

## **FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING BOARD**

### **Minutes of a Meeting of the Board held on Monday 13 June 2016 at 6.30pm in “The Barn”, 2 Chapel Lane, King’s Lynn**

#### **PRESENT:**

Ray Johnson (Chairman)  
Steve Clark  
Tony Hall (Chief Executive)  
Brian Long  
Ian Pinches  
Jasmine Rigg  
Colin Sampson

#### **IN ATTENDANCE:**

Robert Clarke	-	Director of Housing
Colin Davison	-	Director of Property
Michelle Gant	-	Director of Engagement
Clare Flynn	-	Finance Business Partner (minute numbers 110/16 – 116/16)
Howard Burton	-	Business Assurance Manager (minute numbers 110/16 – 117/16)
Angus MacQueen	-	Company Secretary
Judith Carter	-	Executive Assistant

#### **110/16      APOLOGIES AND INTRODUCTION**

An apology for absence was received from Marie Connell.

[Confidential wording]

The Chairman introduced Judith Carter, Executive Assistant, who was attending the meeting as part of her development.

#### **111/16      MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 May 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### **112/16      MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising.

#### **113/16      DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **114/16      CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE**

The Chairman said that he had attended his usual weekly meetings with the Chief Executive. In addition, he advised of the following:

- He had attended an update on the Housing and Planning Bill on 18 May, given by James Tickell of Campbell Tickell to the Chairmen and Chief Executives of the e<sup>2</sup> organisations.
- On 19 May, he had considered an appeal from an individual who had been designated as a “persistent complainant”.
- On 24 May, he had sat on a recruitment panel for the West Norfolk Clinical Commissioning Group.
- On 25 May and 2 June, he had attended Governors’ Council meetings at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital.
- On 7 June, he had attended a meeting to shortlist Board Member applications.

The Chairman also advised that he had received an anonymous letter in relation to a recent employee matter. As no contact details had been provided, he had not been able to respond to the letter, and he had taken no action in relation to its contents.

## **115/16      CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE**

### **(a) Introduction**

A written update from the Chief Executive had been previously circulated and was noted by the Board.

The written update covered the following issues:

- Royal Bank of Scotland Visit
- Freebridge Community Awards 2016
- Department for Communities and Local Government Estate Regeneration Fund
- Recruitment for Director of Finance and Resources Update
- Board Member Recruitment
- Festival Too
- Home Ownership
- Plaxtole House
- Interim Chief Executive of the Homes and Communities Agency Visit to Freebridge
- Out and About in May

Discussion took place on some aspects of the update, as described below.

**(b) Royal Bank of Scotland Visit**

In answer to a question, the Chief Executive confirmed that the visit from senior representatives of the Royal Bank of Scotland had been very positive; a good relationship was being maintained with them.

**(c) Department for Communities and Local Government Estate Regeneration Fund**

The Board was pleased to note that contact had been made with the Department for Communities and Local Government with a view to a bid being made to their Estate Regeneration Fund for funding towards the Hillington Square project. The Head of the Estate Regeneration Delivery Team, Anton Draper, would be visiting Hillington Square shortly. The Chief Executive said that Mr Draper had been so impressed with the project that he had put housing organisations in Rochdale and Toronto in touch with Freebridge, for advice on their own regeneration projects.

**(d) Interim Chief Executive of the Homes and Communities Agency Visit to Freebridge**

The Chief Executive thanked Ian Pinches for arranging a visit from Mark Hodgkinson, Interim Chief Executive of the Homes and Communities Agency. The visit had been a useful opportunity to show Mr Hodgkinson the positive impact that Freebridge was having on the local area and, in particular, the investment it was making in Hillington Square.

**116/16 FINANCIAL PLAN UPDATE 2016**

Confidential item

**117/16 STRATEGIC REPORT INCLUDING VALUE FOR MONEY SELF-ASSESSMENT STATEMENT 2015/16**

The Business Assurance Manager presented a report which sought approval for the Strategic Report and Value for Money Self-Assessment Statement 2015/16 for inclusion in the statutory financial accounts for 2015/16.

The Business Assurance Manager highlighted that the document focused on three key areas: making the best use of assets, comparative costs, and achieving efficiencies.

The Board welcomed the clarity and robustness of the document, which were particularly important as the Regulator was increasingly focusing on value for money.

The Board was pleased to note that Freebridge had trained 96 of its own staff and 23 from partner organisations in energy efficiency. This was in line with Freebridge's vision of "Supporting a Better West Norfolk", and enabled staff to help tenants save money on their energy bills.

The Board asked for the following amendments to be made to the document:

- Remove Havebury Housing Partnership from the list of e<sup>2</sup> Consortium members.
- Add compliance with the funders' covenants to the list of key risks.

**RESOLVED:**

1) That the following statement be agreed:

“The Board has reviewed the Value for Money self-assessment statement and it is satisfied that there is sufficient evidence to:

- enable stakeholders to understand the return on assets measured against the organisation's objectives;
- set out the absolute and comparative costs of delivering specific services; and
- demonstrate how value for money gains have been or will be made, and how these have and will be realised over time.

The Board considers that there are no significant deficiencies, omissions or errors and that its inclusion in the financial statements fulfils the VfM standard requirements of the Homes and Communities Agency's 'Value for Money Standard' April 2012.”

2) That the draft Strategic Report and Value for Money statement be approved for inclusion in Freebridge's statutory financial accounts 2015/16, subject to the amendments listed above.

**118/16      REVIEW OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT POLICY**

The Director of Engagement presented a report which reviewed the Human Resources Management Policy.

The Director of Engagement said that the review of the Policy had been particularly robust, having been informed by two documents: the Times Top 100 findings report and the Internal Audit Cultures and Behaviours report. Key themes of the revised Policy were empowerment and accountability.

As requested by the Board at the last meeting (minute number 102/16 refers), the Director of Engagement gave some background to the recent increases in staff turnover and staff sickness absence. She advised that the increase in staff turnover was partly the result of dismissals; this demonstrated that Freebridge was taking firm action when this was required. Voluntary turnover was usually for positive reasons, such as career moves. There had been a slight increase in staff sickness absence when Freebridge had decided to start paying for the first three days of absence; this was part of the organisation's commitment to well-being. Freebridge was taking action to

address or avoid long-term sickness absence, for instance paying for physiotherapy or counselling sessions for employees.

The Board welcomed the approach to employee well-being, in particular the provision of counselling sessions. In response to a question, the Director of Engagement stated that, when counselling was required by employees, it was not necessarily for work-related issues.

In answer to questions, officers made the following points:

- The Times Top 100 report and the Cultures and Behaviours report had indicated that there was a perception of unfairness among some Freebridge employees, both in relation to pay anomalies and to consistency of management style. These were both being addressed.
- The Human Resources team would be looking to embed learning within the organisation. A menu of opportunities for learning and development would be produced. Employees would be empowered to take ownership of their own training, including pursuing training delivered in their preferred learning styles.
- As part of the quarterly monitoring of the progress of the Business Plan, the Board would receive updates on the implementation of the Human Resources Management Policy.

**RESOLVED:** That the revised Human Resources Management Policy be approved, as presented.

**119/16      REVIEW OF THE DEALING WITH UNREASONABLY PERSISTENT COMPLAINANTS POLICY**

The Director of Engagement presented a report which reviewed the Dealing with Unreasonably Persistent Complainants Policy.

The Director of Engagement highlighted that the revised Policy had been extended to include abusive individuals. It had also provided clarity around procedure.

The Board observed that, when an individual was designated as a persistent complainant or an abusive individual, the Policy required a review of the decision after six months; this could result in the designation being lifted and the problems starting again. The Chief Executive responded that evidence and judgement would need to be used in each case. It was also noted that eviction could be pursued if a serious breach of tenancy agreement had occurred.

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

**120/16      REQUEST TO WRITE OFF DEBTS OVER £2,000**

Confidential item

**121/16      PROVISION OF A GARAGE TENANCY TO AN EXISTING EMPLOYEE**

Confidential item

**122/16      ANNUAL HEALTH AND SAFETY UPDATE**

The Director of Property presented a report which provided the annual health and safety update.

The Board was very pleased to note that Freebridge had received the RoSPA Gold Award, for excellence in health and safety practice, for the fifth year running.

In answer to questions, the Director of Property advised that Freebridge's fleet of vehicles was fitted with tracking devices, and so usage could be monitored. Installation of cameras into the vehicles was being considered, although the number of incidents where this might be required was minimal. Occasions where Freebridge operatives had been found to be using mobile telephones whilst driving had been dealt with appropriately.

In response to a question, the Director of Property explained that the higher level of accidents at the Providence Street Community Centre, as compared with the rest of the organisation, was as a result of the types of activities, such as sports, that were carried out at the Centre.

The Board noted the report.

**123/16      FURTHER ANALYSIS OF THE HILLINGTON SQUARE EXPERIENCE**

The Director of Housing presented a report which highlighted the findings of a second resident survey carried out on the two developed phases of Hillington Square, to measure the impact of the development on residents and on the community as a whole.

The Director of Housing highlighted that residents in Phases 1 and 2 were more confident than before in reporting issues. There was more resident engagement and increased pride in the neighbourhood.

The Board asked that its thanks be passed on to the Head of Housing Services for a very interesting report.

The Board noted the report.

**124/16      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.

**125/16      ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Confidential item

**126/16      NEXT MEETING**

The Board noted that its next meeting was scheduled for Monday 1 August 2016 at 6.30pm.

**The meeting closed at 8.10pm.**

**CHAIRMAN**