

Notes of the Tenant Panel Meeting

Held on 15 January 2021 at 9.45 am held virtually

Attendance – Tenant Panel Facilitator, Governance Coordinator Anne, Frances, Annette, Sandy, David, Charlotte, Roger and David.

Apologies – Sarah.

The Tenant Panel Facilitator shared that Inge had decided to leave the Tenant Panel for personal reasons.

Declarations of Interest – There were none.

Work Programme – This was noted.

	Item
1	<p>Notes of the Last Meeting held in December 2020 and Matters Arising</p> <p>They were approved as a correct record, and the matters arising report was noted which contained updates from the Governance Coordinator on follow up work agreed at the last meeting. All actions were resolved.</p> <p>The work programme was noted.</p> <p>Tenant Checked Logo – Some Tenant Panel Members were unsure about the wording ‘approved’ to be on the logo as it might imply that they approved the policy as opposed to the format of the document. The Tenant Panel asked if the Director of Housing could consider this point further and perhaps amend to say they had checked the format instead. The Governance Coordinator agreed to share with the Director of Housing.</p>
2	<p>Review of Customer Facing Materials – Tenant Handbook (re-occurring)</p> <p>The Director of Housing arrived in the meeting to discuss items on the agenda and receive comments from the Tenant Panel.</p> <p>Complaints and Compliments Leaflet – Redrafted following comments at the December meeting. Information that could be read elsewhere had been signposted and removed to reduce length.</p> <p>Following a comment about the ‘democratic filter’ referenced in Ombudsman guidance in regard to complaints, the Director of Housing shared that the Draft Building Safety Bill recommended that the democratic filter be removed, however there was no date when this was due to be passed and become law and when there was further updates this would be provided. A Panel Member commented that they had wondered whether in the interim if Freebridge had left themselves open until this Bill was passed, but the Director of Housing explained that a customer can only request a designated tenant panel if there was one and if there was not they have to rely on other methods.</p> <p>Panel members commented that the reduced format was much improved.</p> <p>A Panel Member shared that they had thought the Ombudsman complaint information had advised that if there was no designated tenant panel to hear a complaint the housing association could signpost the customer to another housing association that had one. The Director of Housing asked the Panel Member to forward the extract of where they had come across this information for further review.</p> <p>The Panel confirmed that they were satisfied that the leaflet was now okay to publicise.</p> <p>Rewire Form/Leaflet – Circulated for comments on email to the Tenant Panel who gave comments individually as follows:</p>

- The leaflet presented was not necessary to provide to tenants and better to discuss in person for when the works was due to be carried out.
- If using the form need to add pictures of what is being explained so people know what the difference is.
- There is a paragraph about Freebridge not taking responsibility for damaged carpet but disagree that this should be left damaged as a result of work taking place with no compensation.
- Would not recommend surface trunking in properties as it does not look good at all, and it is better to spend the extra money to improve the home and sink wires into the wall flush.
- Tenants may be put off having the work done if carpets are not repaired after.
- People may be put off a fresh sunk wiring in walls and go for trunking instead which may not be best for the property in the long term, and they may make this decision because they are not being compensated enough to redecorate and nothing towards damage flooring.
- Once electrical inspection is carried out a meeting should be held on site between the tenant and a surveyor or housing team member to discuss each room in the house and then after the meeting it should be drawn up in a written agreement provided to the tenant and kept on file for contractor/operatives reference. The work in writing will help the tenant to remember what was agreed at the time and what is going to happen, as well as after if there are issues this can be referred to and will help to reduce complaints.
- It is a huge upheaval for tenants not to include resolution of any damaged carpets.
- The meaning of compensation to most people will not just be financial but for the disruption also.
- If Freebridge understands that tenants are vulnerable they should consider rather than giving them compensation financially to redecorate for them.
- Each property should be assessed on site on an individual basis as they all have different layouts.
- When they were a tenant of another housing association they were offered a deal with a local shop with a discount of 20% to get all the items they needed to decorate.
- When looking at compensation someone may perceive that to not just be financial, but for the disruption that has been caused.
- If many tenants opt for flush trunking in the walls, this option will cost a lot of money to redecorate.

Following a query the Director of Housing shared that it is not possible to determine how many properties require rewiring until the electricians have been checked, but agreed to share with the Panel how many electrical inspections there were coming up but the number of rewires would be less than tests.

The Director of Housing thanked the Tenant Panel for their comments and agreed to take them forward with the Assets team. The Governance Coordinator agreed to note under matters arising to feedback to the Tenant Panel a final decision on this matter.

Tenant Handbook – though may need to divide up over meetings.

Had been circulated in the agenda for comments:

The Tenant Panel felt strongly in regard to the matter of fencing within the handbook where pictures of nice fencing had been included but which was not a policy of Freebridge to install, they felt that Freebridge should consider installing close board fencing as a basic standard due to the following reasons:

- The Handbook had pictures of nice fencing though Freebridge do not automatically offer fencing so unsure this should be publicised in this way.

Freebridge should have a uniform approach to gardens and fencing falling into the white paper point about stigma in social housing.

- At their home a wire fence had been put up however the garden kept disappearing onto the adjoining pathway and had to keep being cleared up by Freebridge and therefore it would make sense to install wooden fencing as it would keep the garden in plus it would look much more presentable linking in again to stigma. The surveyor advised them that it was adequate when they had asked them about it and therefore wooden fencing for all properties needs looking at for a more permanent basic requirement in properties.
- For fencing, the two wires and the concrete posts that Freebridge feel are adequate for tenant's homes do not protect privacy, and from when he served on a housing board elsewhere, this had been a top priority. Within two years of resolving to fit close board fencing the antisocial behaviour decreased by 40% as it gave people privacy in their own gardens and property without interference. Freebridge need to look at the policy of fencing and look at the benefits of doing so, giving tenant's privacy and security.

The Director of Housing shared that the current position on fencing was that Freebridge marked boundaries only as a matter of process; the charter looked to improve the external areas of properties. The new Director of Assets Graham Wilson would be considering external areas of assets, and we would look to have an external process of works on a road-by-road or estate basis for consistency. She shared that adequate was not what Freebridge was aspiring to and wished to reassure the Tenant Panel that there would be an externals programme in place to look at all aspects of the properties. Most people would expect to have a closed Board fencing for security. The Governance Coordinator agreed to add the matter for update in six months time to the plan.

Other Comments on the handbook were as follows:

- The scooter section needed review to say what tenants should be able to have.
- The contents page had text on a purple background that made it difficult to read and ideally should be black text with a white background like the rest of the document.
- The Handbook was quite wordy and repetitive and it was too much for how to live in a property that you rent.
- They supply adapted properties for disabled people, so if you have a wheelchair or electric scooter you will need to charge it, so has to come in the house. A charged scooter should be more urgent than a repair to a TV aerial as stated in the handbook.
- Was there figures on how much it costed Freebridge to bring a property up to relet standard from when a tenancy ends.
- Freebridge will support tenants that want to downsize, is there any help to assist in downsizing.
- Freebridge needed to ensure that it complied with their own policies because if they do not, then they cannot ask tenants to do the same. They need to set an example.

The Director of Housing shared that the feedback on the handbook was what was required, and it had been in the current format for far too long, and where points have been added the general redesign of the whole document resulting in it not making sense so feedback is helpful. She wished to confirm point about fencing had been heard loud and strong, and when Leadership Team touched on strategy, a uniform approach to fencing was something they agreed with and it would be taking forward to Graham Wilson Director of Assets. The Panel agreed that it was an issue that needed to be addressed.

Following a question the Director of Housing shared that the worst state a property can be in is most likely following eviction, and with landlord costs to take someone to court,

average rent arrears and the number of days it takes to get it ready for re-let, the average cost calculated by Shelter had been around £6k ten years ago so inevitably would be double that now.

Following a query about incentives for downsizing the Director of Housing shared that a few years ago finance was provided but it was found that it wasn't really an incentive as people who wished to move as they were minded to do that anyway. She added that redirection of mail, removal costs (where Freebridge require the move); change of energy supply; was provided to assist people.

A Panel Member shared that she hoped the handbook would continue, as it was worthwhile document. Following a query about assisting new tenants who move into sheltered housing, the Director of Housing shared that the lettings surveyors currently carry out accompanied viewings for prospective tenants to show them where the items to use are in the property.

The Director of Housing shared that the handbook tried to balance between what tenants should expect from Freebridge and what is requested from them, and perhaps with the useful feedback provided this could be presented differently. There may be a need to take chunks and chapters overtime to further review at Tenant Panel meetings.

3

Five Year Strategy/Customer Charter

The Director of Housing shared that there would be a separate session with the Tenant Panel to focus on the five year strategy/customer charter. She added that the plan over the next five years needed to look at where we were now and in the future, economically, the UK and wider implications of Covid, brexit etc. On a local level, we have seen increasing poverty and hardship in the borough and Freebridge needed to recognise its role in tackling that with partners. The seven main areas to tackle through the strategy were:

- **Customer Excellence/experience** – across the range – repairs, contact centre, housing teams, property etc. Initiatives under this heading – when, how and who access services from.
- **Homes and places to be proud of** – quality, environment (fencing),
- **Social Impact through provision of new homes** – development pipeline and provision of new and different homes.
- **Employment** – recruitment, retention, offer to staff, how people work going forward as majority are home working and did within a couple of weeks at the start of the pandemic and has been working well since, but when vaccinations are further rolled out need to consider how we move forward .
- **Better West Norfolk** – how as a landlord we work with partners to improve the wider opportunities for West Norfolk (employment, services outside immediate housing, community work)
- **Carbon Emissions** – reaching net zero target by 2050, how Freebridge operates, homes etc.
- **Strength of business** – technology etc.

Will be looking to seek the panel's views at the specific session. There will be a number of projects and objectives for all these areas behind these headings.

The Tenant Panel had the following comments/queries:

- Hopefully it will all come to fruition but there was a long way to go before Freebridge gets anywhere near on what is expected on the list of seven items shared.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Also felt that this was a huge plan over five years, difficult to comment at this stage and happy to do so going forward. Wish every success and all very new with Brexit, the cost of living, those recovering from covid, shops that fail and where the town centre maybe different in future, hope that all the changes proposed are not too overwhelming for staff. • Poverty increasing over last five years – as we find ourselves in this current state – poverty will most likely increase further. Will you get more staff or refer tenants to other agencies more. The Director of Housing shared that when the strategy is pulled together it will be a consideration of how much do we do ourselves or support partners to do that for example with charities such as the money advice hub. The Board need to take a view on whether there is further investment, whether it be financially or otherwise. • A Panel Member felt that how to deal with poverty could not be completely planned for, as we may have to deal with the issue over the coming months and years at each particular point in time, as the situation will change. • There is a lot going on in people’s homes which we will not be aware of like abuse of children, domestic abuse and as Freebridge house people they to do more to consider doing more and as much as they can to help and they would like to see the issue written into a strategy. The Director of Housing shared that absolutely problems for families go wider than financial, and whilst we see more customers come forward for reasons other than financial, the need is growing but there is still a lot hidden. There is more shown through other ways, such as the hot meals project and suggested the Community Caterer could come and visit the Panel at some point to share the work that they do. The Governance Coordinator noted this for the work programme. • A Panel Member commented whether Freebridge would think about having volunteers coming to help at project events. The Director of Housing shared that Freebridge employees and charities come to help in recent initiatives and definitely would look at how help could be sort more. <p>A session would be held with the Tenant Panel to discuss the strategy further.</p>
4	<p>Introduction: New Director of Development</p> <p>Paul Newbold, New Director of Development came to the Tenant Panel Meeting to introduce himself since joining Freebridge at the end of 2020 and the Director of Housing continued in the meeting. He shared slides with the Panel, which was subsequently circulated on email.</p> <p>The Director of Development shared that an update could be provided to the Tenant Panel every six months on development schemes. The Governance Coordinator agreed to liaise with the Director of Housing on timescales within the Tenant Panel work programme.</p> <p>A Panel Member shared a comment that it was good to get a mixture of Board, Directors and Managers with tenants to discuss ideas around development. The Panel member wished to query if there were any designs at the moment that would be flexible so that if Freebridge were building homes for younger single people, the designs could be altered later on so that one size fits all. The Director shared that the footprint of the property could be harder to change, but in previous roles when looking at a stock condition survey he had experienced review of properties that could be extended to adapt them for more flexible accommodation than build a new home. He added that modular homes and pre-constructed homes were becoming cheaper and in a few years maybe more, comparable to current building methods but any investigations into this would be at a very early stages currently.</p> <p>The Panel thanked the Director of Development for their attendance and he advised before leaving the meeting that he was happy to take questions offline.</p>

5

Placeshaping Strategy Review and Annual Update

Hannah Hooks, Placeshaping Manager attended to provide the Tenant Panel an update but also discuss the Placeshaping Strategy. The Director of Housing continued in the meeting. The Placeshaping Manager advised the following:

- Discovery Centre relaunch had been paused.
- Partnerships were strong and would continue.
- Delivering well-being packs to vulnerable families now.
- Understanding key themes from the Tenant Panel or partners would be a good starting point to review the Placeshaping strategy to understand where we wish to continue to deliver services or amend them.

Tenant Panel Members commented that:

- Children were suffering with mental health issues due to the lockdown and wondered if Freebridge could help. The news recently focused on very young children. The Placeshaping Manager shared that the team were looking to help to support all ages with the challenges of mental health because of lockdown. They run a youth engagement survey with questions around what they miss about school; their favourite subjects; hobbies etc. Some of the children wanted to see the sea and never seen the beach and wished to have more arts and crafts at home. The survey helped to build up a picture of what was needed in future. This work started in November and ongoing. The Placeshaping Manager shared that she had been asked to be a community governor at St Edmundsbury school.
- A Panel Member wished to congratulate the team for their effort.
- A Panel Member wished to say thank you to the community team with the Santa at Providence Street, as it had been wonderful with the year that has been to be able to do this with their child.
- A Panel Member commented that support and inclusion for children that have vulnerable, medical or learning needs was important and there had been no government support additionally in home schooling over the year and the effects on that this would have had on parent's mental health and wellbeing over this time. They added that some of these children were unable to go to school as they were in the vulnerable bracket. The Placeshaping Manager shared that it was difficult for parents and children who have special educational needs, and the team were in conversation with other agencies and groups, which included action for children, and it may be possible to signpost or provide a connector service. The Placeshaping Manager agreed to keep the Tenant Panel up to date on this topic as it progresses and thanked the Tenant Panel for their specific offer on working closely on this subject.
- A Panel Member wished to query what Freebridge was doing in addition to tackle anti-social behaviour, which would have potentially increased due to lockdown and where tenants deserve to feel safe in their own homes. The Placeshaping Manager shared that it was important that incidents were reported to Freebridge so that help can be provided. The Director of Housing shared that they were aware of specific examples when they appear on social media, there was set procedures that are followed and sometimes where someone is not satisfied with the action that has been taken it is perceived as non-action. The Director of Housing shared that there can be reasons behind behaviours relating to anti-social behaviour that make it complex.
- A Panel Member queried whether there had been an increase in garden assistance over the past year. The Placeshaping Manager in changing the criteria as previously discussed with the Panel, there had been lots of responses back and additional requests for garden assistance with a mixture of what was

	<p>required. Customers had been asked to respond by the end of January and she would update the Panel on the service further after this time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Panel Member shared that they wondered whether any questions that would identify lone parents that are struggling to have someone to talk to. The Placeshaping Manager shared that in engagement with children at the school, they engaged with parents also and a lot just wanted a friend to talk to about the situation and they will be looking at community consultation and workshops to support tenants and the wider community. <p>The Placeshaping Manager shared that Freebridge were also partnering with MIND and Lily to support tenants.</p> <p>The Placeshaping Manager shared that she would attend further when possible to provide further updates, and the Tenant Panel thanked her for the attendance and she left the meeting at this point.</p>
6	<p>Draft Quarterly Report to Board and Key Messages</p> <p>The Tenant Panel agreed to email the Governance Coordinator outside the meeting with suggested messages or questions to set within the quarterly Board report. The Governance Coordinator agreed to collect the last 12 months messages to the Board in the form of a table in order to the Tenant Panel to review and share with the Board to invite response on anything that is felt to be still outstanding. This was something that the Vice Chair can then be referenced to for response.</p>
7	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>There was no other business.</p>
8	<p>Meeting how did it go</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very successful and helped to understand some of the issues more including Placeshaping, and hopefully points made have been heard. • Everything gone well, many comments made and hopefully some Freebridge will take forward. • Been a very good meeting and very informative, committees and panels get bogged down but this one does not and keeps moving things forward. • Food for thought. • More questions than answers, much success as the Director of Housing has received flavour of where to go to in reviewing all the items that were on the agenda for discussion. • Found it very informative and all subjects interesting and had learnt a lot. • Interesting and informative. • Been a very very full meeting and good that the Director of Housing, Director of Development and the Placeshaping Manager have all the information they have wanted to get to progress and hopefully given them food for thought. • They like what the Director of Development said that he was building homes not did not say the word houses. • Felt that the Panel have helped the Director of Housing move forward with issues that she wished to with extra evidence in the form of tenant's views. <p>The Tenant Panel thanked the Tenant Panel Facilitator for keeping the meeting going.</p>
9	<p>Date of Next Meeting –Friday 12 February 2021, 9.45 am – 1.45 pm, via Zoom.</p> <p>Meeting Closed at 1.45 pm</p>