

## **FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING BOARD**

### **Minutes of a Meeting of the Board held on Monday 5 November 2012 at 6.40pm in the Conference Room, Juniper House, Austin Street, King's Lynn**

#### **PRESENT:**

Ray Johnson (Chairman)  
Lesley Bambridge  
Matthew Brown  
Steve Clark  
Frazer Clement  
John Fox  
Simon Gathercole  
Bill Guyan  
Paul Leader  
Ian Pinches  
Colin Sampson

#### **IN ATTENDANCE:**

Tony Hall - Chief Executive  
Sean Kent - Deputy Chief Executive  
Angus MacQueen - Company Secretary

#### **OBSERVER:**

Debby Ounsted - Campbell Tickell

**NOTE:** The meeting was preceded by a presentation on “Equality and Diversity” given by Steve Clark, who gave feedback on Board Member training that he had attended recently, and by the Deputy Chief Executive, who updated on Freebridge’s actions and priorities relevant to equality and diversity. The presentation concluded with an invitation to all Board Members to a Human Library event at 5.00pm on Monday 10 December 2012, prior to the Board meeting that evening.

#### **194/12 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES**

The Chairman welcomed Debby Ounsted of Campbell Tickell who was observing the meeting as part of the annual Board appraisal and review process.

There were no apologies for absence.

#### **195/12 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 October 2012 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**(a) Awards Ceremonies (Minute Number 176/12(e))**

The Chief Executive said that the Board Vice-Chairman, Paul Leader, and some employees had recently attended a National Housing Federation regional awards ceremony. This was because the Jog-on Project, which Freebridge operated along with two local partners, had been nominated for a Community Impact Award. Although the Project had not won, it had been a significant achievement even to be nominated. The Board asked that its thanks be recorded to all those involved in the Project.

It was noted that Freebridge representatives would be attending the National Training Journal Awards ceremony later in the month, for which Freebridge had been shortlisted.

**(b) Board Recruitment (Minute Number 176/12(f))**

In answer to a question, the Chief Executive stated that research was being undertaken regarding the issue of couples sitting on the same Board. The results would be reported back to the Board in due course.

**(c) Local Support for Council Tax Scheme (Minute Number 186/12)**

The Chief Executive referred to the response that he had sent to the Borough Council's consultation on its proposals around support with Council Tax payments. The response had reflected the discussion at the last Board meeting and had been copied to the Norfolk Policy Authority and Norfolk County Council. As yet, no reply had been received from either the Borough Council or the County Council. The Policy Authority had responded, stressing that it would take its share of any liability arising from non-collection of Council Tax.

In answer to questions, the Chief Executive said that Freebridge's next steps should be to focus on doing everything that it could to help tenants. This included providing welfare advice, assisting tenants to downsize under the Under Occupation Policy, and investing in properties to keep heating bills to a minimum. Freebridge could also seek to influence the Borough Council on the kinds of cases at which it would target its hardship fund, and also to exert pressure on the County Council to contribute to the hardship fund.

The Board was very concerned to note the likely combined effect on many people of the forthcoming cuts in both Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit. This was exacerbated by the fact that most of those who would be affected were already struggling financially. The Chairman said that he would be discussing the situation with each Board Member at the appraisals being held later that week.

The Chief Executive also mentioned that Freebridge had been featured in a recent television report on BBC 1 East's Politics Show, about the "bedroom tax", one element of Housing Benefit reform.

**197/12        DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**198/12        CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE**

The Chairman thanked those Board Members who had taken part in a recent impromptu email debate on improving the Board's linkage with the Tenant Panel. This topic would be covered at the forthcoming Board away weekend.

The Chairman said that he had undertaken no activities as Chairman since the last meeting, other than his weekly meetings with the Chief Executive. However, he would shortly be undertaking the following activities:

- He would be conducting Board Member appraisals during that week.
- He would be taking part in the judging for the general needs garden competition, in the following week.
- He would be attending Board Member training at Bury St Edmund's on 16 November, regarding Universal Credit.
- He would be attending the Board away weekend on 23-24 November.
- He would be attending meetings towards the end of November to consider tender returns for the Hillington Square constructor contract.
- He would be attending the Training Journal Awards function in London on 29 November.

The Board noted the update.

**199/12        CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE**

**(a)    Plaxtole House**

Confidential

**(b)    Providence Street**

The Chief Executive advised that information had been received from Norfolk County Council regarding the fees that were charged to each of the current user groups of the Providence Street facility. This would help in the negotiations with the user groups.

**(c)    Direct Debit Payments**

The Chief Executive explained that Freebridge currently processed Direct Debit rent payments in-house. However, it was intended to transfer this work to Allpay, who already processed other types of Freebridge rent payments.

As a result, customers would have considerably more choice as to when the payments could leave their accounts. This would help with encouraging the take-up of Direct Debit rent payments in preparation for the introduction of Universal Credit. Board approval was required to make the transfer, as it involved the execution of a Deed.

**RESOLVED:** That the transfer of Direct Debit rent payments to Allpay be approved.

**200/12        DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UPDATE**

Confidential item

**201/12        EMPLOYMENT OF A CLOSE RELATIVE OF AN EXISTING EMPLOYEE**

Confidential item

**202/12        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.

**203/12        OPERATIONS PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW**

**(a)    Introduction**

The Chief Executive presented the Operations Performance Overview report for the quarter ending 30 September 2012.

The Board was of the view that, while the report was interesting, much of the information it contained was operational, rather than strategic. The Board did not need this level of detail, and the staff time required in compiling it could be better spent elsewhere. The Board, therefore, requested that it continue to receive the appendices to the report, but that these were accompanied only by a brief covering report, highlighting significant issues by exception.

Discussion took place on some aspects of the report, as set out below.

**(b)    Decent Homes**

The Chief Executive advised that a bid for 50% funding for a 50 further properties to be changed to air source heat pumps had been successful. The Board asked that its thanks be recorded to the Assistant Director of Property Services for achieving this.

In answer to a question, officers confirmed that all properties were being monitored, to ensure that necessary works were carried out at the appropriate time to avoid them falling into non-decency.

**(c) Hillington Square**

Confidential

**(d) Performance/Quarterly Trends**

The Board commented on the following:

- The performance around rent arrears was good, although not quite hitting the target. It would be important to monitor this.
- The ongoing achievement of 100% gas servicing certificates completed on time was excellent. A recent benchmarking report had shown that many associations were not achieving this.
- The performance around keeping appointments was good.

**(e) Compliments**

A member commented on the pleasing number of compliments listed, and in particular that some names were mentioned more than once. The Chief Executive responded that he had written a personal “thank-you” note to four employees who had been frequently named in compliments.

**(f) Feedback/Comments**

Confidential

The Board noted the report.

**204/12 FINANCE AND HUMAN RESOURCES QUARTERLY  
MANAGEMENT REPORT**

**(a) Introduction**

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report which provided financial information for the quarter ending 30 September 2012, together with Human Resources key performance indicator information. Discussion took place on some aspects of the report, as set out below.

**(b) Income and Expenditure Account**

Confidential

**(c) Property Services**

Confidential

**(d) Recyclable Grant Fund**

The Deputy Chief Executive highlighted that there was a new section to the report entitled “Recyclable Grant Fund”. This was because a property had been sold under the “Right To Acquire” which had generated some grant funding that Freebridge had three years to use, otherwise it was returned to the Homes and Communities Agency. In answer to a question, officers confirmed that the funding would be used, and that it would be monitored in this report.

**(e) Human Resources Key Performance Indicators**

The Board was pleased to note the improvements in the figures around sickness absence and staff turnover.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that the annual staff survey had just been undertaken. There had been a 91% return rate – a huge improvement on last year. The results were very pleasing. They would be discussed with the Employee Panel and then presented with an action plan to the Board at its meeting on 10 December 2012.

The Deputy Chief Executive also reported that a leaflet was being produced to give potential job applicants an insight into what it was like to work for Freebridge. A number of employees had provided very positive quotes about their experiences of working for Freebridge, to be included in the leaflet. In answer to a question, the Deputy Chief Executive said that there was a shortage of certain technical skills in West Norfolk, and it was difficult to attract people to the area. Efforts were being made to improve recruitment, including work with schools and colleges. It was also noted that talent was nurtured within the organisation where possible.

The Board noted the report.

**205/12 TREASURY MANAGEMENT UPDATE**

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report which provided an update on treasury activity for the quarter ending 30 September 2012.

The Board noted the report.

**206/12 RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE**

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report which detailed risk management activity during the quarter ending 30 September 2012 and provided an update to the Corporate Risk Map.

In answer to a question, the Deputy Chief Executive said that the key current risks facing Freebridge related to welfare reform and the Hillington Square project. Other ongoing key risks were around fluctuations in interest rates, future rent increases and inflation on build costs. Robust plans were in place to manage these risks and mitigate their impact, where possible.

The Board noted the report.

**207/12      BUSINESS PLAN 2012/13 – SECOND QUARTER UPDATE**

The Chief Executive presented a report which set out the second quarter update to the 2012/13 Business Plan.

The Board noted the report.

**208/12      UNDERSTANDING THE DRIVERS OF SHELTERED NEEDS  
TENANT SATISFACTION 2012**

Confidential item

**209/12      PENSION DISCRETION**

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report which described a pension discretion that had been granted in relation to the early retirement of an employee.

The Board noted the report.

**210/12      CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S APPRAISAL**

Confidential item

**211/12      URGENT ACTION TAKEN – PROPOSED PURCHASE OF A  
PROPERTY AT KING'S LYNN**

Confidential item

**212/12      URGENT ACTION TAKEN – PROPOSED PURCHASE OF A  
PROPERTY AT HUNSTANTON**

Confidential item

**213/12      WORK UPDATE**

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

- Action Sheet
- Future Work Programme of the Board.

[Confidential paragraph]

The Board noted the update.

**214/12      ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

**215/12      NEXT MEETING**

The Board noted that its next meeting was scheduled for Monday 10 December 2012 at 6.30pm.

**The meeting closed at 8.30pm.**

**CHAIRMAN**