

FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING BOARD

Minutes of a Meeting of the Board held on Monday 13 April 2015 at 7.20pm in Conference Room, Juniper House Austin Street, King's Lynn

PRESENT:

Ray Johnson (Chairman)
Lesley Bambridge
Matthew Brown
Steve Clark
Marie Connell
Tony Hall (Chief Executive)
Sean Kent (Deputy Chief Executive)
Ian Pinches
Jasmine Rigg
Colin Sampson

IN ATTENDANCE:

Robert Clarke	-	Director of Housing
Colin Davison	-	Director of Property
Michelle Gant	-	Director of Engagement
John Crowther	-	Interim Director of Finance (minute numbers 67/15 – 73/15)
Helen Royall	-	Finance Manager (minute numbers 67/15 – 73/15)
Angus MacQueen	-	Company Secretary

The meeting was observed by two members of the Tenant Panel.

The meeting was preceded by a presentation from the Head of Housing Services on the Impact of Welfare Reform.

67/15 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

68/15 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

69/15 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

70/15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Ray Johnson declared an interest in the item at minute number 74/15 – Board Recruitment 2015 – He withdrew from the room for the duration of the item.

The Executive Board Members and other staff present declared an interest in the item at minute number 75/15 – Business Plan Bond. The Board was content that they should remain in the room for the discussion, but the Executive Board Members did not vote.

71/15 CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

The Chairman said that, since the last Board meeting, he had continued to attend his weekly meetings with the Chief Executive, as well as coming into the office to sign and seal documents.

72/15 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:

- Hillington Square project
- Fire Damage at Elizabeth Avenue, Downham Market
- Homes and Communities Agency Viability Review
- Queen Elizabeth Hospital
- Official Opening of the Residential Extension at Thornage Hall
- Board Member Declaration of Interest
- Community Awards

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

(b) Hillington Square Project

The Board was very pleased to note the positive coverage about the Hillington Square project that had appeared recently in the Lynn News. The Board was also delighted that Phase 1 of the project had been shortlisted for a Royal Town Planning Institute award and that it was to be featured in the Architects' Journal.

(c) [Confidential]

(d) Homes and Communities Agency Viability Review

The Board was very pleased to note that, following the Homes and Communities Agency's annual viability review, Freebridge had retained its V1 rating.

(e) [Confidential]

(f) Week of Wellbeing

This was an additional item, not included in the written update.

The Company Secretary tabled leaflets about the Freebridge Week of Wellbeing, which would be taking place on 11 – 15 May. Board Members were invited to take part in the events/activities listed.

73/15 ANNUAL BUDGET 2015/16

Confidential item

Steve Clark in the Chair (Ray Johnson having left the room)

74/15 BOARD RECRUITMENT 2015

The Company Secretary presented a report which suggested positions that the Board might wish to take with regard to Tenant and Independent Board Member recruitment in 2015.

The Board acknowledged that it was in an unusual situation in that it was looking to change the Board structure at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) in September 2015, but it was not yet clear whether this would be possible. In the meantime, it had to operate under the current structure. Nevertheless, the Board was of the view that, because of the uncertainty over the Board's structure, it would be inappropriate to recruit to the two Tenant Board Member vacancies at present. Not recruiting would result in an increased risk of inquorate meetings, as there would be just one Tenant Board Member; however it was only for the short term and processes were in place to enable decision-making should inquorate meetings occur. In an emergency situation, a co-option to the Board from the Tenant Panel could be considered. Jasmine Rigg confirmed that she did not feel undue pressure by being the only Tenant Board Member.

[Confidential]

Whilst accepting that decisions around the Board's structure would not be known until the AGM in September 2015, the Board was of the view that there were a number of governance issues which it should begin looking at sooner. These included succession planning for the Chairman and other Board Members, enhancing the role of the Tenant Panel, and how the Board could best meet the needs of the business going forward. These could be considered initially at a "thinking session".

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the 2015 AGM be recommended that Ray Johnson be reappointed as a Board Member until the 2017 AGM.
- 2) That it be agreed not to recruit to the two Tenant Board Member vacancies at this time, pending possible changes to the Board structure being agreed at the 2015 AGM.
- 3) That a Board “thinking session” be held in June 2015 to consider governance issues.

Ray Johnson in the Chair

75/15 BUSINESS PLAN BOND

The Director of Engagement presented a report which set out the final outturn for the 2014/15 Business Plan Bond.

The Board was pleased to note that most of the Business Plan Bond targets had been achieved. It was highlighted, in particular, that 99% of staff had attended a Mary Gober refresher session.

The Board acknowledged that within the Business Plan Bond there was a £20 discretionary payment to be applied by the Board. The Board asked that the directors collate further evidence to support the decision as to whether to pay this element or not. In order to adhere to the timetable for making the payment in May 2015, authority would be delegated to the Chairman, in consultation with the Chief Executive, to agree it.

The Chief Executive commented that, in future years, the Business Plan Bond outturn would be presented at the same time as the full Business Plan outturn, and the timetable for payment of the Business Plan Bond adjusted accordingly.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the 2014/15 Business Plan Bond payments be approved as presented.
- 2) That the directors collate further evidence to support the decision as to whether to pay the element of the Business Plan Bond to be made at the Board’s discretion, and that delegated authority be given to the Chairman to approve the payment in consultation with the Chief Executive.

76/15 REVIEW OF THE CUSTOMER CARE POLICY

The Director of Engagement presented a report which reviewed the Customer Care Policy.

In answer to questions, it was explained that Freebridge contractors were required to undergo training in the Mary Gober Customer Excellence Model or equivalent. Freebridge paid for the training, but the cost was minimal.

In response to a question, the Director of Engagement said that she would be carrying out greater analysis of complaints, and the Board would be kept informed of actions being taken to address complaints. Staff would be reminded of the process for dealing with complaints, at the forthcoming employee conference. Once a complaint had been finalised, the complainant would be contacted for feedback on how the complaint had been dealt with.

RESOLVED: That the revised Customer Care Policy be approved, as presented.

77/15 REVIEW OF THE COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS POLICY

The Director of Engagement presented a report which reviewed the Complaints and Compliments Policy.

RESOLVED: That the revised Complaints and Compliments Policy be approved, as presented.

78/15 REVIEW OF THE FIRE SAFETY POLICY

The Director of Property presented a report which reviewed the Fire Safety Policy.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the revised Fire Safety Policy be approved, as presented.
- 2) That the Fire Safety Policy be reviewed every two years going forward.

79/15 REQUEST TO WRITE OFF DEBTS OVER £2,000

The Director of Housing presented a report which sought approval to write off debts that were each in excess of £2,000.

[Confidential]

It was stated that it was important to pursue bad debts as far as possible, otherwise Freebridge would gain a reputation for allowing non-payment. Written-off debt could still be pursued if further leads became available at a later date.

The Board acknowledged that the context for write-offs could be interpreted from the performance and budgetary information that it received, but asked

that, for clarity and ease of reference, this information be set out within future write-off reports.

In response to a question, the Director of Housing said that Freebridge worked with other agencies as far as possible to pursue bad debts, but had to be careful not to break data protection rules.

RESOLVED: That the write-off of the debts listed in the report be approved.

80/15 REQUEST TO WRITE OFF RECHARGEABLE DEBT OVER £2,000

The Director of Housing presented a report which sought approval to write off a rechargeable debt that was in excess of £2,000.

In answer to a question, the Director of Housing said that large rechargeable debts normally built up over a long period of time, despite significant tenancy management efforts.

The Board requested that future reports requesting rechargeable debt write-offs include an explanation as to how the level of debt had occurred and also stated how many similar-sized rechargeable debts there were which were not yet being presented for write-off.

RESOLVED: That the write-off of the debt listed in the report be approved.

81/15 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.

82/15 TENANT PANEL QUARTERLY UPDATE

The Director of Engagement presented a report which provided the quarterly update from the Tenant Panel. She said that work would shortly be undertaken with the Panel with a view to further enhancing their role; this would run alongside the proposed changes to the structure of the Board.

The Board was delighted with the Tenant Panel's volume of work and engagement with the organisation. Steve Clark, Board Vice-Chairman, undertook to pass on the Board's thanks to the Panel at his next regular meeting with them.

The Board noted the report.

83/15 **REVIEW OF HILLINGTON SQUARE VALUATION PROCESS FOR PHASE 1 CONTRACT**

Confidential item

84/15 **REVIEW OF SOCIAL ASPECTS OF HILLINGTON SQUARE**

The Director of Housing presented a report which highlighted the early findings regarding the impact on the community of the completion of Phase 1 of the redevelopment of Hillington Square.

The Board was pleased to note the early indications that the project was providing significant benefits to the community at Hillington Square. The feedback from the tenants returning to live at Millfleet Court was particularly encouraging.

In answer to a question, the Director of Housing said that it would be necessary to wait for a further 12 months before doing another survey, in order to achieve a full picture. However, the situation would continue to be monitored, and he would make an interim report to the Board in six months' time on the comments that were being received.

The Board asked that its thanks be passed on to all staff involved in improving the community aspects at Hillington Square.

The Board noted the report.

85/15 **REVIEW OF ENERGY ADVISOR WORK**

The Director of Property presented a report which provided an update on the first 12 months of the work of the Energy Advisor, and on the impact that this was having on Freebridge's customers.

The Board thanked the Director of Property for a very interesting report, and asked that its thanks be passed on to the Energy Advisor for her hard work and the impact she had made during her first year in post.

It was suggested that the Board would find it useful to learn about the effect of the Energy Advisor's work on building fabric, for instance in reducing condensation.

In answer to questions, the Director of Property made the following points:

- Freebridge was continuing the work on improving the thermal efficiency of its stock, and the possibility of replacing storage heaters with more user friendly systems was being investigated.
- The Energy Advisor had spoken to the Tenant Panel about her work, and the Director of Property would also ensure that the information in this report was provided to the Panel.

The Board noted the report.

86/15 WORK UPDATE

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

- Action Sheet
- Future Work Programme of the Board.

In answer to a question, the Director of Housing confirmed that he was considering whether radicalisation needed to be included in the safeguarding policies.

In response to a question, the Director of Property said that he would provide to the next meeting revised dates for the completion of contracts which had received Board approval.

The Board noted the update.

87/15 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(a) Board Training

The Board was reminded that training on the new financial reporting rules would be held for all Board Members on Monday 20 April 2015 at 4.00pm.

(b) Freebridge Community Awards

The Board was reminded that the Freebridge Community Awards evening, to which all Board Members were invited, would be held on Tuesday 28 April 2015 at 5.45pm at the Providence Street Community Centre.

88/15 NEXT MEETING

The Board noted that its next meeting was scheduled for Monday 18 May 2015 at 6.30pm.

The meeting closed at 9.00pm.

CHAIRMAN