

Notes of the Tenant Panel Meeting

Held on 12 March 2021 at 10.00 am held virtually

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

Apologies – Annette and David W.

Declarations of Interest – There were none.

Work Programme – This was noted.

	Item
1	<p>Notes of the Last Meeting held in February 2021 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.</p> <p>The work programme was noted.</p>
2	<p>Quarterly Update from the Board</p> <p>Simon Smith Vice Chair of the Board attended the meeting to provide an update on behalf of the Board and shared the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• New Leadership Team members and now Anna Simpson Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive.• Backlog of repairs the previous year had been 3267, and the Board had requested that this should be resolved as a priority. In addition, 2964 of those had been completed or 91% during the pandemic, which was a brilliant result for the teams, involved.• A Customer Experience slot was included at Board meetings where a customer could attend the meeting to share their experience as a customer• The Board had four new members with two due to leave by the end of April.• The Board and Leadership Team had spent a lot of time discussing and working on the five-year strategy over the past few months. <p>Simon shared a response in regard to the Tenant Panel's questions posed within their quarterly report at the March Board Meeting:</p> <p>1) Appreciation of the Placeshaping team.</p> <p>Response: The Board agreed with this.</p> <p>2) Question from the Panel – Whether the Board felt that it should do more to push for better Performance within the repairs service.</p> <p>Response: The Board had been satisfied in how much they had led the push improvements on performance. The Board was supporting the current Leadership Team to lay the foundations in 2021/22 for the future.</p> <p>3) Question from the Panel – That a Fencing Policy should be considered for all tenants as a basic right to have security and for general wellbeing.</p> <p>Response: Management had in their sights the Tenant Priorities Survey from 2017 and this issue had been a top priority on that list. He believed that management might comment that fencing would need to be considered as far as the Decent Homes Plus programme.</p> <p>Andrew Hill new Board Member introduced himself and summarised his background in corporate treasury. He shared that it was good to see that the Tenant Panel was set up</p>

	<p>as a two-way communication with customers and was looking forward to seeing how we can engage with more tenants, and it would be interesting to have the Panels views on this over time.</p> <p>The Tenant Panel commented that success with the repairs backlog had been positive, but the Board needed to acknowledge the need for management to call customers back when they requested to speak to them. The Vice Chair of the Board shared that this had come out of the recent Customer Experience session at the Board meeting with the example provided and it was unacceptable and the culture needed to be addressed in this regard.</p> <p>A Panel Member commented that some repair jobs logged do not appear on the system when contacting Freebridge for an update sometimes. The Vice Chair of the Board shared that there was work to be done to improve data quality and its management within the organisation.</p> <p>A Panel Member shared that maintenance to the external of homes had been raised as an issue for a number of years by the Panel, which if felt can affect the internal home such as mould and damp. The Vice Chair of the Board shared that he was confident the new team would be able to put in place what was required to resolve this process. The Panel Members added that this was not the tenants fault that there was a change in management and that they still had to wait years for these repairs and some were still waiting.</p> <p>The Tenant Panel thanked the Vice Chair of the Board for his attendance and he left the meeting.</p>
<p>3</p>	<p>Five Year Strategy</p>
	<p>The Director of Housing shared that the five-year strategy would be a standard item on the Tenant Panel agenda over the coming months to discuss updates on progress. A survey had been sent to customers recently to ask what their top five priorities would be for Freebridge over the next five years and this had shaped the strategy. The Director of Housing wished to seek feedback from the Panel on whether this was representative, there had had been over 400 responses which was not a huge number but substantially more than expected. Responses received had been detailed but not always about repairs, some were about community and support for the building of new homes as well as communication.</p> <p>The Governance Coordinator agreed to circulate the Strategy Road map shared with the Tenant Panel on email.</p> <p>Self-Assessment Against the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code</p> <p>The Self-Assessment Against the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code was circulated on email after the February meeting and it was agreed to discuss further if there were any queries raised via the Governance Coordinator offline.</p> <p>Customer Self-Referrals for Assistance</p> <p>Following a query about self-referrals for wellbeing related assistance the Director of Housing asked the Tenant Panel to research services with other tenants in mind and report findings at the April meeting. The Panel agreed to research how accessible information might be for various tenants on seeking additional help and support.</p>

4 Update on Rent Arrears Position and Universal Credit

The Housing Operations Manager attended the meeting to share the item, he shared that the last 12 months had been challenging for tenants, society and the income team that he managed and he wished to share how these challenges had been addressed such as rent arrears:

- Following lockdowns last year, a lot of the team's focus changed from outbound calls chasing up rent payments, to instead being a lot about providing support to people through the uncertainty that had resulted from the pandemic, such as maximising their income.
- Twice as much support from the team in this way was required by tenants that pre covid.
- The Government furlough scheme was in place but with either less income for those effected or being at risk of losing their job which was a worry.
- Freebridge sent a letter to all working age tenants with information on support around unemployment, benefits and external agency support.
- Support information was included on the website.
- The Customer Service Team received training on same advice provided by the Income Team to extend this help.
- The team measured potential projection of the increase of rent arrears within the usual pattern expected every four weeks, where rent is received and which normally expect steadily increases towards Christmas. The income had benefited from a good starting position and that the team were prepared for providing assistance to customers, and as a result the arrears could have been much worse than they were and that of other associations.
- There had been an increase in tenants claiming universal credit and by April/May, there had been double the amount of people receiving this benefit at around 22% of tenants. There was still a potential delay of 5-6 weeks in tenants receiving their benefit money when moving from housing benefit to Universal Credit and this money was provided directly, which observations by the team had shown the more tenants that received Universal Credit the less rent they could collect.
- The team had found through the support they offered that those who had found themselves unemployed had not required help with benefits, though the DWP had been struggling with demand.
- The Income Team had also helped tenants to find support through the hardship fund.
- Next steps were to refocus on collections, away from the support role that had been in place over the past year and journey out of covid.

Following a comment about the Credit Union Scheme, the Housing Operations Manager advised that customers seemed to be more interested in getting low cost loans than saving in this way but Freebridge would consider reviewing advertisement.

Following a comment about recovering former tenant rent arrears and debts, the Housing Operations Manager advised that he would attend the Tenant Panel later in the year but would email stats on the issue for the time being, but the team did make efforts to try and resolve where they were able to. The Governance Coordinator agreed to liaise with the Housing Operations Manager on circulate of stats and programming in of a further session on former tenant debt.

	<p>The Panel were impressed with the efforts of the teams involved over the past year and it highlighted the difficulties that the pandemic had created. The Housing Operation Manager agreed to pass on the compliment to the teams involved.</p> <p>The Panel thanked the Housing Operations Manager for his update and he left the meeting.</p>
5	<p>Assets – Various</p>
	<p>New Director of Assets Introduction</p> <p>The new Director of Assets Graham Wilson attended the meeting to provide an introduction to himself and his service area since joining the organisation earlier in the year as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was focus on repairs and improvements to quality of work. • Improved communications with tenants. • Planning of repairs with the tenant to ensure that a repair can be repaired first time. • Seeking feedback after service has been provided. • Before and after photos of work completed to give an audit and to help Freebridge understand the issues when things go awry. • Provide new dates for work when it cannot be completed that day. • The Customer Services Team and scheduling team were working closer together, as well as the repairs and assets teams to encourage cross team working. • A review of timing of urgent, emergency and routine repairs. <p>The Panel shared that all these ideas were good and it was hoped that this would help improve satisfaction. A Panel Member commented that good customer service can be judged on how things are handled and resolved when they something goes wrong and this was important to remember.</p> <p>The Panel asked if they could receive regular updates on repairs and maintenance as improvements progress quarterly with the Head of Service Delivery. The Governance Coordinator agreed to arrange the meetings in the Tenant Panel schedule.</p> <p>Stock Condition Survey</p> <p>The Head of Asset Management had previously spoke to the Panel about the Stock Condition Survey in October 2020 and agreed to come back at this point to provide an update. he shared the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Storage of data was an issue • They had set up a gateway project through the Leadership Team in relation to the system requirements and they had employed a Systems Analyst to rebuild the storage of the data. • At a later stage, a form will be redesigned to use with tenants to gather data but the project was not at this stage yet but he would come back to the Panel with this as soon as it is ready for comments. The Governance Coordinator agreed to note this further action. • Work would be required to the energy data stored for all properties; fuel poverty was a concern . They had collaborated with a national charity called the Energy Savings Trust to provide data for energy ratings on properties, and this was an offshoot to the stock condition survey project, and provided some important planning. The data

	<p>should lead them into achieving carbon zero and cross reference running costs of properties.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The team had secured funding for poorly insulated properties that do not have a cavity called non-traditional homes, they will be able to externally insulate. <p>Following a query by a Panel Member in regard to how Freebridge were approaching replacement of storage heaters in future, the Head of Asset Management shared that the team had identified some systems were non-programmable, and there was a pilot programme for the replacement of heaters that come up for repair or maintenance . In the interim, the team were also working with the housing team on the winter fuel payment scheme to help over the next winter.</p> <p>The Panel felt that this was all positive news and some exciting changes. The Head of Asset Management shared that he would circulate a PowerPoint presentation to the Panel and come back further to present the issue. The Governance Coordinator agreed to programme this further visit in at the next best time.</p> <p>Rewire Leaflet Review Update and Access to Properties Update</p> <p>The Director of Assets was aware of the Tenant Panel feedback in relation to the rewire leaflet intended to be provided to tenants ahead of rewiring of a property and he was going to review the form and the process behind it including the financial aspect, together with the Director of Housing and the teams involved. The Panel confirmed that they were would wait for a further update as there were many issues arising from the review to consider. The Governance Coordinator agreed to schedule in the programme as necessary.</p> <p>Following a query the Director of Housing shared that it was not known how many properties would need a full rewire until the initial check is complete for each.</p> <p>The Panel thanked the Director of Assets and Head of Asset Management for their attendance and they left the meeting and looked forward to seeing them again.</p>
6	Tenant Panel Recruitment Update – Director of Housing
	<p>There would continue to be the usual interview process after the advert has closed on 30th April. An online session would be offered to those who wish to attend. The Director of Housing and Governance Coordinator would consider ideas for the online session.</p>
7	Meeting how did it go
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarity of presentations, problems acknowledged and awareness of communication concerns. More hope that might get somewhere. Future appears to be rosy. Enjoyed the nice open conversations that have been had. Gone very well today and interesting with the Director of Assets and Head of Asset Management joining us and very successful meeting. Freebridge focus on tenant involvement. Very interesting. Hearing from the Assets and the important work, they are doing and how the communication is going to happy. <p>The Director of Housing contributed well, receiving challenge with respect where needed it,</p>

	There was enormous amount of work gone through in the meeting, and there was a real balance between what want to hear about and a balance of what Freebridge is doing well.
8	Date of Next Meeting
	Friday 30 April 2021, 9.45 am – 1.45 pm, via Zoom. Meeting Closed at 1.45 pm