

FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING BOARD

Minutes of a Meeting of the Board held on Monday 15 April 2013 at 6.00pm in the Conference Room, Juniper House, Austin Street, King's Lynn

PRESENT:

Ray Johnson (Chairman)
Lesley Bambridge
Matthew Brown
Steve Clark
Frazer Clement
John Fox
Bill Guyan
Paul Leader
Ian Pinches
Colin Sampson

IN ATTENDANCE:

Tony Hall	-	Chief Executive (minute numbers 40/13 - 66/13)
Sean Kent	-	Deputy Chief Executive (minute numbers 40/13 - 66/13)
Colin Davison	-	Director of Property (minute numbers 40/13 - 66/13)
Michelle Playford	-	Director of Engagement (minute numbers 40/13 - 49/13)
Angus MacQueen	-	Company Secretary

38/13 EXECUTIVE REMUNERATION

Confidential item

39/13 EMPLOYMENT OF A CLOSE RELATIVE OF AN EXISTING EMPLOYEE

Confidential item

40/13 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Simon Gathercole.

[confidential wording]

41/13 MINUTES

The minutes of the ordinary meeting held on 4 February 2013 and of the special meeting held on 11 March 2013 were confirmed as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

42/13 MATTERS ARISING

- **Empty Homes Bid (Minute Number 36/13(a))**

The Chief Executive reminded the Board that it had approved a further bid for funding towards bringing empty homes back into use. However, it had subsequently not proved necessary to make the bid, as Freebridge's share of the original funding allocated to e² had increased. In answer to a question, the Director of Property advised that the additional funding could result in around 15 further properties being brought back into use.

43/13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Confidential item

44/13 CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

(a) Queen Elizabeth Hospital Trust

The Chairman reported that he had met with Kate Gordon, Chair of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Trust in King's Lynn. They had found a number of areas of opportunity for joint working between Freebridge and the Trust. They would be meeting again, together with the Chief Executives of the two organisations, to consider how these could be taken forward.

(b) Corporate Bond

The Chairman reminded the Board that each year a series of targets were set around a corporate bond. At the conclusion of the year, Freebridge employees all received a one-off payment, the value of which depended on which of the corporate bond targets had been achieved. The achievement of a "V1/G1" result from the Homes and Communities Agency's Regulatory Judgement had not been included in the 2012/13 corporate bond targets, but the Chairman was of the view that it should have been. He suggested that, in recognition of this significant, milestone achievement for the organisation, all members of staff should receive an additional £20 as part of the corporate bond payment.

RESOLVED: That an additional payment of £20 be made to all Freebridge employees as part of the corporate bond reward for 2012/13, in recognition of the achievement of a "V1/G1" result from the Regulatory Judgement.

45/13 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE

(a) Malcolm Fry

The Chief Executive said that Malcolm Fry, Assistant Director of Finance, had left the organisation for personal reasons. His departure had provided an opportunity to restructure the management of the Finance team, and to create a Finance Director post. The new post would be advertised shortly, once the job description and person specification had been finalised. In the meantime,

Shendi Keshet had been appointed as Interim Assistant Director of Finance, and had started work that day. She had significant experience in senior accountancy roles, including in the housing sector.

In answer to a question, the Deputy Chief Executive stated that the Finance team had coped well with the change in management. He had no concerns relating to year-end work, although he would review the timetable for the external audit. All members of the Finance team had been involved in the selection of the Interim Assistant Director.

The Board asked that its thanks be passed on to Malcolm Fry for his hard work during his seven years at Freebridge and its best wishes for the future.

(b) Providence Street

The Chief Executive advised that he was awaiting further contact from Norfolk County Council regarding the potential transfer of the Providence Street Community Centre. He would update the Board when there was any progress.

46/13 REVIEW OF THE INFORMATION COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT) POLICY

The Board considered a report which reviewed the ICT Policy.

A member pointed out that at some points in the Policy, the words “will aim to” were used. This did not communicate a definite commitment. The Deputy Chief Executive undertook to make suitable amendments.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the ICT Policy be approved, as presented, subject to the uses of the words “will aim to” being replaced with more definite terminology.
- 2) That it be noted that the Data Protection Policy and the ICT Security Policy have been incorporated into this new Policy and will no longer exist as separate policies.

47/13 REVIEW OF THE CUSTOMER CARE POLICY

The Board considered a report which reviewed the Customer Care Policy.

RESOLVED: That the Customer Care Policy be approved, as presented.

48/13 REVIEW OF THE COMPLAINTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLIMENTS POLICY

The Board considered a report which reviewed the Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy.

In answer to a question, the Director of Engagement said that the suggested new complaints process, with two stages as opposed to three, would save senior staff time. There was an element of duplication in the current process, which involved a full review by a Director, followed, if necessary, by a full review by a member of the Executive, before reaching the Complaints Panel stage.

The Director of Engagement stated that, should the new Policy be approved, this would be the first time that the Tenant Panel would be involved in complaints. She felt that both the Tenant Panel and the Board's Complaints Panel would benefit from some training in how the new combined panel would operate.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy be approved, as presented.
- 2) That a joint complaints briefing session be held for the Board Complaints Panel and Tenant Panel members.

49/13 REVIEW OF THE FIRE SAFETY POLICY/UPDATE ON THE LONE WORKING AND PERSONAL SAFETY POLICY

The Board considered a report which reviewed the Fire Safety Policy and which provided an update on the Lone Working and Personal Safety Policy review.

In answer to a question, the Director of Property said that he would be studying the coroner's report and recommendations following the Lakanal house fire investigation, and would be assessing whether there were any implications for Freebridge. It was unlikely that there would be any significant implications for Freebridge, as the report focused on high rise blocks and there was none of these within Freebridge's stock.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Fire Safety Policy be approved, as presented.
- 2) That it be agreed that the Lone Working and Personal Safety Policy falls under the Health and Safety Policy as a procedure document, and therefore is removed as a standalone policy.

50/13 REVIEW OF THE TREASURY MANAGEMENT POLICY STATEMENT AND PRACTICES

The Board considered a report which reviewed the Treasury Management Policy Statement and Practices, and accompanying Treasury Management Schedules.

RESOLVED: That the Treasury Management Policy Statement and Practices, and the accompanying Treasury Management Schedules, be approved, as presented.

51/13 AMENDMENTS TO THE RENT SETTING AND SERVICE CHARGES POLICY

The Board considered a report which proposed amendments to the Rent Setting and Service Charges Policy.

RESOLVED: That the amendments to the Rent Setting and Service Charges Policy be approved, as presented.

**52/13 HILLINGTON SQUARE RE-IMAGINE PROJECT
(PARTNERING CONTRACT)**

The Director of Property presented a report which advised of the next stages of the Hillington Square project and sought authority to enter into partnering arrangements.

In answer to questions, officers made the following points:

- The project was still in its early stages, with detailed implementation to be developed. There was no particular area of concern at present.
- Lovell Partnerships was working with Freebridge to identify potential cost savings.
- It was now intended to start work on site in July 2013.
- There were currently around 65 units on Hillington Square being kept empty in anticipation of work starting on site. This was not having a detrimental effect on the budget.

The importance of holding a ceremony to mark the start of work on site was stressed. This would raise the profile of both the project and Freebridge. Invitees should include dignitaries and people who had supported the project. The Director of Property said that this would be taken forward by the Communications Group.

The Chief Executive reported that, as a result of the work at Hillington Square with the Cabinet Office Behavioural Influencing Team, an opportunity had arisen for Freebridge to apply for funding to the new Government Community Organisers initiative. Freebridge had subsequently been awarded full funding for two posts, initially for one year, one to be based at Hillington Square and one at South Lynn. The posts would take effect from autumn 2013. Freebridge was the first housing association to be granted funding under this scheme. The award of the funding had enhanced the value for money of the work with the Cabinet Office. In answer to a question, the Deputy Chief

Executive said that publicity would be arranged about the new posts at the appropriate time. The Board thanked the Director of Housing and the Strategic Support Aide/Executive Assistant for their work in putting the bid together.

A member asked for thanks to be recorded to the Hillington Square Project Manager for her prompt and efficient response to a recent query about the project.

RESOLVED: That authority be delegated to the Chief Executive to enter into a Project Partnering Agreement and subsequent Partnering Contract with Lovell Partnerships for Phase 1 of the Hillington Square project.

53/13 GOVERNANCE IMPROVEMENT

The Company Secretary presented a report which set out progress against last year's Governance Improvement Action Plan, requested approval for the new Governance Improvement Action Plan, and sought to confirm the Board's position on the future make-up of the Board.

In answer to a question, the Chief Executive confirmed that he would personally consult the Borough Council and the Tenant Panel on the Board's aspiration for its future make-up.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Executive and the Company Secretary for an excellent report.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the progress achieved against the Governance Improvement Action Plan arising from the Board appraisal and review process held in 2011 be noted, and it be agreed that, other than actions incorporated into the new action plan, it is now completed.
- 2) That the new Governance Improvement Action Plan be approved, as presented.
- 3) That the Board's position on its aspiration for the future make-up of the Board be confirmed as follows:

In order to improve further the Board's performance, it needs to ensure that it can recruit and retain the right set of skills to lead the organisation through a more demanding and complex environment. It is also essential that the Board develop as a team as well as individually. With this in mind, the Board aspires to form a Board of nine members including two Executive posts. This would be a unitary Board (without constituent parts) and members would be paid to reflect the commitment required for the role.

- 4) That consideration of Board payment be left to be part of the overall package.
- 5) That consultation on the proposals for the future of the Board be undertaken with the Borough Council and the Tenant Panel, and that the outcomes of the consultation be reported to the Board meeting on 20 May 2013.
- 6) That the Board meeting on 20 May 2013 also consider the next steps for implementing the Board's proposals and Board recruitment for 2013.

54/13 ADOPTION OF THE NATIONAL HOUSING FEDERATION CODE OF CONDUCT 2012

The Company Secretary presented a report which considered adoption of the National Housing Federation Code of Conduct 2012 and Freebridge's approach to some of the good practice and excellence guidance that accompanied the Code.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the National Housing Federation Code of Conduct 2012 be adopted as an update to and replacement of the Federation's "Excellence in Standards of Conduct" Code for Members 2010.
- 2) That, for the purposes of the Code, the term "Involved Residents" be applied at Freebridge to mean the Tenant Panel.
- 3) That the Tenant Panel's constitutional documents be revised to comply with the Code, and presented for adoption to the Board meeting on 20 May 2013.
- 4) That Freebridge retain its existing definition of "closely connected person" for the purposes of declaration of interests.
- 5) That Freebridge retain its existing approach to secret societies and similar organisations for the purposes of declarations of interests.
- 6) That the Board Member Agreement be amended (at paragraph 1.9) as follows, to address situations where a Board Member wishes to be a candidate for employment with Freebridge (*amendments in italics*):

The requirements *in 1.9 above* apply to former Board members who have left the Board within the previous 12 months and to persons closely connected to them.

In circumstances where a current Board member wishes to be a candidate for employment with Freebridge, the requirements above will apply, and in addition:

- *The applicant should resign from the Board at the point of application.*
- *If unsuccessful, the applicant may not be reappointed to the Board until 12 months after the resignation. There should be no presumption of reappointment.*

55/13 MYSTERY SHOPPING PAYMENTS

Confidential item

56/13 AMENDMENT TO STANDING ORDERS (SCHEME OF DELEGATION)

The Board considered a report which sought to make an amendment to Standing Orders to reflect the day-to-day working of the Association.

RESOLVED: That the following additional wording be included within Standing Order 8 – Delegated Authority to the Deputy Chief Executive:

- 7.8 Authority to complete the surrender and re-grant of former Right to Buy leases to rectify errors in leases previously granted by the Council or to otherwise amend plans in leases.

57/13 APPOINTMENT OF SHAREHOLDERS

The Board considered a report which described applications for tenant shareholding.

RESOLVED: That the applications for tenant shareholding set out in Appendix 1 to the report be approved.

58/13 ANNUAL EFFICIENCY STATEMENT

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report which provided an update on efficiencies obtained for the financial years 2011/12 and 2012/13.

The Deputy Chief Executive said that, although the submission of an Annual Efficiency Statement was no longer a regulatory requirement, Freebridge had continued to produce the Statement, as it was a useful exercise. The Board had previously seen the figures, in the budget report. Going forward, submission of efficiency information to the Regulator had once again become a regulatory requirement, as part of the Board's Value for Money self-assessment. The first of these would need to be produced later this year.

In answer to a question, the Deputy Chief Executive explained that the efficiencies listed in the report were where money had been saved through definite action. Some of these were one-offs while others would be ongoing.

The Board noted the report.

59/13 BENCHMARKING REPORT 2011/12

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report which provided the 2011/12 annual Housemark benchmarking results. For ease of reference, the Deputy Chief Executive also tabled a sheet which set out the results in tabulated form.

The Deputy Chief Executive highlighted that the results showed that Freebridge had improved across a number of performance indicators, when compared to the previous year. It was now in the top third of the benchmarking group for almost half the indicators. This demonstrated that, not only was Freebridge improving, but it was improving more rapidly than some of its benchmarking partners. The only indicator in which Freebridge's performance had reduced was for tenant satisfaction, but a great deal of work had already been undertaken to understand the reasons for this. Freebridge was in the bottom third for just two indicators. The first was major works and cyclical maintenance, and Freebridge's position reflected the fact that Decent Homes work and the Hillington Square project had not yet been completed. The second related to Information Communications Technology, and Freebridge was restructuring that department to reduce costs.

The Board was pleased to note these very positive benchmarking results. There were plans in place for the few areas that might have been of concern, namely tenant satisfaction, major works and Information Communications Technology. The Board acknowledged that the information was out-of-date, as it was for the year ending 31 March 2012, but that this was the best benchmarking data available.

The Board noted the report.

60/13 RENT YEAR-END PROCESS 2013/14 (NOTIFICATION OF RENT INCREASE)

Confidential item

61/13 PENSION DISCRETION

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report which provided an update on an employee being granted early retirement.

The Board noted the report.

62/13 URGENT ACTION TAKEN – PROVISION OF A TENANCY TO A CLOSE RELATIVE OF AN EXISTING EMPLOYEE

The Board noted a request for urgent action that had been approved, to enable the association to provide a tenancy to the close relative of an existing employee.

The Board noted the report.

63/13 WORK UPDATE

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

- Action Sheet
- Future Work Programme of the Board.

The Board noted the update.

64/13 COMMITTEE MINUTES

Paul Leader, Chairman of the Audit Committee, presented the minutes of the Committee's meeting held on 28 January 2013.

65/13 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Confidential item

(b) Lesley Bambridge

The Board offered its best wishes to Lesley Bambridge for her forthcoming operation.

66/13 NEXT MEETING

The Board noted that its next meeting was scheduled for Monday 20 May 2013 at 6.30pm.

The meeting closed at 7.55pm.

CHAIRMAN