

FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING BOARD

Minutes of a Meeting of the Board held on Monday 24 June 2013 at 6.30pm in "The Barn", 2 Chapel Lane, 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
Sean Kent	-	Deputy Chief Executive
Colin Davison	-	Director of Property
Michelle Playford	-	Director of Engagement
Simon Swanson	-	Communications and Engagement Manager (minute number 94/13)
Angus MacQueen	-	Company Secretary

94/13 TENANT SATISFACTION SURVEY

The Communications and Engagement Manager gave a presentation on the results of the recent tenant satisfaction survey. He tabled copies of the slides used in the presentation.

The Communications and Engagement Manager explained that the "STAR" (Survey of Tenants and Residents) survey had been used. This was a standard survey, used nationally, and the questions could not be adjusted as the results were used for benchmarking. The survey had been sent to a random selection of 2,500 tenants, and there had been around 900 respondents; this was sufficient for meaningful analysis.

The Board was pleased to note the generally positive results, although the Chief Executive expressed disappointment that overall satisfaction at 88% had not quite achieved the 90% target. He said that Management Team was looking at the detail behind the figures.

A member said that it would be useful for the Board to see how the results of the survey were fed into corporate and departmental planning. In response, officers explained that it had been felt important to share the results with the Board at the earliest opportunity. They were now being analysed, would be

used for benchmarking and considered as part of business and service planning.

It was noted that the least successful results had appeared in the section covering support and advice provided by Freebridge. The Chief Executive said that this may be partly because of issues around marketing. As the questions were not targeted, it may also be that many of the respondents had not experienced or required much of the support and advice on offer from Freebridge.

A member pointed out that 75% of respondents had said that Freebridge had a good reputation in their area. This appeared low when compared with scores around other perceptions of Freebridge. The Chief Executive responded that he was confident that this did not represent anything that Freebridge was doing wrong. It may reflect long-held attitudes in areas where there was a high proportion of ex-Council estate housing.

The Board was concerned to note that only 44% of respondents had internet access, particularly at a time when benefits claims were increasingly being expected on-line.

The Board noted the presentation and the Chairman thanked the Communications and Engagement Manager.

95/13 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Simon Gathercole.

96/13 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 May 2013 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

97/13 MATTERS ARISING

(a) Empty Homes (Minute Number 69/13(b))

The Chief Executive confirmed that work was ongoing to bring empty homes back into use, including flats above shops. The Director of Property was working with the Borough Council, and a possible further source of funding was being investigated. The Chief Executive would provide the relevant Portfolio Holder at the Borough Council with some figures around empty homes in advance of the forthcoming Council meeting, at which the subject was expected to be discussed.

(b) Financial Regulations (Minute Number 72/13(b))

The Company Secretary reminded the Board that it had, at its last meeting, agreed that the Financial Regulations should be updated to change cosmetic items, such as job-role titles and committee/organisation names. These changes had been made; however, an issue had arisen with respect to

Financial Regulation 6, in that it was not completely clear that the Deputy Chief Executive had delegated authority to make changes to the list of authorised signatories. It had always been the intention that the Deputy Chief Executive should be able to make changes to this list, as it would not be a sensible use of the Board's time.

RESOLVED: That it be clarified within Financial Regulation 6 that the Deputy Chief Executive has delegated authority to make changes to the list of authorised signatories.

(c) Providence Street Youth Centre (Minute Number 73/13)

The Chief Executive said that negotiations were continuing with Norfolk County Council regarding the purchase of the Providence Street Youth Centre. There appeared to be no issue over price, but there was currently a delay while the ownership of a triangle of land was established. There was now also a new Portfolio Holder at the County Council who had to be consulted. The Chief Executive had met with the lead officer from the County Council and representatives of the user groups, and had received positive feedback about Freebridge taking ownership of the Centre. He was also consulting with Genesis Housing about the flats they owned on the site. The County Council had indicated that it may be another two months before the sale could be progressed, but this did not create any significant difficulties.

In answer to a question, the Chief Executive stated that the children's study group operated from Providence Street by the Speedway Club had closed as a result of the loss of County Council funding. This was not related to the closure of the Youth Centre.

(d) Tenant Panel (Minute Number 75/13)

The Chief Executive said that he, along with the Director of Engagement and the Company Secretary, had attended the Tenant Panel's away day on 21 June 2013, and had provided the Panel with further information around the Board's long-term aspiration for the Board's structure. Some members of the Panel had expressed concern about the loss of tenant seats from the Board, but it had been explained that the intention was to improve the Board by reducing its size and recruiting the best possible mix of skills. The Panel had unanimously supported the Board's interim proposal for this year, to reduce the number of tenant seats on the Board from five to three and to introduce two Executive seats; any further changes in the future would need discussion with the Panel. The Panel had been very positive about the enhanced role that the Board had asked it to assume.

(e) "Bedroom Tax" (Minute Number 83/13)

In response to a question, the Deputy Chief Executive said that Freebridge's collection rate of the "Bedroom Tax" to date appeared to be at least as good as that of other associations.

(f) Plaxtole House (Minute Number 87/13)

The Chief Executive said that a useful meeting had been held between the Management Teams of Freebridge and the Benjamin Foundation. This had been followed up with a meeting between himself and the Chief Executive of the Benjamin Foundation, which had resulted in a clear joint vision for the Plaxtole House project and had helped prioritise which sources of money to apply for to support the values of the project. The Chief Executive had also made contact with senior staff at Adult Social Services, who had agreed to visit Plaxtole House. The opportunity to use Homes and Communities Agency funding on the project had been a significant boost.

98/13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Matthew Brown declared an interest in the item at minute number 104/13 – Board Recruitment – as he had applied for reappointment to the Board. He remained in the room during the item, but did not take part in the discussion or vote.

99/13 CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

The Chairman said that, in addition to his weekly meetings with the Chief Executive, he had undertaken the following activities as Chairman since the last meeting:

- He had attended a training session for Complaints Panel members.
- He had represented Freebridge at the funeral of Rita O'Donnell, former Freebridge Tenant Empowerment Manager.

100/13 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE

(a) Confidential

(b) Regulatory Visit

The Chief Executive said that Freebridge had recently received a regulatory visit from its Financial Analyst at the Homes and Communities Agency. Freebridge had been well prepared for the visit, and had provided the Analyst with a pack containing almost all of the information and evidence that he required. He had once again complimented Freebridge on how easy it was to work with. The outcome of the visit was awaited, but there was no reason to believe that there would be any reduction on the previous year's V1 score.

101/13 MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

The Director of Engagement presented a report which introduced the new Marketing and Communications Policy.

It was noted that the new Policy had incorporated the Communications Policy, which would now be deleted.

The Board welcomed the suggested vision “A Better West Norfolk”, which complemented the vision of other agencies in the area.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Marketing and Communications Policy be approved as presented.
- 2) That “A Better West Norfolk” be approved as Freebridge’s vision.

**102/13 REVIEW OF THE VALUE FOR MONEY POLICY –
INCREASING CAPACITY TO DELIVER INCREASING
SATISFACTION**

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report which reviewed the Value For Money Policy.

The Board acknowledged that the Regulator was putting an increasing emphasis on value for money, and that the Regulator expected this to be linked not only to economic considerations, but also environmental and social. The Board was pleased to note that this was reflected in the revised Policy. The Deputy Chief Executive advised that the Regulator had indicated that it did not wish associations to put too many resources into measuring social and environmental value; it would prefer a light touch approach.

The Board agreed that value for money should be integrated across all of Freebridge’s activities and embedded in the organisation. It was noted that the Policy highlighted particular links with procurement and risk management. The Deputy Chief Executive said that a review of the Procurement Policy would be presented to the Board in autumn 2013.

The Board supported the proposal in the revised Policy to consult tenants on value for money as part of the business planning process.

RESOLVED: That the Value For Money Policy be approved as presented.

**103/13 PROCUREMENT OF NEW GROUNDS MAINTENANCE
CONTRACT**

The Director of Property presented a report which sought approval to procure a new grounds maintenance contract, and described the proposed procurement process for the contract.

The Director of Property explained that a service review was being carried out and would inform the exact specification in the tender. The service review had not yet been completed, but it was important to start the procurement process now, so as to give time to comply with the requirements of the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) procedures.

The Board expressed some concern at the tightness of the timescale, and stressed the need to ensure that the correct procedures were followed in the early stages, so as to prevent delays later in the process. In answer to a question, the Director of Property confirmed that there was in-house expertise with regard to the OJEU process.

A member highlighted a recent instance at Columbia Way whereby rubbish had not been cleared before grass had been cut. The result had been that the lawnmower had run over aluminium cans, leaving dangerous and unsightly pieces of the cans on the grass. The Director of Property undertook to rectify this particular instance and to ensure that rubbish clearance before maintenance was a requirement of the tender specification.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the procurement of a new grounds maintenance contract be approved.
- 2) That delegated authority be granted to the Director of Property to approve the successful contractor, subject to the requirements of Financial Regulation 7 having been followed.
- 3) That the timetable for procurement be noted.

104/13 BOARD MEMBER RECRUITMENT

The Company Secretary presented a report which provided an update on this year's Board recruitment process and sought the appointment of a Recruitment Panel for the selection of a Board Member.

The Company Secretary highlighted that, as agreed at the last Board meeting, a less expensive option for advertising in the local press had been sourced. Whilst this had resulted in a significant saving, there had been a poor response as compared to previous years: six expressions of interest in the position and two applications, including one from an existing Board Member who was reapplying.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That a Recruitment Panel be established to pursue the 2013 recruitment of an Independent Board Member and report back with its recommendations to the Board meeting on 5 August 2013.
- 2) That the Panel comprise three Board Members, namely John Fox, Ray Johnson and Ian Pinches.
- 3) That the quorum for the Panel be two members.
- 4) That John Fox be appointed Chairman of the Panel.

105/13 APPOINTMENT OF SHAREHOLDERS

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

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

106/13 ANNUAL HEALTH AND SAFETY UPDATE

The Director of Property presented a report which provided an update on health and safety activity over the year and which described progress towards reducing the overall risks associated with Freebridge activities.

The Director of Property highlighted that Freebridge had achieved the prestigious Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) Gold Award for the second time, and was one of very few associations to achieve such an award. A decision was awaited in August 2013 as to whether Freebridge would receive the award for a third consecutive year.

The Board was particularly pleased to note that the number of incidents and accidents was reducing, probably owing largely to additional staff training.

[Confidential wording]

The Board noted the report.

107/13 ANNUAL EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IN RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING UPDATES

The Director of Engagement presented a report which provided an update on equality and diversity in recruitment, on actions undertaken to promote equality and diversity in recruitment, and on training and development during 2012-13.

The Director of Engagement highlighted that there had been an increase in diversity across applicants, whilst there had been a focus on achieving value for money in training.

In answer to a question, officers explained that some documents were translated, and a translation option was included on Freebridge's website. However, translation by exception, accompanied by the use of Plain English, was now accepted best practice.

A member commented that the report should have demonstrated how the figures were impacting on business activity. In response officers said that the figures were being provided to the Board at the earliest opportunity. They would be now used for benchmarking purposes, and to inform business activities, such as the application to the Times Top 100 Employers list. A member highlighted that the Board could take comfort from the figures that

equality and diversity was being properly addressed within the Freebridge recruitment process.

In terms of the diversity figures, a member asked that in future reports, comparisons with figures for the local area were included. This was agreed.

The Board noted the report.

108/13 STATISTICAL DATA RETURN 2013

The Company Secretary presented a report which confirmed that the Statistical Data Return 2013 had been submitted by the 31 May deadline, and which made the document available for Board Members to view.

The Board noted the report.

109/13 URGENT ACTION TAKEN – EMPLOYMENT OF A CLOSE RELATIVE OF AN EXISTING EMPLOYEE

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

The Board noted the report.

110/13 WORK UPDATE

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

- Action Sheet
- Future Work Programme of the Board.

The Company Secretary said that the stock tour for Board and Tenant Panel members would be arranged shortly.

The Board noted the update.

111/13 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(a) Provision of a Tenancy Under the Mortgage Rescue Scheme to the Close Relative of an Existing Employee

The Company Secretary presented a report which sought to enable the provision of a tenancy under the mortgage rescue scheme to the close relative of an existing employee.

The Board noted that all of the usual criteria and conditions had been met in this case and that the applicant had received no advantage through her connection to Freebridge. The employee concerned had had no involvement in or influence on the case.

The Director of Property said that he would ask Orbit Group, which operated the mortgage rescue scheme on Freebridge's behalf, to ensure that applicants were required to declare close connections with Freebridge at an early stage in the application process.

RESOLVED: That the provision of a tenancy under the mortgage rescue scheme in relation to the property in question be approved.

(b) Cabinet Office Behavioural Insights Team Report on Hillington Square

The Board had previously been issued with the Cabinet Office Behavioural Insights Team report on Hillington Square.

The Board welcomed the report, which was well researched and contained a number of useful ideas to take forward. The ideas would be useful not only for Hillington Square but also for other communities. In answer to a question, officers advised that the report had been shared with key partners and published on the Freebridge website, and could be treated as a public document.

The Board was pleased to note that positive publicity had been achieved on the publication of the report.

In response to a question, the Director of Engagement said that consultants were about to be interviewed regarding the marketing, branding and visual identity of Hillington Square.

(c) Property Services Awards

The Board was pleased to note the following with regard to individual staff members at Property Services:

- Two would be taking part in the Rotary Young Leaders Award, one being funded by Freebridge and one by the Rotary Club.
- Three had recently been nominated or won "Apprentice of the Year" awards.
- One had recently been runner-up in the national Scheduler of the Year awards.

The Board asked for its congratulations to be passed on to those who had achieved nominations or awards.

112/13 NEXT MEETING

The Board noted that its next meeting was scheduled for Monday 5 August 2013 at 6.30pm. A briefings evening would be held for the Board on Monday 15 July 2013 at 6.00pm.

The meeting closed at 8.30pm.

CHAIRMAN