

Notes of the Tenant Panel Meeting

Held on 16 September 2021 at 10.00 am held virtually

Attendance – Tenant Panel Facilitator, Governance Coordinator, Director of Customer and Communities, Frances, Sandy, Charlotte, Charmaine, Charlie, David and Roger.

Apologies – Anne

Declarations of Interest – There were none.

Work Programme and Review of Group Contract – This was noted. It was hoped that from next year we could start including an away day again.

	Item
1	To Approve July notes, to note the Matters Arising Report
	The notes were approved, and the Matters Arising report noted.
2	Quarterly Update from the Board
	<p>Simon Smith, Vice Chair and new Board Member Vicky Savage attended the Panel meeting to provide an update since the Board Meeting in July.</p> <p>Vicky introduced herself and shared that she had joined the Board in February 2021.</p> <p>On request by the Panel, the Vice Chair shared information about how the Board evaluate their performance and explained that the Board set the strategy and hold management to account in its delivery.</p> <p>Following a query about the Board's oversight of the organisation, the Vice Chair shared that the Board attended Out and Abouts which provided a true representation of homes and customers.</p> <p>A Tenant Panel member suggested that to raise the Board's profile they could include a regular article in the Streets Ahead magazine much like the Tenant Panel. The Vice Chair shared that the Board were keen to raise their profile and this was a fair suggestion.</p> <p>In response to how the Board oversee project work, the Vice Chair shared that the Board review how management progress issues. The project to call all tenants will be informing data about properties that may have damp and mould issues for example, which a new Repairs Task and Finish Group (consisting of Board Members and Leadership Team members) will review and suggest improvements to repair services. The Governance Coordinator agreed to discuss on behalf of the Panel sight of data that the Repairs Task and Finish Group review with the Director of Customer and Communities.</p> <p>Following a query from a Tenant Panel Member, the Vice Chair shared that membership to organisations such as Placeshapers was periodically reviewed by management.</p> <p>The Panel thanked both Vicky and Simon for attending the meeting and they left.</p>
3	Quarterly Customer Satisfaction and Performance Quarter 1 (April – June 2021)
	The Director of Customer and Communities attended the meeting at this point and highlighted information from the performance measure report provided to the Panel with the agenda.

	<p>Following a suggestion by a Tenant Panel member to provide customer centre staff with a trouble shooting guide for repairs to avoid operatives being called out, the Director of Customer and Communities shared that going forward a specialist team would help customers to self-diagnose repairs and also in the future there would be this help via digital means such as videos and on the website.</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>Customer Charter</p>
	<p>The Tenant Panel had been asked to consider responses to the following questions prior to the meeting. The Director of Customer and Communities shared that Freebridge were looking to finalise a Customer Charter and answers provided by the Panel together with responses to a customer survey which had received over 200 responses would help to shape this work. The Customer Service Committee would also be considering the questions.</p> <p>Panel members shared the following responses individually:</p> <p>1.What more can Freebridge do to make you feel safer and more secure at home?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ASB – some tenants feel Freebridge do not take it as seriously as they would like them to. • Street lighting is key and some areas do not have them. • When someone moves into a property, Freebridge should carry out a security check so that people feel as safe as possible like door and window locks. Then for the more vulnerable tenants do a follow up. • Make sure outside lighting around the properties work and that they light up the front and back areas. • Good fencing for security and privacy, security lights front and back of properties instead of D lights. • A regular check up on the phone for vulnerable tenants. <p>2.What matters most to you about what Freebridge does for its customers?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That promises or goals that Freebridge make within the Charter or booklets are realistic and achievable. Make sure that what Freebridge put in the Charter is measurable for Freebridge staff but also their contractors. • That Freebridge go beyond being a landlord and cover a large assortment of assistance such as financial advice. • Security and privacy and knowing that any concerns are acted upon and taken seriously. • That when becoming a new tenant that all the processes around that run smoothly and most importantly safety is a top priority. • Activities for children in the local area and information that is within Streets Ahead is helpful. <p>3.What could Freebridge do differently to achieve a better impact when dealing with complaints?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More awareness and responsibility for tenants concerns and points of view, as tenants might be living with a problem, if not this can result in a bad reputation for Freebridge and this is hard to overcome. • Freebridge needs to be more understanding and make more use of the Tenant Panel when they have complaints, as they are an independent observer with an independent view. • Having a dedicated person or team to liaise between tenants and teams when there is a complaint to ensure that the tenant is updated from the beginning until its conclusion.

- In dealing with ASB, Freebridge says that it works within multi-agency partners such as the Police, but how extensive is that partnership and are there limitations in what it can achieve.
- There should be an allocated case-worker for complaints and Freebridge should value complaints as they can learn from them. There is always a valid reason for a complaint, and input should be seen as valuable and no tenant should be made to feel they are being a pain.
- Tenants should receive an acknowledged response that their complaint has been heard even if it transpires that it didn't work in their favour. Freebridge should provide a 'person centred' response.

4.How do you think Freebridge could hear and understand the needs of its customers better?

- Listening and responding better. Paying attention to what people say and make a note of what jobs need doing and what tenants are asking for.
- Employees should act like they care by returning phone calls, no news is not always good news and often it can be that the enquiry by a tenant has been forgotten.
- A return of surgeries in person would be a good idea as it would provide another opportunity to hear from tenants.
- When taking a call at the Customer Centre there should be background notes taken to save tenants having to explain themselves multiple times when talking to different people. Tenants do not wish to repeat themselves.
- There should be presence of the Placeshaping team within rural areas and perhaps have a village tenant representative that can feedback to Freebridge. Freebridge could have a 'meet the team day' in different areas, not knocking on doors as not all tenants like that, but meet the team with cupcakes and sweets for children to speak to residents.

5.What matters most to you about your own home and the area you live in?

- Having good quality fencing and gates, in Freebridge's own words their own fencing is adequate but not always in a tenant's view.
- The area and village I live in is lovely and there is no shop but I require nothing more.
- I want my home to be fit for purpose, areas well maintained to a good standard, and tackling any asb.
- Safety, community and feeling supported as a single parent as there is a need for support across the board, and this was particularly highlighted during the covid lockdowns.
- Property that is fit to live in and kept to a good standard.
- There were six teenagers in their village that were causing problems, so help to tackle issues like that.
- Safety and security are important.
- The area, which they live, is in the middle of no-where, but still like to see the area kept tidy but not really, Freebridge's responsibility as it is down to the Council regarding verges and hedges.
- Freebridge could use the Placeshaping team and local parish councils more.
- With Covid something like a needs assessment for new tenants to identify those who need support and such issues as covid they would have been be able to tailor information and services to those people first.
- Everyone wishes to have a nice home, but for some tenants without this basic need and good standard of housing it can be difficult to achieve.
- They have adequate fencing only on one side and nothing on the other side.
- There is nothing for children where they live; extra support should be there for those with additional needs.
- Some areas that Freebridge own look messy and this results in the area feeling sad.

	The Director of Customer and Communities shared that the feedback provided in the meeting would help to shape the Customer Charter, and the Governance Coordinator would note on the work programme the final copy for sharing with the Panel.
5	Repairs and Maintenance Update (including update on calls to tenants and Damp and Mould Update)
	<p>The Director of Asset Management joined the meeting to provide an update to the Tenant Panel on Repairs and Maintenance including calls to tenants and damp and mould update together with the Director of Customer and Communities as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systems and procedures were being reviewed as part of five-year strategy and investment was needed in technology to improve systems to have a positive impact on customer service. • Recruitment in the business of key roles had been challenging, they were working with a recruitment company to explore alternative ways to fill the roles available. • A new post called Repairs and Void Manager would be joining the business around mid to end October. They would be managing team leaders and contractors in the repairs service. • Those who work within the repairs services recognise that there are gaps in service and they need support, so they are supportive of new posts being created in the business. • Recognise that damp and mould is an issue in some properties and the team are looking at create a new process to deal with damp and mould which was pending sign off. <p>A Panel member commented that they would want to seek assurance from the inspections that Freebridge carry out to assess the causes of damp and mould so that we are not too quick to conclude that it is because of lifestyle. The Director of Asset Management suggested that at a future meeting the process of inspecting homes for damp and mould could be presented to the Panel for the Panel to be fully assured that the correct conclusions were to be determined. The Governance Coordinator agreed to follow up outside the meeting.</p> <p>The Director of Customer and Communities shared that the property health check was about getting the data in place so that Freebridge could prioritise those which needed action and where there were homes with the same issues in the same area, it will be possible to instruct work to be done in a planned approach.</p> <p>The Director of Customer and Communities shared that key information from a report that the Repairs Task and Finish Group will receive will help to assess and formulate resolutions.</p> <p>The Director of Customer Services shared that the project to call all tenants had started 6 weeks ago to diagnose outstanding repairs and collect any unreported repairs. Freebridge were keen to remove the term 'lifestyle' when determining damp, mould causes, and instead would be either reported as structural or non-structural causes. The Director of Asset Management added that a large cavity wall insulation programme was currently underway.</p> <p>The Director of Asset Management advised that emergency and urgent jobs from calls were being raised straight away.</p> <p>The Tenant Panel thanked for the presentation and the Director of Asset Management left the meeting.</p>
6	Independent East Customer Scrutiny Panel
	<p>The Director of Customer and Communities presented the item and shared that she was seeking views from the Panel on the shaping a proposal to create a separate tenant voice panel by Independent East which was collection of associations in the East. It might be that the group contains existing tenant panel member or new tenants. Costs of the panel would be shared between member organisations and Panel members could be on it as well as remain on the Tenant Panel.</p> <p>The Panel shared the following individual views in regard to the concept:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In view of the green paper on social housing and a tenant’s voice, in general it was a good idea if you can get it off the ground with tenants involved. • Good idea to share resources with other organisations, which had worked well in the past when mystery shopping was carried out in this way. • Unless people are from the Tenant Panel you may struggle to find tenants to be involved, and recruitment is difficult. It was a great idea as you could share ideas between each other. • A Panel Member shared that perhaps landlords should invite tenants specifically to join on a rotating basis rather than wait for tenants to apply. • Suggestion to publicise on a local TV programme such as Look East to ask tenants to come forward to be on the panel. • A Panel Member shared they had been on a few different interview panels for the Tenant Panel, and if you randomly invite tenants to be part of the group you still need to interview them. • A proactive way by inviting tenants to be involved was better than expecting tenants to apply. In addition, it should not be restricted for those with panel experience; however, a tenant should have lived their home for at least 6 months. • Training could be given to tenants who had no experience. • The new group should have the same membership rules as the Tenant Panel that you live and are a named tenant in the housing association home and not a non-resident leaseholder or resident leaseholder. • That any rules of membership are consistent across the organisations. <p>The Director of Customer and Communities thanked the Tenant Panel for their feedback and summarised that the Panel as a group felt that to be a member was a good idea, and she would therefore take forward within the Independent East and feedback to the Tenant Panel as soon as possible when it progresses further. The Governance Coordinator would note for the Panel to be updated as soon as more information is available.</p>
7	Housing Ombudsman Residents Panel Update
	It was agreed to defer this item to the next meeting, as Anne had been not been required to attend on this occasion .
8	Any Other Business
	A Panel Member wished to understand the costs to join various memberships in order to receive information and data; and wished to know more about who monitors whether they are value for money and who monitors the quality of the information provided. The Governance Coordinator agreed to seek a response on this.
9	<p>What did we do well – Feedback from the Meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was able to get points of view across. • Good meeting, Charter is a big subject and perhaps need more than a 20-minute slot and something more with that. • Contributions were bold. • Feel well informed and was interesting overall. • Enjoying be able to provide significant input on Charter questions. • Done a fabulous job in providing feedback to the Director of Customer and Communities • Feel that next meeting a better flow of prompts to speak would be better. <p>The Director of Customer and Communities shared that there was valuable feedback in the meeting specifically in order to take the Customer Charter forward.</p>
10	Date of Next Meeting
	Thursday 14 October 2021, 9.45 am – 1.45 pm, via Zoom.

Meeting Closed at 1.50 pm