

FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING BOARD

Minutes of a Meeting of the Board held on Monday 8 March 2021 at 4.30pm “Virtual” Meeting by Video Link

PRESENT:

Andy Walder (Chair)
Joanna Barrett
Andrew Hill
Anita Jones (Chief Executive)
Brian Long
Donald McKenzie
Pauleen Pratt
Gill Rejzl
Jasmine Rigg
Vicky Savage
Simon Smith
Richard Spilsbury

IN ATTENDANCE:

Anna Simpson	-	Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive
Sophie Bates	-	Director of Housing
Birgit Lenton	-	Director of Corporate Services and Culture
Paul Newbold	-	Director of Development
Graham Wilson	-	Director of Assets
Clare Flynn	-	Head of Finance (Minute Numbers 08/21 – 18/21)
Ashley Williamson	-	Complaints Coordinator (Minute Number 09/21)
Angus MacQueen	-	Governance Manager

OBSERVER:

Stephen Bull - Campbell Tickell

08/21 APPOINTMENT OF BOARD MEMBER AND WELCOME

The Chair explained that Gill Rejzl had previously been appointed as a Board Member with effect from 17 May 2021 (minute number 03/21 refers), when it had been anticipated that the next vacancy would arise. However, following the recent resignation from the Board of Marcus Hopkins, there was now a vacancy. The Chair, therefore, proposed, that Gill Rejzl be appointed as a Board Member with immediate effect, and this was supported by the Board.

As well as Gill Rejzl, the Chair welcomed Andrew Hill, Donald McKenzie and Vicky Savage, who had recently been appointed as Board Members and were attending their first ordinary meeting of the Board.

The Chair also welcomed Clare Flynn, Head of Finance, and thanked her for her input into the new corporate strategy and the budget which would be presented later in the meeting.

Finally, the Chair welcomed Stephen Bull, of Campbell Tickell, who was observing the meeting as part of the governance review that they were currently undertaking of Freebridge.

09/21 CUSTOMER VOICE

The Chair explained that he had introduced this as a new item to the agenda and intended that it would become a regular feature. The plan was for the Board to hear from a tenant at each meeting about their experience of Freebridge. This would be a powerful way of boosting the Board's understanding of Freebridge's customer service.

A tenant who had made a recent complaint to Freebridge had been invited to address the Board; however, this was not possible owing to technical difficulties. Nevertheless, the Board had received a report on the complaint and the Complaints Coordinator gave further details at the meeting. The Board was disappointed to learn of the experience suffered by the tenant, and asked that a letter be written to her offering an apology from the Board and explaining how Freebridge's service would improve.

The Leadership Team advised that the following measures were being put in place to minimise the possibility of a similar situation occurring again:

- Review of the mutual exchange process, to ensure it was clear who was responsible for what.
- A reminder to the teams of the need to take ownership of cases and to respond to tenants in a timely manner.
- Introduction of weekly repairs team leader meetings.
- Training for all managers on the Ombudsman complaints code.

[Confidential wording]

10/21 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

11/21 MINUTES

The minutes of the ordinary meeting held on 16 November 2020 and of the special meetings held on 7 December 2020, 5 February 2021 and 12 February 2021 were confirmed as correct records.

The minutes would be signed by the Chair once the office had reopened following the current coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak.

12/21 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

13/21 ACTION SHEET

The Board noted the action sheet. The Chair asked that future action sheets contain further information where items had been completed.

14/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Brian Long declared an interest in the item at minute number 21/21 [Confidential Wording] as he was Leader of the Borough Council. As there was little discussion, the Board was content that he remain in the room for the item.

15/21 CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair gave the following update on his activities since the last meeting:

- He had taken part in the Board recruitment exercise and was delighted with the high calibre of the four successful candidates.
- He had undertaken Board appraisals.
- He had been involved in briefing Campbell Tickell on the scope of the Governance review.

[Confidential wording]

- He had attended meetings of the East of England Chairs and would shortly be attending a meeting of the Placeshaping Chairs.
- He had attended webinars on the new Code of Governance.
- He had attended a liaison meeting with the Borough Council.

16/21 LEADERSHIP TEAM UPDATE

(a) Introduction

The Chief Executive presented the Leadership Team Update. Discussion took place on some aspects of the update, as set out below.

(b) Covid-19 Vaccination/Testing/Service Delivery

In answer to a question, the Chief Executive said that there had been a high uptake of Covid-19 vaccinations among the operatives who had been offered them.

(c) Winter Support Initiatives

The Board welcomed the winter support initiatives, and asked that these continue in the future, post-Covid, as far as possible.

(d) Development Update

[Confidential wording]

17/21 **PERFORMANCE PACK**

(a) Introduction

The Board considered the Performance Pack for the Quarter ending 31 December 2020. Discussion took place on some aspects of the Pack, as set out below.

(b) Evictions

In answer to a question, the Director of Housing confirmed that, once evictions became permitted again, it would not be Freebridge's intention to evict people who were in hardship purely as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

(c) Complaints

In response to a question, the Director of Housing stated that there had been few complaints resulting solely from delays to repairs caused by the Covid-19 pandemic; customers had tended to be very patient. [Confidential wording]

(d) [Confidential wording]

(e) Performance Indicators

A Board Member requested that, in future reports, the Leadership Team make it clear how performance below target was being managed.

(f) [Confidential Wording]

(g) Key Messages from the Tenant Panel

The Board noted the key messages from the Tenant Panel and echoed the Panel's thanks to the staff team for their excellent support of tenants during the current difficult times.

18/21 **NEW CORPORATE STRATEGY 2021-2026 AND BUDGET 2021-2022**

The Chief Executive presented a report which set out the new Corporate Strategy. She also displayed a version of the Strategy which had been designed and included photographs, so as to indicate to the Board how the final version would appear. She added that a summary version would be included in the next issue of the tenants' newsletter, "Streets Ahead".

In answer to questions, the Chief Executive made the following points:

- She would review the document to ensure that it was consistent around vision, mission and promise.
- The risk framework would be reviewed in line with the Strategy.
- Appropriate consent had been obtained to use photographs of children in the document; diversity had been taken into account when choosing photographs.

- Employees' views would be sought on working arrangements after the pandemic; it was likely that there would be a combination of home and office-based working. It would form part of the new operating model.
- The values were still felt to be relevant in themselves; it was performance and accountability that appeared to be the challenge. The values could, of course, be reviewed as part of a "living document", should the Board feel it was appropriate to do so.

[Confidential Wording]

The Board thanked the Leadership Team for their hard work in producing the Strategy. The Board's views expressed at the strategy afternoon on 8 February 2021 had been taken into account, and links had been made between the strategic objectives, value for money, risk and key performance indicators. It was suggested that the Strategy should include something on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. It was acknowledged that the Strategy would be a "living" document and, as such, could be reviewed by the Board at any time.

The Chief Executive displayed an infographic on how it was envisaged the Strategy would be implemented over the five years. The Board was content to approve the Strategy in principle, but only felt able to give full approval to the first year delivery plan, alongside the budget which was also being presented at this meeting. The Board deferred giving full approval to the Strategy as a whole until it was satisfied with the Financial Plan for years 2 – 5, to be presented at the meeting on 17 May 2021.

[Confidential Wording]

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Corporate Strategy 2021-2026, incorporating the Mission, Values and Objectives (Appendix 1 to the report) be approved in principle, subject to comments made by the Board at this meeting being taken into account in the final document and the Board being satisfied with the deliverability of the Strategy when the Financial Plan is presented to the Board's meeting on 17 May 2021.
- 2) That the Annual Delivery Plan 2021-22 be approved, having specific regard to how it meets the strategic ambition of the Board in the coming year (Appendix 2 to the report).
- 3) That the strategic key performance indicators and targets (set out in Appendix 3 to the report) be approved, having specific regard to how the measures support the Board to retain appropriate oversight of progress.
- 4) That the 2021/22 budget be approved.
- 5) [Confidential Wording]

[Note: The Corporate Strategy replaces the following strategies: Communications, Customer, People, Placeshaping.]

19/21 **HOME OWNERSHIP POLICY**

The Director of Housing presented a report which proposed amendments to the Home Ownership Policy in light of recent enquiries and existing best practice.

The Director of Housing advised that around 250 – 300 Freebridge properties were likely to be subject to the rural area restrictive covenant. The Board asked that it be made clear in the document that it retained the ability to depart from the policy on the rural area restrictive covenant in exceptional circumstances.

RESOLVED: That the amendments to the Home Ownership Policy set out in the report be approved, subject to it being made clear in the document that the Board retains the ability to depart from the policy on the rural area restrictive covenant in exceptional circumstances.

20/21 **DIRECTORS' AND OFFICERS' INSURANCE ARRANGMENTS 2021-22**

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive presented a report which provided options for the replacement of Directors' and Officers' insurance for the period commencing 1 April 2021, in light of this ceasing to be provided by the National Housing Federation as part of its membership provision.

[Confidential Wording]

It was noted that the Audit and Risk Committee had raised this as an issue of concern in January 2021. The Board asked the Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive to pass on its thanks to the Business Assurance Manager for his hard work on this and for identifying a competitive option despite the limited market.

In view of the exceptions listed in the PIB Group policy, the importance of the Board being in control of health and safety issues was stressed.

The Board asked the Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive to arrange for a statement to be provided to members setting out their personal liability.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the PIB Group quotation for both Directors' and Officers' and Corporate Entity cover for the period commencing 1st April 2021 be accepted.
- 2) That the Board Member Agreement for Services be amended to state that the level of cover will be as agreed by the Board from time to time.
- 3) That future options continue to be discussed with Independent East partners going forward, as appropriate.

21/21 Confidential Item

22/21 **REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE GOVERNANCE AND REMUNERATION COMMITTEE**

Pauleen Pratt, Chair of the Governance and Remuneration Committee, presented the Chair's report, which included the minutes, of the Committee's meeting held on 11 January 2021.

Pauleen Pratt explained that the Committee had recommended adoption of the new Code of Governance expecting that the Board would have had a briefing on this by the time of this meeting. However, with the arrival of the new Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive, who had taken on responsibility for Governance, it had made sense to delay this to enable her to prepare and deliver the briefing. The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive stressed that full compliance with the new Code would be required by 31 March 2022; a gap analysis and action plan would be prepared to enable this.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That a statement of compliance with the National Housing Federation Code of Governance 2015 be included within the 2020-21 Financial Statements.
- 2) That adoption of the National Housing Federation Code of Governance 2020 be deferred until the Board meeting on 17 May 2021, by which time the Board will have received a briefing session on its contents.

23/21 REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE

Richard Spilsbury, Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee, presented the Chair's report, which included the minutes, of the Committee's meeting held on 18 January 2021.

RESOLVED: That a new corporate risk be approved, as follows:

COVID-19: Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic: The long term impact of the Covid-19 pandemic (and/or subsequent related outbreaks) could have an impact on both the way we are able to provide and deliver our services, as well as the financial sustainability of our operations.

Accountability: **Chief Executive**

Primary Risk Assessment: **23**

Residual Risk Assessment: **19**

Target Risk Assessment: **12** (*Based on Board Risk Appetite score of 3*)

Target Risk Actions Required: **Yes** (*To be determined/Lessons Learned*)

24/21 REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE CUSTOMER SERVICE COMMITTEE

Joanna Barrett, Vice-Chair of the Customer Service Committee, presented the Chair's report, which included the minutes, of the Committee's meeting held on 25 January 2021.

[Confidential wording]

[Confidential wording]

25/21 APPOINTMENT OF SHAREHOLDERS

The Board noted a report on applications to become shareholders which had been approved.

26/21 WRITTEN RESOLUTIONS

The Board noted the following written resolutions:

- Hillington Square Buy-Back

- Tenant Panel Nine Year Rule
- Lease Renewal King's Lynn
- New Company Secretarial Arrangements
- Applications to vary and give consent under rural restrictive covenant

[Confidential wording]

27/21 FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME OF THE BOARD

The Board noted its work programme for the ensuing year. It was acknowledged that the work programme was likely to be impacted by the outcomes of the Campbell Tickell Governance review.

28/21 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

[Confidential wording]

(c) Thanks to Employees

The Chair asked the Director of Housing to pass on the Board's thanks to the Complaints Coordinator for his attendance at the meeting and that the Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive pass on the Board's thanks to the Head of Finance for her attendance at the meeting.

29/21 NEXT MEETING

The Board noted that its next meeting would be a special meeting on Monday 29 March 2021 at 4.30pm and that there would then be an ordinary meeting on Monday 17 May 2021 at 4.30pm.

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The meeting closed at 7.25pm.

CHAIR