted by a 'red band' within the Housing Management system.

On arrival at their home

- Only enter the property if you are invited and you feel it is safe to do so.
- Check you have the correct address and it is the right person. Introduce yourself and show them your identity card before entering their home. Identity cards can be worn around the neck or clipped to a belt.
- You should not carry confidential information or valuables. Take only the documentation required and mobile phone and keys.
- Follow them into their home, and take note of your environment so you know the way out if required.
- Money should only be collected in extreme circumstances, such as to prevent an eviction or when a customer is unable to pay in any other way.
- When money is collected, you should return to the nearest cash handling office immediately before continuing with any further visits.
- Ask to be introduced to other people who are present if you are unfamiliar with them, or not expecting them to be present. Check that the person you are seeing is happy to discuss sensitive issues with these other people present.
- If unaccompanied minors have been left alone at the home to meet and greet you **leave immediately**, and make another appointment (either at the time or later from the office) making it clear to the person that employees will not carry out FCH business without the responsible adult (usually the tenant) being present.
- Ask politely for pets to be put in another room if you are uncomfortable with them being there or they hinder the work you need to do. If the person you are visiting is upset by or refuses this request you do not need to stay if you feel uncomfortable.

- Check that any work you need to do is carried out safely, making sure that the people inside are not put at any risk.
- Politely leave if anyone present appears to be under the influence of drink or drugs or appears to be agitated, or their behaviour concerns you.
- Play for time if 'put on the spot' and try to avoid making rash decisions or promises. Say that you must check with your line manager before any decision can be made. You do not need to defend FCH property or position and personal safety always comes first.

Lone working in empty properties

- Check if there is light and power available at the empty property so you can work safely.
- Work in only good daylight hours if there is no light available or take a powerful torch with you.
- Be very vigilant before entering an empty property, checking each area as you go, including doorways and cupboards. The outgoing tenant may have made 'alterations' following the pre-void inspection, and may have removed floorboards, stairs, banisters etc or removed fixtures and fittings e.g. boilers, or left obstructions that could harm you, making the property extremely dangerous.
- Leave immediately if there appear to be any major structural alterations (e.g. the removal of walls) and inform your line manager.
- If you find contamination of any kind e.g. sharps or drug-related items, animal or human excrement, chemicals or other unknown substances, vermin or other infestations, do not touch, unless you are trained to do so and have appropriate PPE. If necessary, leave and secure the building, immediately call the appropriate organisation to deal with the contamination, if known to you, otherwise contact your manager or appropriate colleagues for advice.
- If available, wear protective clothing such as coveralls, gloves, hard hats and safety footwear etc to protect you from the above hazards when expected or encountered.

Lone Working in Offices

A risk assessment of office accommodation is completed, highlighting any relevant procedures for lone working. Anyone needing to start before 7 a.m. or work after 7 p.m. or at a weekend, must make either their line manager or another responsible person aware and notify them once they have completed work and have left the building (evenings and weekends) so that the alarm can be raised if someone does not make contact.

Personal safety when alone in your car on work-related business

If you are travelling alone in your car:

- Keep your car in good working order and ensure it is serviced regularly
- Make sure you have adequate fuel to get to and from your destination
- Carry details of your breakdown/rescue organisation with you
- Plan your route before setting off and have directions and maps in the car so you do not have to stop and ask
- Try where ever possible to use main roads and known routes
- Do not have valuables visible in your car
- Keep windows closed and doors locked, especially in areas where you stop at junctions
- Lock your car, even if you are paying for petrol on a garage forecourt
- When parking in daylight, consider what the area will be like after dark
- If you think you are being followed, keep driving until you reach a busy area
- If your vehicle is fitted with a tracking device make sure this is activated

If your car breaks down:

- Turn on the hazard warning lights, and summon assistance on your mobile phone
- Assess whether it is safer to stay in your car or to get out. Take account of how isolated that area is and the time of day
- If you stay inside, sit in the passenger seat to give the impression you are not alone
- Keep your doors locked and the windows open no more than 1 ½ inches. If someone stops to offer help, ask them to telephone for assistance
- If you leave your car lock it. Keep your personal alarm to hand, and take your torch with you if it is dark
- If you have a warning triangle, place it in the direction of on-coming traffic 30 metres from your car and on the same side of the road

Road Accidents

What to do in the event of a road accident:

- Stay calm

- Give your name, telephone number, address and insurance details to the other driver if you have them
- Take the above details from the other driver and the vehicle make, model, colour and registration
- Telephone your responsible person to let them know what has happened and you may be late for your appointment. If necessary they can telephone ahead and cancel
- If there is an injured party do not move them unless you have no choice, (i.e. there is a risk from fire or they are in a vulnerable position in the road, but do not put yourself at risk – it is your choice) and call an ambulance immediately

Safety equipment to carry in your car

If you travel in your car as part of your job on a daily basis FCH will make the following available, if you do not already have them in your vehicle:

- Red triangle
- Torch with batteries
- High visibility vest
- Drivers First Aid Kit

It is the responsibility of the individual employee to ensure this equipment is kept in good condition

Personal safety on foot

- Look confident and walk purposefully
- You are more likely to be able to escape danger wearing clothes you can easily move in and shoes that are comfortable
- Walking quicker is usually safer than trying to run
- Keep your arms/hands as free as possible by putting items you need in a bag that can be placed across your body
- Try to avoid walking alone in the dark, but if you have to, keep to busy well-lit roads where possible
- Do not take short cuts, unless you know they are as safe as the longer route
- Always carry any personal alarm you have or have been supplied with in a place where it can easily be activated
- Be observant around you – take note of your surroundings for areas to avoid, including any obstruction/hazards in the way (i.e. pot-holes, trip hazards, wet surfaces etc) and poorly-lit areas

Dealing with aggression

- If someone is trying to provoke you do not respond in the same kind of way
- Ensure you have a clear exit

- Stay calm – speak gently, slowly and clearly. Do not argue or try to outsmart the person verbally or use jargon they may not understand. (Do not try to argue or outsmart – do not feel obliged to defend your or FCH position. Agree to have the decisions, policies reviewed to get out of the situation)
- Breathe slowly to control your tension
- Avoid body language which may be perceived as confrontational, e.g. hands on hips, are folded, raised arms, etc.
- Be aware of personal space and keep safe distance
- Suggest going to see colleagues to get you out of the situation
- Avoid physical contact wherever possible
- Call for help if necessary, either verbally or by using your mobile phone or other technology you may have been provided with. Out of hours in an emergency you can call Invicta on 01732 781966
- Do not be afraid to call the police on 999 if you feel threatened
- In emergencies shouting 'Fire' can get you attention better than calling help
- If you are followed and feel threatened, go to a public place to seek assistance or go to another house if you can see signs of life
- If you have concerns or problems about this behaviour, you could contact your line manager or the HR department or talk it through with a councillor through The Employee Assistance Programme

Register of “Red Flag” persons

Where you consider that a tenant/occupant poses a risk to staff, this information should be passed to the named contacts within Housing Management (Sophie Bates, Steven Manning or Ann-Marie Thompson) for consideration as to whether the customer's tenancy will be 'red flagged'.

When a risk is identified following an incident. The 'Violence & Aggression' report form:

<U:\Health & Safety\Violence and Aggression Report form.docx>) should be completed and forwarded to HR. HR will then pass this information onto Housing Management to add a 'red flag' record where appropriate.

This register will be periodically reviewed to ensure that the customer on it still poses a threat, if not the details will be removed.

The criteria for a red flag incident could include those below, but this is not exhaustive and the appropriate manager will need to consider all the circumstances:

- Abusive or malicious language (includes swearing and racist/sexist remarks)
- Aggressive shouting or raised voice

- Aggressive or suggestive body language or remarks
- Threat of violence against any individual or property
- Actual physical contact, whether aggressive or just unwanted
- Appears to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol causing concern
- Attack or aggressive behaviour by an animal
- Unsafe environment in the property, i.e. needles, smoke, fleas, missing floor boards, removed walls etc.

Actions to be taken following an incidence of violence and aggression.

Where an incidence of violence or aggression is reported the employee meets with their line manager and a member of HR as soon as possible and the following considered (if a face to face meeting is not feasible a telephone call will be made):

Up to 24 hours after an incident as necessary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical assistance needed • Police attendance/contact needed • Family/ Next of Kin contact • Employee to be sent home if necessary • Referral to EAP telephone helpline (counselling) • Red Band warning put in place (by Housing Management)
1-7 days after as necessary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further investigation and written report of incident if necessary • Police investigation if necessary • Tenant involved to be formally written to where appropriate (Housing Management) • RIDDOR reportable incident? (completed by HR)
7 + days after as necessary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow up by manager • Follow up by police if necessary • Face to face counselling arranged by HR if necessary • Legal advice sought by Housing Management if necessary

Employees also have the option of contacting the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) details of which are available from Human resources.

Freebridge Community Housing

Report to the Board

Author	Michelle Playford	Report Type		Impact		
Related Work Ref.		For Decision	√	High	Medium	Low
		For Information		√		
Consultation	TOWN					

Meeting Date: 17th January 2011

Report Title: Tenant Panel

Purpose: To provide an update on the establishment of the Tenant Panel.
Policy/Strategy Implications: The existence and role of the Panel will need to be included in the Tenant Involvement policy when it is revised.
Finance and VFM Implications: Assessment against pre-determined criteria will be carried out in the recruitment and appointment of an independent facilitator.
Customer Care/Equality and Diversity Implications: The establishment of the Tenant Panel will have a positive impact in terms of customer care, with tenants able to get involved and play a key role in delivering continuous improvement. Recruitment of members for the Panel will take into account equality and diversity, ensuring that membership is suitably diverse and appropriately representative of the communities which we represent.
Risk Assessment (cross-reference with FCH Risk Map): 1.7 Failure in relationship with TOWN – Critical Impact, High Likelihood 7.1 Failure in tenant communication – Critical Impact, Significant Likelihood 7.4 Failure to achieve tenant empowerment – Critical Impact, Low Likelihood 12.0 Failure to address Equality and Diversity issues effectively – Marginal Impact, Significant Likelihood
Recommendations: It is recommended that the Board: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Approve the establishment of a Tenant Panel, as described in this report. (ii) Approve the Panel's draft Terms of Reference, as set out in this report, before they go to wider tenant consultation.

1.1 The Tenant Panel will provide a diverse, representative, active tenant forum which will focus on the continuous improvement of Freebridge's services. It is being set up, in part, in response to changing national policy which places greater emphasis on tenant panels as a means of monitoring and improving the services delivered by Registered Providers. The 'Local Decisions: a fairer future for social housing' report published by the government also outlines a requirement of landlords to support tenant panels –or equivalent bodies - in order to give tenants the opportunity to scrutinise the services being offered and to be involved in resolving disputes. These changes will be made as part of the forthcoming Localism Bill.

1.2 Following consultation with members of TOWN, and discussion with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Board, we have now produced draft Terms of Reference:

Draft Terms of Reference

Purpose

The Tenant Panel will be a group for tenants from different backgrounds and different communities in West Norfolk to get together to look at which key areas of Freebridge's work could be improved. The Panel will be linked to the Board by giving, and getting, feedback.

Aims

- To look at which key areas of Freebridge's work could be improved
- To bring together different projects with tenants, or jointly with tenants and staff, to look for ways of improving key areas of work. These areas of work will be agreed with the Board
- To encourage tenant involvement and feedback on the different improvement activities. Tenants will be able to get involved in a number of ways, including through telephone feedback, email, text and social media such as Facebook.
- To write and agree, each year, with the Freebridge Board a plan of improvement and scrutiny activities
- To get regular reports on complaints, surveys and other tenant feedback from Freebridge
- To think about tenant feedback on changes in national policy and give ideas to the Board.

How it will be set up and what the Panel will do

- Report to the Freebridge Board (or a nominated sub-committee) but the Panel will be independent of the Board
- Be supported by an independent facilitator jointly appointed with, and paid for by, Freebridge
- Will appoint a chair and vice chair each year
- Will openly publicise its minutes and reports to other tenants and Freebridge
- Will appoint members for a term of up to three years after an open and fair recruitment process. Members will be allowed to be re-appointed, as long as they are not a member for more than 9 years.
- Meetings will be open so that non-member tenants and invited non-tenants can come to watch. They will be allowed to get involved in the meeting on the decision of the Chair.

Membership

- Membership of up to 12 tenants, who will come from the wide range of backgrounds, and from the different communities, that Freebridge serves.

Brief for Facilitator

- Will be jointly appointed by tenants and Freebridge but paid for by Freebridge
- Will attend Panel meetings and make sure there is a review at the end of each meeting
- Will help the Panel chair before, during and between meetings
- Will give training to help tenants to take part in meetings and other agreed activities successfully
- Will be able to show an excellent knowledge of housing management policies and procedures
- Will be able to show a track record of ongoing improvement work in housing
- Will be able to show a track record of good management, support and new ideas
- Will be able to show that they are committed to tenant empowerment and involvement.

1.3 Next Steps

The following are the next steps for establishing the Tenant Panel:

20 th January – 20 th February	<p>Consultation with wider tenant group: letter and survey send to sample of tenants for feedback on the Terms of Reference/proposals for the Panel</p> <p>Brief issued for recruitment of facilitator, and recruitment process for a facilitator begins.</p>
w.c. 21 st February	<p>Tenant working party (membership TBC but chaired by Albert Havard) meets to refine the Terms of Reference based on the feedback, agree the process for recruitment – including criteria for ensuring diversity of membership – and shortlist the facilitator applicants.</p>
w.c. 21 st February – mid April	<p>Recruitment process begins to attract applicants to the Panel; this will be followed by a selection and interview process which ensures equality and diversity of membership.</p> <p>Tenant working party holds face-to-face interviews with shortlisted applicants for the facilitator role; facilitator appointed.</p>
End April – beginning May	<p>First meeting of the Tenant Panel held; to take the form of an interactive workshop to agree the working programme for the coming year.</p>

Following feedback from the Board at this meeting, the focus will be on wider consultation on the Terms of Reference with tenants, and the open recruitment of a facilitator for the Panel.

Freebridge Community Housing

Report to the Board

Author	Michelle Playford	Report Type		Impact		
Related Work Ref.		For Decision		High	Medium	Low
Communications Strategy		For Information	√		√	
Consultation	Staff and tenant focus groups; Management Team					

Meeting Date: 17th January 2011

Report Title: Brand Development

Purpose: To provide an update on the development of the Freebridge brand.
Policy/Strategy Implications: The brand development builds on the Communication Policy.
Finance and VFM Implications: Market testing was carried out in the recruitment of the design agency appointed to deliver the brand development, resulting in Value for Money as the most cost-effective pitch was accepted. The cost for this work is around £5k which will be met by the existing communication and customer engagement budget.
Customer Care/Equality and Diversity Implications: The development of the brand will lead to a more coherent and attractive brand identity which will be more appealing to customers. Equality and diversity has been considered in the development of the brand, making sure that different user groups are represented through the images used in the brand. Accessibility and diversity issues – such as visual impairment and cultural awareness – have also been considered in the development on the brand.
Risk Assessment (cross-reference with FCH Risk Map): 7.1 Failure in tenant communication – Critical Impact, Significant Likelihood 7.3 Inappropriate organisational image – Marginal Impact, Significant Likelihood 12.0 Failure to address Equality and Diversity issues effectively – Marginal Impact, Significant Likelihood
Recommendations: It is recommended that the Board: (i) Note the progress made on the Brand development.

1.1 Following on from the brand workshops which took place in February 2010, and in line with the new Strategic Communication and Engagement Activity Plan, the Freebridge brand is currently undergoing development. This is a development of the existing brand and not a redevelopment, meaning the logo and colours of the brand will remain the same. The idea behind the development is to present a more coherent and appealing Freebridge visual identity which reflects the values and brand messages which were refined at the brand workshops. At present, there is not always consistency in how the Freebridge brand is presented to our audiences.

1.2 This can result in our work not being readily identified and associated with us, and confusion amongst our audiences as to who we are and what we are striving to achieve, thus weakening our messages.

1.3 To strengthen our brand identity, following a competitive market-testing process, we appointed FoxBullenYoung design agency to come up with a more joined-up identity, based on our existing brand, values and brand messages. They came up with a number of different design options which were then discussed at a tenant and staff focus group in December 2010. Taking into consideration issues such as accessibility and diversity, the group have decided upon a preferred design route (please see appendix one).

1.4 This will now be developed further – through the inclusion of different elements such as colour pictures or a different font – to arrive at a final brand identity for Freebridge. This identity will then be rolled out across all of Freebridge’s communication materials – from PowerPoint presentations to tenant leaflets; from Streets Ahead to the website. As part of the brand development, we have been challenged on our strapline – ‘developing homes and creating opportunities for people within West Norfolk’ – with questions asked about how empowering this is through the use of words ‘for people.’ We will be considering the strapline as part of the Business Planning process.

1.5 Staff will be fully engaged in the brand development through the distribution of brand guidelines – which will highlight how the brand identity should be used – and the appointment of a ‘brand guardian’ in each service area. The role of the brand guardian will be to make sure that the brand is being used correctly so that the image which Freebridge is presenting to our audiences is joined-up, coherent and appealing. The brand identity will be rolled out from February 2011 onwards by the Communication and Customer Engagement team.

Appendix one

Current examples of Freebridge branding

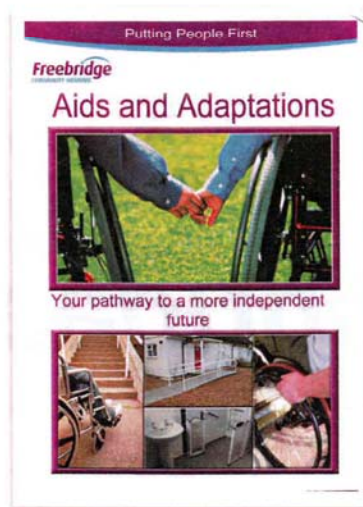
CURRENT EXAMPLES



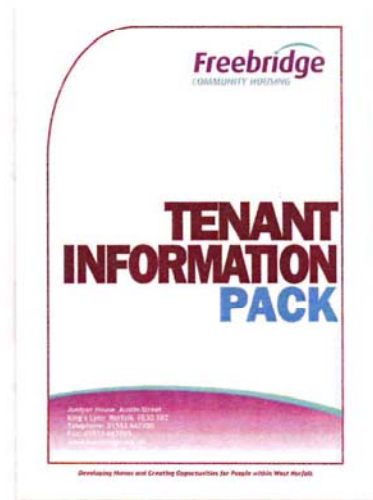
D1 LEAFLET



A5 BOOKLET



A4 DOCUMENT



A4 DOCUMENT

Preferred design approach for Freebridge branding

TENANT WELFARE SERVICE

WE ARE HERE TO HELP



CREATING HOMES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Freebridge
COMMUNITY HOUSING

DL LEAFLET

HOUSE EXCHANGE

THE BEST WAY TO FIND A MUTUAL HOME EXCHANGE



CREATING HOMES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Freebridge
COMMUNITY HOUSING

A5 BOOKLET

ADAPTION AIDS FOR YOUR HOME

YOUR GUIDE TO A MORE INDEPENDENT FUTURE

CREATING HOMES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Freebridge
COMMUNITY HOUSING

A4 DOCUMENT

Freebridge Community Housing

Report to the Board

Author	Angus MacQueen	Report Type		Impact		
Related Work Ref.		For Decision	√	High	Medium	Low
Governance Working Group					√	
Consultation	Chief Executive					

Board Meeting Date: 17 January 2011

Report Title: Board Member Recruitment

<p>Purpose: The purpose of this report is to propose a process by which Independent and Tenant Board member vacancies will be filled.</p>
<p>Policy/Strategy Implications: The report invokes the Board Membership, Recruitment and Succession Policy.</p>
<p>Finance and VFM Implications: None as a direct result of this report.</p>
<p>Customer Care/Equality and Diversity Implications: The recruitment/selection processes should be properly accessible to people from all diversity strands.</p>
<p>Risk Assessment: (cross-reference with FCH Risk Map): Risk 1.1: Failure to comply with Regulatory and Legislation requirements (Critical Impact / High Likelihood). A comprehensive Board recruitment process, as set out in this report, is necessary to achieve the Regulatory requirement of good governance. Risk 1.4: Skill Deficiency in Board or Management Team (Critical Impact / High Likelihood). The comprehensive Board recruitment process set out in this report aims to target areas of skill deficiency on the Board.</p>
<p>Recommendations: It is recommended that the Board:</p> <p>(i) Agree the Board member recruitment process outlined in this report.</p>

1.0 Background

- 1.1 There are currently four vacancies on the Board (three tenant Board member vacancies and one independent Board member).
- 1.2 Consultation is ongoing with regard to reducing the size of the Board from 15 to 12 members, and the Board will be asked to consider this issue further at its meeting on 7 March 2011. However, regardless of the outcome of the Board's consideration, it is clear that there is a requirement to recruit at least one tenant Board member and one independent Board member.
- 1.3 The tenant Board member vacancy was advertised in the December 2010 issue of Streets Ahead. To date, only one expression of interest has been received, and so

further work is required to encourage a greater pool of candidates. The Company Secretary is working with the Assistant Director of Communications and Customer Engagement on this.

1.4 It is suggested that recruitment of an independent Board member is begun in January.

2.0 Skills Analysis / Representational Balance

2.1 The Campbell Tickell outcome report on the Board appraisal and review process highlighted that Housing Management is an area of expertise that is lacking at Board level. The report also suggests that the Board consider whether it needs legal and/or further financial expertise.

2.2 The Campbell Tickell report also highlights that there are diversity gaps on the Board in terms of female members, younger members and ethnicity.

2.3 2.1 and 2.2 above should be taken into account during the recruitment process.

3.0 The Proposed Process

3.1 The following process is proposed to achieve the required Board appointments:

1. Late Jan – Advertising/publicity for recruitment of both tenant and independent Board members.
2. Mid-Feb – Information event for prospective Board members – to be led by the Chief Executive and attended by officers only.
3. 4 March – Deadline for applications from prospective Board members.
4. Board 7 March – Board to establish Recruitment Panel, to pursue the recruitment process. When appointing the Panel, the Board will be made aware of the identities of all applicants, so as to avoid any potential conflicts of interest.
5. Board 11 April – Recruitment Panel to make its recommendations on the appointment of Board members. Independent Board member to be appointed immediately on a temporary basis until the AGM in September 2011, with a recommendation that the appointment be made permanent at that stage.
6. Apr - June – If necessary, ballot of all tenants to appoint tenant Board member(s)

Freebridge Community Housing

Report to the Board

Author	Tony Hall	Report Type		Impact		
Related Work Ref.		For Decision	√	High	Medium	Low
Asset Management Strategy		For Information			√	
Consultation	Management Team					

Meeting Date: 17th January 2011

Report Title: European Development Growth Fund – Competitiveness Programme 2007 - 13

<p>Purpose The purpose of this report is to advise the Board of a project concept that has been put forward by Freebridge to the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).</p>
<p>Policy/Strategy Implications The project will help inform the retrofit of green energy solutions to our housing stock and support knowledge, training and jobs in related activities.</p>
<p>Finance and VFM Implications: The total value of the project is £721,000, with a ERDF contribution of £288,000. Freebridge and its partners will be expected to contribute 40% of the cost however this can be made up of cash and “in – kind” contributions.</p>
<p>Customer Care/Equality and Diversity Implications The flat block identified for the project has been a source of complaints about the cost of heating. The improvements will significantly improve energy rating for the property and contribute to more affordable warmth. Lessons learnt from the project can be used across other Freebridge properties.</p>
<p>Risk Assessment (cross-reference with FCH Risk Map): The project will inform the Sustainability Strategy and therefore mitigate risk 4.10 – Not delivering zero carbon agendas. The main risk for implementation relate to project management. Funding has been included within the proposal for a project manager and the initiative would be controlled through our project management framework.</p>
<p>Recommendations: It is recommended that the Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Note the content of the report and approve the participation of Freebridge in the project. (ii) Agree that a further detailed report is prepared for the Board if we are successful in reaching the next stage.

1. Background

1.1 The East of England Development Agency (EEDA) recently announced a funding programme focused on the retrofitting of low carbon technologies to housing. Although there is an element of capital investment, the main emphasis is to stimulate interest in low carbon technologies from small and medium size employers (SME's) in the eastern region.

1.2 Initial thoughts focused on Hillington Square, however the scale and timing of funding did not fit. After careful consideration, Mayflower flats North Lynn were chosen, as the block demonstrates a good housing example that can be replicated across the region.

1.3 Representatives from Construction Skills, the Borough Council, and Shaping Norfolk's Future worked with us to develop the proposal. An expression of interest was submitted in the name of Freebridge; we have received feedback and have been invited to resubmit the proposal by the 4th January. This has been done and I will update the board of any further information at the meeting.

2. Key Objectives and Outcomes

Objectives

- To provide hands on knowledge dissemination of the design, manufacture and installation of the low carbon retrofit solutions in walk-up blocks of flats.
- To provide business engagement through hands on knowledge dissemination, larger 'tool box' talks and wider dissemination in the engaged SME's and business groups within the immediate Kings Lynn and further EEDA region.
- To provide procurement opportunities for construction materials and technologies to SME's in the EEDA region.
- To provide procurement opportunities for contractors and installers within the EEDA region.
- To educate and subsequently employ a resident who lives in the retrofitted units as 'Green Champions'.
- Wider awareness raising in the community of 'green' lifestyles using Green Champions.
- To achieve 60-80% carbon emissions reductions from the retrofitted units.

Outcomes

- Provide an easily understandable demonstration of how to retrofit walk-up blocks of flats using a range of technologies.
- Using baseline information collected by the project to develop a 'technology menu' to assist public and private landlords and owners to identify the most appropriate technologies that can be used to retrofit walk-up blocks of flats considering costs and utility savings, installation/maintenance requirements and achievable CO2 reductions.
- Dissemination of the findings of the project to housing associations, private landlords, the construction sector and tenants.
- Piloting of the use of waste material as a locally sourced and produced insulation material, with the potential to develop this into a commercial venture.
- Contribution towards the development of a low carbon economy.

3. Financial Implications

3.1 The total scheme cost is £721,000. This includes £288,000 cash contribution from the European Regional Development Fund. Freebridge and its partners will provide 40% matched funding through a combination of cash and "in kind" contributions.

3.2 The bidding process is laborious and, if successful, it is unlikely that we will get final sign off from EEDA until May 2011, with an anticipated start date of June 2011.

4. Conclusions

4.1 The project fits with our business plan objectives, specifically:

- A key partner in community development activities to build community capacity
- Delivering homes within sustainable communities and developing skills, capacity and employment opportunities through effective partnerships
- Completed the Decent Homes Programme and agreed 'Decent Homes Plus'

4.2 The Board are requested to note the content of the report and approve the involvement of Freebridge in the project.

Freebridge Community Housing

Report to the Board

Author	Tony Hall	Report Type	Impact		
Related Work Ref.		For Decision	High	Medium	Low
Business Planning		For Information	√		
Consultation	Executive Team				

Meeting Date: 17th January 2011

Report Title: Consultation Paper 'Local Decisions: a Fairer Future for Social Housing'

Purpose: To advise the board of the emerging implication for Freebridge and its tenants of the Government's proposed reform of social housing. At this stage there are no decisions for the Board to make but it is important that members understand the key objective of the reform as a number of policies issues will need addressing over the coming months.

Policy/Strategy Implications: Not at this stage however further reports will be produced once there is further clarity.

Finance and VFM Implications: None as a result of this report, however further reports will be produced once there is further clarity, however there will be significant implications for the Board to consider at a later stage.

Customer Care/Equality and Diversity Implications: None as a result of this paper, however there will be significant implications for the Board to consider at a later stage.

Risk Assessment (cross-reference with FCH Risk Map):

There are two specific risks within the risk area "Governance Framework" that apply:

- Failure to comply with Regulatory and Legislation Requirements has a critical impact and a high likelihood.
- The second area is government housing policy change which had a marginal impact with a significant likelihood.

These risks are managed by the Executive ensuring that the Board are aware of consultation papers and the implications for Freebridge and to present appropriate policies and strategies in response to any changes.

The risk profile in this area will be reassessed and escalated in light of the volume and speed of change in national policy at the present time.

Recommendations: It is recommended that the Board:

- (i) note the content of this report and the summary document Appendix 1

1 Background

- 1.1 In November the Government launched a consultation paper, Local Decisions: A Fairer Future for Social Housing. It outlines changes in the way social housing will function as a result of the new investment framework announced as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review.
- 1.2 The proposals are to reform social housing by introducing a number of policy changes:
- A new more flexible local authority affordable rent tenancy with a minimum fixed term of two years;
 - Reforming the social housing allocations system,
 - Introducing a national social home swap programme,
 - Enabling local authorities to fully discharge homelessness duties into the private sector,
 - Tackle overcrowding
 - Refocus regulation on economic assessments, with a stronger role for local tenants to hold landlords to account.
- 1.3 The consultation paper acknowledged the value of social housing, but it is a scarce resource and there are limited central resources to fund new homes. It also points out that there are a disproportionate number of unemployed people of working age in social housing compared with other tenures. As a result there are five key objectives of social housing reform.
- Focusing social housing on those most in need in a way that enables them to use it as a springboard to opportunity
 - Social housing is flexible and available to more people and to those that genuinely need it
 - Make best use of existing social rented homes
 - Increase the freedoms available to all social landlords to determine the sort of tenancy they can grant to new tenants
 - Protect the rights of existing tenants
- 1.4 A summary of the consultation paper is set out in Appendix 1.

2 Implications for Freebridge and its tenants

- 2.1 At this stage we are still waiting for much of the detail, and although it appears that some decisions will be required by the Board for investment purposes before April 2011; further information is required from the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) and the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). There are also implications for Freebridge from the way the local authority wants to manage the waiting list and its tenancy strategy.
- 2.2 The Executive Team are assessing the risks and opportunities that the consultation paper presents. Discussions are taking place with the local authority and within the e² Consortium in order that the Board can decide how it wishes to respond.
- 2.3 The closing date for responses to the consultation paper is the 17th January; therefore an Executive response has been prepared in consultation with the Chairman.

Local decisions: a fairer future for social housing

The aim

The Government has embarked on a radical programme to shift power from Westminster to councils and communities. As part of this, we are carrying out a fundamental reform of social housing to:

- make the system fairer, striking a proper balance between the needs of new and existing tenants
- ensure that the support which social housing provides is focused on those who need it most for as long as they need it
- give local authorities and housing associations new powers so that they can make best use of their housing, in a way which best meets the needs of individual households and their local area

We will need to change the law to deliver many of these reforms and we will use the Localism Bill to do this.

This document gives a brief summary of the reforms. More detail is available in a policy document, which is downloadable from the Department for Communities and Local Government website at www.communities.gov.uk

The document asks a number of questions about the way these new powers are likely to be exercised and we are particularly keen to hear council and housing association tenants' views. The date for submitting responses is **Monday 17 January 2011**. The email address for comments is housingreform@communities.gsi.gov.uk

The reforms

Tenancies

The lifetime tenancies of existing council and housing association tenants (that is to say, people who are tenants at the time the law is changed) will not change.

For new tenants, the Government will give councils and housing associations the freedom to grant fixed term tenancies, as well as lifetime tenancies. These fixed term tenancies will be at social rent levels and provide another option for landlords and tenants alongside the new fixed term Affordable Rent tenancies.

Landlords will not have to grant the new fixed term tenancies and will be able to continue to give lifetime tenancies in some or all cases, if they consider this is right.

Generally speaking, fixed term tenants will have the same rights as lifetime tenants, such as a right to repair, and a right to buy/acquire.

The new fixed term tenancies will have a minimum time period of at least two years, but no maximum time period, so landlords can provide a length of tenancy that takes account of the needs of individual tenants and the local community – be that 10 years, 20 years, or longer.

We are consulting, and will decide, in the light of views expressed, on other rules for the use of fixed term tenancies. Those include whether the minimum period should be more than two years; whether some groups should always be guaranteed a longer fixed term or a social home for life; and whether existing secure or assured tenants should always continue to receive a lifetime tenancy when they move.

Landlords will need to publish their own policy on tenancies in the light of these rules and tenants' views. Their decisions on whether to renew a tenancy at the end of the fixed term will need to be in line with that policy.

What happens at the end of the fixed term tenancy is important. Many tenants will need to stay in social housing, either in their current home or another more suitable property; others will be able to move on to low cost home ownership or private rented housing. Landlords will need to discuss the various housing options with their tenants well before the end of the fixed term, and help tenants move on to different accommodation, where this is appropriate.

Succession

We are changing the rules on succession (where someone living in a property inherits the tenancy when the tenant dies) so they will be the same for all new council and housing association tenants. For all new tenancies (lifetime and fixed term) in future, the spouse or partner of the tenant will have an automatic legal right to succeed, as long as the tenant him/herself isn't a successor. However, landlords will be able to give additional succession rights in the tenancy agreement, if they choose.

The changes to succession will not affect existing secure tenants who stay in their current home or move using the nationwide social home swap scheme. They will also not affect the right of a joint tenant to take over the tenancy when the other joint tenant dies.

Affordable Rents

We are introducing a new 'Affordable Rent' tenancy to be offered by housing associations to new tenants of social housing from April 2011.

Affordable Rent properties will offer shorter term tenancies at a rent higher than social rent, with landlords able to set rents anywhere between current social rent levels and up to 80 per cent of local market rents. Local authorities will continue to play a key role on nominations.

Tenants of Affordable Rent properties will be able to get housing benefit, if they are eligible.

Allocations

Councils will be able to set the rules which decide who qualifies to go on the housing waiting list. At the moment they have to keep 'open' waiting lists, which means that people can get onto any council's waiting list whether they need social housing or not.

The rules which determine who should get priority for social housing will continue to be set by central government, by means of the statutory Reasonable Preference (RP) categories. This is to ensure that priority for social housing continues to go to the most vulnerable in society and those who need it most.

Council and housing association tenants who want, rather than need, to move will no longer have to compete with other people on the waiting list. Councils will be able to develop their own policies for these transferring tenants. However, social tenants who are in housing need (e.g. those who are overcrowded) will still go on the waiting list and will also continue to get priority.

Mobility

The Government is introducing a nationwide social home swap scheme so that all council and housing association tenants wishing to move have the best chance of finding a suitable match.

Homelessness

Councils will be able to bring the homelessness duty (owed to people homeless through no fault of their own and in priority need) to an end with an offer of suitable private rented housing. At the moment, they can only do this if the person agrees (unless they are offering temporary accommodation). So, people owed the main homelessness duty can effectively insist on being offered social housing, whether they need it or not, taking around a fifth of new social lettings. This significantly restricts the number of social homes that could be made available to others in need on the waiting list. The tenancy offered will have to be for at least 12 months and if the person becomes homeless again within two years through no fault of their own, the council would have a duty to secure accommodation for them again. Councils will still be able to offer social housing to end the homelessness duty, if they choose.

Council housing finance

The current arrangement for financing council housing – through the Housing Revenue Account subsidy system – is complex, leaves councils uncertain about future income and doesn't enable them to plan long-term. The Government plans to replace this with a new self-financing arrangement that will enable councils to keep all the rent money they raise and spend it locally on their services. It will also enable tenants and local taxpayers to hold their landlord to account for the cost and quality of their housing.