

FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING BOARD

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Board held on
Monday 12 June 2017 at 5.45pm in
“The Barn”, 2 Chapel Lane, King’s Lynn**

PRESENT:

Ray Johnson (Chairman)
Steve Clark
Marie Connell
Tony Hall (Chief Executive)
Ian Pinches
Simon Smith
Andy Walder

IN ATTENDANCE:

Colin Davison - Director of Property
Dave Marshall - Director of Finance and Resources
Angus MacQueen - Company Secretary

OBSERVER:

Alex Dixon - Director of Assets and Development
with effect from 3 July 2017

The meeting was preceded by a presentation from Rob Beiley, partner at the legal firm Trowers and Hamlins, on the legal structures to enable commercial development.

124/17 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Brian Long, Pauleen Pratt, Jasmine Rigg and Colin Sampson.

125/17 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 May 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendments:

[confidential wording]

Minute number 104/17, “Debt Collection Agencies”, add the following sentence to the first paragraph:

“She stressed that Freebridge’s performance in relation to debt collection was better than the sector average”.

126/17 MATTERS ARISING

• **Finance and Human Resources Quarterly Management Report
(Minute Number 114/17)**

A Board Member said that, while the minute on this item was correct, he wished to stress that the Board had had a significant discussion on financial variances. The Board was clearly anxious about variances and was keen that these were minimised going forward.

127/17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

128/17 CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

The Chairman said that, since the last Board meeting, he had attended his usual regular meetings with the Chief Executive.

The Chairman advised that he and Andy Walder, the Chairman-elect, would shortly be attending a meeting with the London School of Economics, organised by Flagship Housing, to discuss housing policy. Andy would be shadowing him more closely from now on.

The Chairman also advised that he would be attending a charity golf day organised by Greenfields Community Housing, on 23 June 2017.

129/17 MANAGEMENT TEAM UPDATE

Confidential item

130/17 HILLINGTON SQUARE REVISED MASTERPLAN

Confidential item

131/17 POLICY FRAMEWORK REVIEW

The Director of Finance and Resources presented a report which described the policy framework review that had been undertaken and which recommended a new policy handbook, as part of the identified actions arising from the Business Improvement Strategy agreed by the Board in January 2017.

The Board welcomed the new policy framework and handbook. The Board requested that documentation be produced which explained the linkages from the vision, mission and values, through to the objective goals, the policy handbook, and the procedures that sat below the handbook. This would be useful reference, both for employees and Board Members. The Chief Executive undertook to ensure that this was included in the Business Plan communication. It was highlighted that the existing assurance framework would monitor implementation of the policy handbook.

With reference to the Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy, the Board requested additional wording to be included, to clarify the occasions when the Chief Executive would report instances of suspected fraud to the Regulator.

RESOLVED: That the revised policy framework and policy handbook, and the proposed integration with the assurance framework, be approved, subject to additional wording being included in the policy handbook, clarifying the occasions when the Chief Executive would report instances of suspected fraud to the Regulator.

**132/17 STRATEGIC REPORT INCLUDING VALUE FOR MONEY
SELF-ASSESSMENT STATEMENT 2016/17**

The Director of Finance and Resources presented a report which sought approval for the Strategic Report and Value for Money Self-Assessment Statement 2016/17 for inclusion in the statutory financial accounts for 2016/17.

The Director of Finance and Resources highlighted that, under “Operating Review”, the report referred to 13 new homes having been developed by Freebridge during the year. Later in the report, under “New and Empty Properties Development”, it referred to Freebridge having developed 11 new properties as part of the e² consortium. He would check whether these figures were consistent with each other.

The Director of Finance and Resources advised that the report was being reviewed by the External Auditors, as part of their annual audit work.

It was noted that expected changes to the Regulator’s Value for Money Standard would, if introduced, result in Registered Providers no longer being required to produce a Value for Money Self-Assessment Statement. The Regulator’s monitoring of value for money would instead focus around a series of metrics. The Strategic Report would, however, still be required as part of the annual accounts.

RESOLVED:

1) That the following statement be agreed:

“The Board has reviewed the Value for Money Self-Assessment Statement and it is satisfied that there is sufficient evidence to:

- enable stakeholders to understand the return on assets measured against the organisation’s objectives;
- set out the absolute and comparative costs of delivering specific services; and
- demonstrate how value for money gains have been or will be made, and how these have and will be realised over time.

The Board considers that there are no significant deficiencies, omissions or errors and that its inclusion in the financial statements fulfils the VfM standard requirements of the Homes and Communities Agency's 'Value for Money Standard' April 2012."

- 2) That the draft Strategic Report and Value for Money statement be approved for inclusion in Freebridge's statutory financial accounts 2016/17.

133/17 BOARD RECRUITMENT 2017 PART 2

The Company Secretary presented a report which sought to progress Board recruitment.

The Company Secretary highlighted that the recommendations in the report included holding a recruitment campaign with a view to appointing two new Tenant Board Members at the Annual General Meeting on 18 September 2017. However, achieving this timetable would not enable advertising the positions in Streets Ahead. It was not crucial to adhere to this timetable, as any new appointments could be made by the Board on a temporary basis, to be ratified at the Annual General Meeting in September 2018. The Board was of the view that it was important that the positions were advertised in Streets Ahead, and so there should be a revised timetable to allow for this.

In terms of recruiting Tenant Board Members, it was suggested that members of the Tenant Panel might be encouraged to apply. So as to avoid losing capacity on the Panel, it was also suggested that it might be possible to allow for someone to sit on both the Panel and the Board; however, it was agreed that this would not be appropriate as it would affect the Panel's independence. Freebridge employees could also be asked whether they had come across any potential Tenant Board Members. It was stressed that any new Tenant Board Members would have to have the requisite skills to justify their recruitment.

It was also pointed out that the report recommended that someone with Finance skills be recruited to the Board this year. The Board was of the view that this should specifically be a qualified accountant or an individual with equivalent experience; although this might reduce the pool of applicants, an ability to interrogate the accounts and to challenge them would be key.

It was noted that the intention was not to recruit asset management/development skills at this stage. This would wait until the Board had progressed further with its plans; if the Board decided to set up a development company, an independent member with these skills could be recruited to sit on the new company's board.

The Board welcomed the suggestion in the report to make the two current Co-opted Board Members into full Independent Board Members. The Board acknowledged that these appointments should not take place until the Co-opted Board Members had been formally appraised, and so asked that their

appraisals be brought forward to early October 2017, so that the appointments could take place at the Board meeting on 6 November 2017.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That Rule changes be commissioned to remove references to the deleted post of Deputy Chief Executive and to add a further Independent seat on the Board.
- 2) That the Rule changes be presented to the Board's meeting in August 2017, for final approval.
- 3) That the recruitment of new Independent Board Members be deferred until November 2017.
- 4) That the recruitment of new Tenant Board Members be instigated.
- 5) That the recruitment of a Board Member with Finance skills (who could be either a tenant or a co-optee) be instigated, the Finance skills being those of a qualified accountant.
- 6) That the Governance Committee be requested to undertake the recruitment described in 4) and 5) above, and to report back to the Board's meeting in November with its recommendations.
- 7) That the Borough Council be invited to put forward a replacement for Colin Sampson by 30 June 2017, to give time for the nominee to be interviewed before the September 2017 AGM.
- 8) That the need for asset management/development skills be reconsidered when the Board's development plans are further progressed.

134/17 FINANCIAL FORECAST RETURN 2016/17

The Director of Finance and Resources presented a report which sought approval for the Financial Forecast Return to be submitted to the Homes and Communities Agency.

RESOLVED: That the Financial Forecast Return, as presented, be submitted to the Homes and Communities Agency.

135/17 CONSULTANCY

Confidential item

136/17 TENANT PANEL QUARTERLY UPDATE

The Director of Property presented a report which provided a quarterly update of the Tenant Panel's work.

In answer to a question, the Chief Executive said that he would check whether the sheltered scheme garden competition was going ahead this year, and would let the Board know.

The Board was of the view that the Tenant Panel presentation at the 2016 Annual General Meeting had been well received, and asked that the Panel give a similar presentation at this year's AGM.

The Board noted the report and

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Tenant Panel Development Plan, as presented, be endorsed.
- 2) That the Tenant Panel Work Plan 2017/18, as presented, be endorsed.

137/17 ANNUAL HEALTH AND SAFETY UPDATE

Confidential item

138/17 EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION UPDATE

The Chief Executive presented a report which provided an update on employee satisfaction feedback for 2016/17. He added that this was the last time that the Board would receive a report on employee satisfaction in this format, as employee satisfaction would be included in the new performance measures to be reported to the Board on a quarterly basis.

In answer to a question, the Director of Property explained that there had been some technical difficulties with enabling all of the Property Services operatives to access the monthly employee satisfaction survey. These difficulties had significantly affected the average response rate to the survey, but had now been rectified with the result that the response rate was increasing.

In response to a question, the Chief Executive said that the monthly employee satisfaction survey results would not form part of the Times Top 100 Employers assessment process.

The Board noted the report.

139/17 WORK UPDATE

The Company Secretary presented the work update, which included the following:

- Action Sheet
- Future Work Programme of the Board.

The Board highlighted that there remained a number of elements of slippage within the action sheet. In particular, item 31/17, to report to the Board on delegated authority in relation to asset disposal, had now slipped four times. The Chief Executive accepted that the Management Team needed to increase its focus on the action sheet. However, he was confident that the slippage was not generally affecting the smooth-running of the business and, in most cases, was fully justifiable. He stressed that there were other business priorities which did not feature on the action sheet, such as those within the Business Plan and arising from performance and service assurance monitoring. He tabled an updated version of the action sheet, containing considerably more detail, and this was accepted.

The Board noted the update.

140/17 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- **Peer Review**

The Chief Executive reported that Orwell Housing Association had approached Freebridge with a view to undertaking a Board peer review process. The Board agreed that this would be useful and asked that it be taken forward by the Governance Committee.

141/17 NEXT MEETING

The Board noted that its next meeting was scheduled for Monday 7 August 2017 at 4.45pm.

The meeting closed at 7.35pm.

CHAIRMAN