

FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING BOARD

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Board held on
Monday 10 March 2014 at 6.50pm in
The Olive Branch Café, Hillington Square, King's Lynn**

PRESENT:

Ray Johnson (Chairman)
Lesley Bambridge
Matthew Brown
Steve Clark
Tony Hall (Chief Executive)
Sean Kent (Deputy Chief Executive)
Paul Leader
Ian Pinches
Colin Sampson

IN ATTENDANCE:

Colin Davison - Director of Property
Sophie Bates - Head of Housing Services (Minute
Numbers 39/14 - 40/14)
Jacqueline Fry - Hillington Square Project Manager
(Minute Number 39/14)
Angus MacQueen - Company Secretary

**39/14 HILLINGTON SQUARE – CONTRACT FOR CONSTRUCTION
WORKS ON PHASE 2**

The Director of Property presented a report which sought the Board's approval on future steps for the Hillington Square project.

Immediately before the meeting, the Board had had a tour of Hillington Square, to view the works undertaken so far, and had then held a "thinking session", to discuss the project to date and future phases.

The Director of Property tabled a sheet of budget information for the Hillington Square project. In answer to a question, he clarified that the total project reforecast budget for 2014-15 onwards was £26,642 million.

In response to a question, the Director of Property explained that it would be within European regulations to award the contracts for the remaining phases of the project to Lovell Partnerships, the contractor for Phase 1, should Freebridge wish to do so.

The Board acknowledged that the assignment of future works packages across multiple phases would be prudent, given current fluctuations in the construction industry, even though this could result in less flexibility. Furthermore, the nature of the construction industry would need to be given due consideration before contracts beyond Phase 2 were awarded.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the contract for construction works for Phase 2 of the Hillington Square project be awarded to Lovell Partnerships, with subsequent phases to be let on a phase-by-phase basis, subject to a full review on completion of Phase 1.
- 2) That authority be delegated to Management Team to assign future work packages across multiple phases where value engineering by placement of orders for services/goods can be gained.

40/14 REVIEW OF VARIOUS HOUSING POLICIES

The Head of Housing Services presented a report which reviewed a number of Housing policies.

The Head of Housing Services explained that all front-line staff who might come into contact with children or vulnerable adults would be receiving face-to-face safeguarding training this year, with refresher training every three years. Previously, the training had been provided through a workbook, but it was felt that face-to-face training would have more impact.

In answer to questions, the Head of Housing Services made the following points:

- Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks were carried out on all relevant staff annually; these were standard rather enhanced checks. It was not straightforward to determine which staff required DBS checks; it depended on the interpretation of legislation and making judgements on each job description.
- It was part of the management agreement with The Benjamin Foundation that their staff working with residents at Plaxtole House would have undergone appropriate DBS checks.
- Frontline staff were told to report any suspected cases of domestic abuse or neglect to their line manager. These cases were then referred to Social Services for investigation.
- Most refuges in Norfolk for victims of domestic violence had closed owing to funding cuts; Norfolk victims tended to be allocated a refuge out of area.

The Board thanked the Head of Housing Services for a thorough report and for ensuring that Freebridge had suitable safeguarding procedures in place.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the revised Domestic Abuse Policy be approved, as presented.

- 2) That the existing Safeguarding Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults Policy and Support for Vulnerable People Policy be abolished.
- 3) That the Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy be approved, as presented, and be subject to annual review.
- 4) That the Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy be approved, as presented, and be subject to annual review.

41/14 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

42/14 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2014 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

43/14 MATTERS ARISING

- **Audit Committee Vacancy (Minute Number 37/14 (b))**

RESOLVED: That Colin Sampson be appointed to fill the vacancy on the Audit Committee caused by the resignation of Frazer Clement from the Board.

44/14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest, although it was noted that there was a general interest among the Non-Executive Board Members in the item at minute number 50/14 – The Business Case for Board Remuneration.

45/14 CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

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

11 February	West Norfolk Partnership leaders' meeting
13 February	Board fraud prevention briefing
14 February	Housing association Chairs' meeting organised by the National Housing Federation, including a talk by Julian Ashby, Chair of the Homes and Communities Agency Regulation Committee
26 February	Times Top 100 Employers awards evening in London
4 March	Queen Elizabeth Hospital Extraordinary General Meeting

The Chairman also reminded the Board that the stakeholder business planning day would be held on 25 March.

46/14 **CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE**

(a) Written Update

The Chief Executive had circulated a written update, covering a number of issues, in advance of the meeting; this was noted by the Board.

In particular, the Board was delighted at the news that Freebridge had achieved 55th position in the Times Top 100 Best Not-For-Profit organisations to work for, with runner-up in a special category for Employee Learning and Development. The Board acknowledged the significant amount of work by the staff team towards this achievement, especially the Director of Engagement.

(b) Director of Finance

The Chief Executive reported that Shendi Keshet, Director of Finance, had left the organisation.

(c) Apprentice of the Year

The Chief Executive said that Livvi Hodges, a Freebridge Apprentice Plumber, had been named Apprentice of the Year at the King's Lynn and West Norfolk Mayor's Business Awards. The Board asked the Director of Property to pass on its congratulations to her.

It was also reported that Livvi had performed well on the Rotary Club's young leaders' scheme, and had made a good speech to the Rotary Club.

[Confidential wording]

47/14 **DRAFT BUSINESS PLAN 2014-15**

The Chief Executive presented a report which proposed the 2014-15 Business Plan targets, the three-year Plan framework and the schedule for the Board's "thinking sessions" over the next year.

The Chief Executive provided the following updates to the report:

- One of the key messages from the Board planning days was "Better homes, not just more houses" (rather than "Better homes, not just more homes").
- The target in the 2014-15 draft Business Plan to "Evaluate Implications of 24/7" should sit under Increasing Satisfaction rather than Increasing Capacity.
- The "thinking session" on Financial Markets would not now be held in April 2014, but would be scheduled for a later date.

The Chief Executive reported that the draft Business Plan had been presented to the Tenant Panel, which had been supportive of it and would align its work plan to it.

The Board acknowledged that the draft Business Plan reflected the views expressed at its planning days.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the draft Business Plan 2014-15 and the three-year Business Plan framework be approved as presented, subject to moving “Evaluate Implications of 24/7” from Increasing Capacity to Increasing Satisfaction.
- 2) That the “thinking session” schedule be approved as presented, subject to removing the session on Financial Markets from April 2014 and organising this for a later date.

48/14 AFFORDABLE HOMES PROGRAMME 2015-18

Confidential item

49/14 COASTSHARE

The Chief Executive presented a report which proposed that Freebridge become a member of Coastshare, a not-for-profit company established to enable not-for-profit organisations to provide services to each other at cost and free of VAT.

It was commented that Freebridge should not feel that it had to agree to every request from members of Coastshare to provide its services at cost; each situation should be considered on its merits.

RESOLVED: That Freebridge become a member of Coastshare.

50/14 THE BUSINESS CASE FOR BOARD REMUNERATION

The Company Secretary presented a report which provided a Business Case for introducing payment of the Board.

It was highlighted that section 1.7 of the report set out a list of issues that remained to be resolved before the introduction of Board payment. These included Board Member expenses and the Borough Council’s position on the payment of its nominated Board Members. In terms of Board Member expenses, the intention would be to move these in line with those paid to employees.

The Board was of the view that the Business Case produced by Campbell Tickell was comprehensive and well put together, and was pleased to note that this had been provided at reasonable cost.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Business Case for Board Remuneration, as attached to the report, be adopted.
- 2) That the Business Case be presented to the Freebridge 2014 Annual General Meeting in advance of the commencement of Board remuneration on 1 October 2014.
- 3) That it be agreed that the Business Case demonstrates that the introduction of Board remuneration will be in the best interests of Freebridge and its tenants.
- 4) That the levels of payment set out in the Business Case be approved, and it be agreed that these are referred to in the recruitment advertising for new Board Members in 2014.
- 5) That the actions set out in section 1.7 of the report which remain to be completed before the introduction of Board remuneration be noted, and the Company Secretary be requested to pursue these and report back to the Board in July 2014.

51/14 BOARD MEMBER RECRUITMENT AND SUCCESSION

The Company Secretary presented a report which set out a process for recruiting Independent and Tenant Board Members in 2014, and which considered succession planning for the position of Chairman.

The Board was of the view that, because of the importance of the positions, they should be advertised more widely than just in the two West Norfolk local papers. This should include advertising in the Eastern Daily Press, and the possibility of on-line advertising should also be considered.

The importance of recruiting new Board Members of the necessary calibre and skills was stressed. It was noted that there may be issues around quorum if appropriate candidates could not be found.

The Board was pleased to note that the Tenant Panel was having an increasing input into Board business, in particular with regard to policy and performance review. The Company Secretary advised that some Tenant Panel Members would be observing the next Board meeting as part of their development. Ultimately, it may be that new Tenant Board Members could be recruited from the Tenant Panel.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Board Member recruitment proposals outlined in sections 4 and 5 of the report be approved, subject to wider advertising than that suggested.
- 2) That the amendment to the Board Membership, Recruitment and Succession Policy set out at section 4.2 of the report be approved.

52/14 **REVIEW OF THE DEALING WITH UNREASONABLY PERSISTENT COMPLAINANTS POLICY**

The Board considered a report which reviewed the Dealing with Unreasonably Persistent Complainants Policy.

The need to exercise sensitivity in cases of persistent complainants was stressed.

RESOLVED: That the revised Dealing with Unreasonably Persistent Complainants Policy be approved, as presented.

53/14 **REVIEW OF THE DIGITAL INCLUSION POLICY**

The Board considered a report which reviewed the Digital Inclusion Policy.

RESOLVED: That the revised Digital Inclusion Policy be approved, as presented.

54/14 **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.

55/14 **BENCHMARKING REPORT 2012/13**

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report which advised of the 2012/13 annual Housemark benchmarking results.

The Deputy Chief Executive apologised that the benchmarking results related to the year ending 31 March 2013, and as such the information was quite old. He would present the results for the year ending 31 March 2014 to the Board at an earlier stage, and in time to feed into the business planning process.

The Deputy Chief Executive highlighted that there were two elements of the results in which Freebridge fell within the bottom third of the benchmarking group. The first was major works and cyclical maintenance; this result reflected the fact that the Decent Homes programme was still in progress during 2012/13. The second was ICT costs; there had now been an ICT service review and a subsequent restructure of the team. With regard to empty property costs, the actual price per repair was comparable to peers, but Freebridge had a higher turnover of properties. Taking into account all elements of the results, Freebridge's direction of travel overall was pleasing.

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

- Whilst it was difficult to make exact comparisons with other ICT teams, Housemark had worked hard to make their benchmarking as useful as possible. The Freebridge ICT team had also undertaken benchmarking with other housing association ICT teams locally. If the Housemark results for 2013/14 revealed that Freebridge remained in the bottom third for ICT costs, the results of the local benchmarking would be shared with the Board.
- Research had been undertaken into the reasons for the comparatively high turnover of properties at Freebridge. This had shown that the two most common reasons for cessation of a Freebridge tenancy were death and moving to a care home, reflecting the elderly demographic of Freebridge's tenants.

The Board noted the report.

56/14 FINANCIAL PLAN AND BUDGET UPDATE 2014/15

Confidential item

57/14 REGULATORY INVESTIGATION

The Chief Executive presented a report which provided details of an investigation into a case involving Freebridge currently being undertaken by the Regulator.

The Chief Executive said that this case had not been the subject of a formal complaint direct to Freebridge. It was unusual for complaints of this nature to be raised with the Regulator without first going through the housing association's own complaints procedure; it was not clear who had brought the matter to the Regulator's attention. Further communication from the Regulator was now awaited. The Executive did not believe that the tenant had been put at serious detriment.

In answer to a question, the Director of Property stated that an error had been made, in that works had been started by a Freebridge contractor without a party wall agreement being in place. However, Freebridge had made every effort to rectify the situation.

The Board noted the report.

58/14 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.

59/14 **URGENT ACTION TAKEN – REPLACEMENT OF CLEMENT COURT HEATING SYSTEM**

The Board noted a request for urgent action that had been approved, to enable the replacement of the heating system at the Clement Court sheltered scheme.

60/14 **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.

61/14 **COMMITTEE MINUTES**

Ian Pinches, Chairman of the Audit Committee, presented the minutes of the Committee's meeting held on 27 January 2014. It was noted that the key issues from the meeting had been raised with the Board at its last meeting (minute number 37/14(a) refers).

62/14 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

(a) Board Members' Conference

The Chairman reminded the Board that the annual e² Board Members' Conference would be held on Thursday 5 June 2014.

(b) King's Lynn Children's Contact Centre

Lesley Bambridge advised that she had become Chair of the King's Lynn Children's Contact Centre. She would look to make connections with Freebridge as appropriate.

(c) Bank Mandate

The Deputy Chief Executive explained that, as Shendi Keshet had left the organisation, the bank mandate would need to be changed to remove her from the list of signatories.

RESOLVED: That the authorised signatories list in the current bank mandate with NatWest Bank, for all existing and future accounts in the name of "Freebridge Community Housing", be changed as follows:

- Remove Shendi Keshet (former Director of Finance)

and that the current mandate continue as amended.

(d) Chairman's Holiday

Confidential

63/14 NEXT MEETING

The Board noted that its next meeting was scheduled for Monday 7 April 2014 at 6.30pm.

The meeting closed at 8.30pm.

CHAIRMAN