

FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING BOARD

Minutes of a Meeting of the Board held on Monday 10 December 2012 at 7.05pm in the Hillington Square Community Centre, King's Lynn

PRESENT:

Ray Johnson (Chairman)
Lesley Bambridge
Steve Clark
Frazer Clement
John Fox
Ian Pinches

IN ATTENDANCE:

Tony Hall	-	Chief Executive
Sean Kent	-	Deputy Chief Executive
Michelle Playford	-	Assistant Director of Communications and Engagement
Angus MacQueen	-	Company Secretary

NOTE: The meeting was preceded by:

- a “Human Library” event, which was part of the Board’s training on equality and diversity; and
- a presentation on the funding markets, given by Philip Porter of Beha Williams Norman Limited, Freebridge’s treasury management advisers.

216/12 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Matthew Brown, Simon Gathercole, Bill Guyan, Paul Leader and Colin Sampson.

The Chairman advised that he had been in touch with Bill Guyan and Paul Leader, to offer his best wishes, as both had been undergoing treatment in hospital.

217/12 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2012 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

218/12 MATTERS ARISING

• Local Support for Council Tax Scheme (Minute Number 196/12(c))

The Chief Executive said that it appeared likely that the Borough Council would delay the introduction of the new Council Tax scheme by one year. If this were the case, it would give Freebridge the opportunity to address the impact of other benefit changes before the reduction in Council Tax Benefit came into effect. The three main agencies funded by the Council Tax, the Borough Council, the County Council and the Police Authority, would need to set aside funds to cover the losses caused by the delay in the introduction of the scheme.

In answer to a question, the Chief Executive undertook to find out the situation with regard to the Freebridge tenants who lived at Thornage, which was in the North Norfolk District Council area.

219/12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Although not specifically relevant to this agenda, Ian Pinches declared that he had recently been appointed as a Non-Executive Director of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Trust, King's Lynn. The Chairman welcomed the appointment, as it would help Freebridge to develop a closer working relationship with this key partner.

220/12 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 carried out Board Member appraisals on 5 - 7 November. He thanked all Board Members for their participation in the appraisals and for their feedback regarding his performance as Chairman.
- On 14 November, he had taken part in the judging for the general needs garden competition.
- He had attended Board Member training at Bury St Edmund's on 16 November, regarding Universal Credit. The speakers had been David Orr, Chief Executive of the National Housing Federation, and Sharon Jones, of Anglia Revenues Partnership. Freebridge had been the best represented organisation at the training, with six of the 17 Board Members present being from Freebridge.
- He had attended the Board away weekend on 23 - 24 November.
- He had attended training on 26 November regarding the scoring of the tender returns for the Hillington Square constructor contract.

- On 28 November, he had attended the tender opening for the gas and electrical maintenance contracts.

[Confidential discussion]

- On 29 November, he had attended the National Training Journal Awards function in London, along with some senior Freebridge employees and other employees who had particularly embraced coaching in the organisation. Freebridge had been shortlisted for an award and, although it had not won, it had been very pleasing to be part of an event also attended by a number of very large, high profile companies. The Chief Executive advised that Freebridge would receive feedback on its submission and that the Journal's editor had offered to pay a personal visit to Freebridge. The Board asked that its thanks be recorded to all staff involved in the submission.

The Board noted the update.

221/12 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE

(a) Funding Options

Confidential

(b) Clenchwarton Almshouses

The Chief Executive advised that the lease agreement for the Clenchwarton almshouses had now been sealed. The Company Secretary said that, consequently, the relevant entry on the Board's action sheet would be removed.

(c) Letter from the Homes and Communities Agency

The Chief Executive reported that a letter had been issued to the whole sector by the Homes and Communities Agency. The letter focused on two areas. Firstly, it stressed the importance of boards having assurance over the exposure of assets when diversifying into non-regulated activities; this would be incorporated into revisions of the Regulatory Framework. Secondly, the letter explained that, unless there were significant issues, Regulatory Judgements would be much briefer in the future. Freebridge's Regulation Manager had, however, confirmed that Freebridge would be receiving a full Regulatory Judgement under the old system, and that this was likely to be in March 2013. The Chief Executive said that the letter would be placed on the Board Member's website, and invited Board Members to contact him with any questions once they had read it.

(d) Providence Street

Confidential

(e) Eastern Procurement Consortium – Partnering Contract with Foster Property Maintenance Limited

Confidential

(f) Homes and Communities Agency Empty Homes Funding

The Chief Executive reminded the Board that a bid for empty homes funding from the Homes and Communities Agency had been successful. Board approval was required to enter into the Framework Agreement with the Homes and Communities Agency to enable the funding to be accessed.

RESOLVED: That Freebridge enter into the Framework Agreement with the Homes and Communities Agency for empty homes funding.

222/12 REVIEW OF ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR, HARASSMENT AND HATE CRIMES POLICY

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report which reviewed the Anti-Social Behaviour, Harassment and Hate Crimes Policy.

RESOLVED: That the Anti-Social Behaviour, Harassment and Hate Crimes Policy be approved as presented.

223/12 PLAXTOLE HOUSE FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Confidential

224/12 EASTERN PROCUREMENT – COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE

The Chief Executive presented a report which described a proposal to incorporate the Eastern Procurement Consortium as a company limited by guarantee.

The Chief Executive stressed that incorporation to a company limited by guarantee would significantly reduce the risk applicable to all members of the Consortium. He highlighted that, whilst the Board report contained a summary of the proposal, a much more detailed report had been placed on the Board Members' website.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That Freebridge become a member of Eastern Procurement as a company limited by guarantee.
- 2) That the Articles of Association and Members' Agreement for the new company be approved as presented.

225/12 **ISSUES AROUND COUPLES ON THE BOARD**

The Company Secretary presented a report which sought to establish the Board's position on couples serving together on the Board.

The Company Secretary explained that, after reading the report, two Board Members had suggested that the issues it covered applied not only to couples but also to other close relatives. The Company Secretary, therefore, tabled an amended recommendation to reflect this. The Board welcomed the amended recommendation, particularly as the reference to and definition of "close relative" was consistent with that used for Board Member and employee declarations of interest.

It was acknowledged that close relatives could operate with independent judgement, but that the perception could still be that their judgement was influenced by each other.

RESOLVED: That the following be added to the Board Membership, Recruitment and Succession Policy:

"Close relatives* will not be permitted to serve together on the Board. This is because of concerns around independence of judgement, conflicts of interest (actual and perceived) and diversity of representation. Should a situation occur whereby the relationship between two existing Board Members changes to the extent that it falls within the definition of "close relatives", one of them would be expected to step down from the Board.

*The term "close relatives" refers to spouse, partner, parents, grandparents, children, grandchildren, brothers, sisters, and similar relations by marriage or civil partnership, but not including estranged relatives where there has been no contact for a number of years."

226/12 **APPOINTMENT OF SHAREHOLDERS**

The Company Secretary presented a report which requested the Board to consider applications for tenant shareholding.

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

227/12 **CONTINUOUS RECORDING (CORE) OF LETTINGS AND SALES FOR 2011/12**

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report which highlighted from the CORE statistics significant changes to Freebridge's lettings in 2011/12 as compared to 2010/11, and which identified any trends and indicators that could affect how Freebridge managed its housing stock in the future.

The Deputy Chief Executive highlighted that an investigation had shown that a number of tenants were moving from their properties because of

overcrowding. This reflected experience, particularly of letting new properties in South Lynn.

The Board acknowledged that a very high proportion, 74%, of General Needs tenants were on Housing Benefit; this figure was over 80% when Sheltered Housing was taken into account. Many of those drawing Housing Benefit were in work, indicating that King's Lynn and West Norfolk had a low wage economy.

The Board noted that the average re-let time was now down to eight days. It asked that its thanks be recorded to the staff involved.

The Board noted the report.

228/12 EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION SURVEY FINDINGS AND ACTIONS

Confidential

229/12 WORK UPDATE

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

- Action Sheet
- Future Work Programme of the Board.

The Company Secretary highlighted that an action from the Board meeting on 8 October 2012, to advertise the Tenant Board Member vacancy in Streets Ahead (minute number 176/12(f) refers), would be removed. This was following discussion at the Board's recent away weekend, when the consensus had been not to fill the vacancy while options for the structure of the Board were considered. The Board agreed that the vacancy should not be advertised for the time being. The Chief Executive said that the Board would be receiving a talk on Governance on 21 January 2013, after which a Governance action plan would be developed.

The Board noted the update.

230/12 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

231/12 NEXT MEETING

The Board noted that its next ordinary meeting was scheduled for Monday 4 February 2013 at 6.30pm. A special meeting was scheduled for Monday 21 January 2013.

The meeting closed at 8.20pm.

CHAIRMAN