

FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING BOARD

Minutes of a Meeting of the Board held on Monday 8 November 2021 at 4.30pm “Virtual” Meeting by Video Link

PRESENT:

Joanna Barrett
Andrew Hill
Anita Jones (Chief Executive)
Donald McKenzie
Gill Rejzl
Jasmine Rigg
Vicky Savage
Simon Smith
Andy Walder

IN ATTENDANCE:

Anna Simpson	-	Director of Resources & Deputy Chief Executive
Sophie Bates	-	Director of Customer & Communities
Paul Newbold	-	Director of Development
Graham Wilson	-	Director of Assets
Keith Wrate	-	Interim Director of Assets
Rebecca Claydon	-	Customer Voice Lead (Minute Numbers 89/21 – 95/21)
Richard Oliver	-	Interim Strategic Projects Consultant – Assets (Minute Number 97/21)
Angus MacQueen	-	Governance Manager

89/21 APPOINTMENT OF BOARD CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

Director of Resources & Deputy Chief Executive (as Company Secretary) in the Chair

(a) Appointment of Board Chair

The Director of Resources & Deputy Chief Executive presented a report which sought to appoint the Board Chair and Vice-Chair for the ensuing year.

Andy Walder was proposed to continue in the position of Board Chair. There being no other nominations, it was

RESOLVED: That Andy Walder be appointed Board Chair until the start of the first Board meeting following the 2022 Annual General Meeting.

Andy Walder in the Chair

(b) Appointment of Board Vice-Chair

Simon Smith was proposed to continue in the position of Board Vice-Chair. There being no other nominations, it was

RESOLVED: That Simon Smith be appointed Board Vice-Chair until the start of the first Board meeting following the 2022 Annual General Meeting.

(c) Role Profiles

In answer to a question, the Director of Resources & Deputy Chief Executive said that any decisions delegated to the Chair were set out in the Standing Orders. There were no decisions delegated solely to the Chair; an example was the ability to approve urgent action, and this could only be undertaken in conjunction with another Non-Executive Board Member.

It was agreed to add to the Chair's profile to reflect the ambassadorial role that the Chair played.

RESOLVED: That the role profiles be approved subject to the addition of the ambassadorial role.

90/21 CUSTOMER VOICE

Confidential item

91/21 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

92/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Andy Walder declared an interest and withdrew from the meeting during the appointment of the Board Chair (minute number 89/21(a)).

Simon Smith declared an interest and withdrew from the meeting during the appointment of the Board Vice-Chair (minute number 89/21(b)).

93/21 REPAIRS UPDATE

(a) Progress Update on Repairs and Voids Performance to Date

The Director of Assets presented a report which provided an update on repairs service performance. He highlighted that good progress was being made in a number of areas.

The Board observed that the procurement of a scheduling system would be key in improving repairs performance. This had been raised at the Repairs Task and Finish Group meeting on 27 September 2021, when the Director of Assets had been urged to pursue the procurement urgently. However, the report referred to implementation sometime in 2022/23, with no definite date.

In response, the Director of Assets recognised the urgency of this procurement and confirmed that it was being pursued as a matter of priority; an implementation timeline would be able to be provided soon, but he could not currently give firm dates. The Chief Executive stressed that it was important for fundamental systems and processes to be in place before introducing the scheduling system. The Chair asked that the Repairs Task and Finish Group monitor the progress of the scheduling system project.

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

- So as to minimise the risk of sub-contractors undertaking work for Freebridge, most of the catch-up work was being undertaken in-house. Works such as installing kitchens and bathrooms, which would be more attractive to contractors, would be tendered.
- In the longer-term, out of hours working for contractors would be considered.
- A proposed property standard would be available in December 2021.

The Board acknowledged the progress being made with regard to repairs, but questioned where it could gain sufficient oversight of tenant health and safety compliance. It was noted that information on this issue was included in the Performance and Finance Update on this agenda, and that a fuller report would shortly be circulated to all Board Members. The Director of Resources & Deputy Chief Executive would also be working with the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee to produce a Board assurance map, so that it would be clear where appropriate oversight was being provided.

The Board noted the report.

(b) Report of the Chair of the Repairs Task and Finish Group

Gill Rejzl, Chair of the Repairs Task and Finish Group, presented the Chair's report, which included the minutes, of the Task and Finish Group's meeting held on 27 September 2021.

Gill Rejzl said that the Task and Finish Group had asked for further data to be provided to future meetings; the Repairs Update report to this Board meeting showed good progress in the provision of data.

The Chair highlighted the escalation items listed in the report, and acknowledged that these were being addressed.

The Board noted the report and

RESOLVED: That the Repairs Task and Finish Group's terms of reference be approved as presented.

**94/21 PERFORMANCE AND FINANCE REPORT QUARTER 2
2021/22**

Confidential item

95/21 ANNUAL RENT AND SERVICE CHARGE REPORT 2022/23

The Director of Customer & Communities presented a report which sought approval for the annual rent and service charge increase for both social and affordable rent properties, as well as the increase in other income types, including garage and commercial unit rents.

The Board noted that the report sought to introduce an annual rent increase for 2022/23 of 4.1%, the maximum permitted by the Rent Standard. The Board was extremely concerned at the impact that the introduction of this increase would have on some tenants, and was reluctant to agree to it. However, in view of the increasing costs that Freebridge was facing, and the fact that potential investors would expect the full increase to be made, the Board felt that it had no option but to approve the full increase. Additionally, the Board made the following observations:

- Freebridge would continue to charge some of the lowest rents in the area, and the sector as a whole was generally imposing the full increase.
- The full roll out of service charging would be delayed; this would help some tenants while having a negligible impact on Freebridge's financial position.
- Both the Tenant Panel and the Customer Service Committee had considered the proposed increase and had supported it, while being mindful of the impact on some customers.

The Board stressed that a tenancy sustainment mitigation plan must be developed. This would include identifying and targeting those tenants who were struggling, or likely to struggle, as a result of the rent increase. Every possible help should be offered to these tenants. This could include additional funds available through the hardship fund, which had been suggested by the Customer Service Committee, and/or credits on rent accounts. The Chief Executive confirmed that there would be targeted intervention. The Board requested an analysis of the impact on tenants of the increase, to be provided six months after its introduction.

[Confidential wording]

The Board requested a breakdown of how the money raised through the increase would be spent and it was confirmed this would be presented as part of the budget in February 2022.

RESOLVED:

- 1) **That the rent increase for 2022-23 be agreed at CPI + 1%, in accordance with the Rent Standard 2020 (CPI being 3.1% as at September 2021), subject to the discussion described above.**
- 2) **That other income be increased in line with the details of their respective agreements (including Shared Ownership Rents which are increased by RPI (which was 4.9% as at September 2021) + 0.5%), or in the absence of such an agreement by CPI + 1%.**
- 3) **That the timeline for roll out of service charges for existing customers be further extended, holding charges at 50% of estimated costs in 2022/23.**
- 4) **That authority to agree the rents for Thornage Hall be delegated to the Chief Executive.**

96/21 Confidential item

97/21 **HOMES AND COMMUNITY MAINTENANCE STRATEGY**

The Director of Assets presented the Homes and Community Maintenance Strategy. He highlighted that the Strategy incorporated Freebridge's approach towards achieving net zero carbon.

The Board noted that this new Strategy replaced the Asset Management Strategy and that the Strategy itself was set out in the slides marked purple in the slide pack. The Chair thanked the Interim Strategic Projects Consultant for his video presentation of the slides, which had been made available to the Board in advance of the meeting, and welcomed this alternative approach to strategy documentation.

In answer to questions, the following points were made:

- [Confidential wording]
- With regard to flood risk, the Director of Development said that this would be considered by the Environment Agency at the planning application stage.
- The Interim Strategic Projects Consultant said that proposals would be developed for the spaces in between properties, as part of the "Building Passports" scheme, in consultation with tenants.

- The Interim Strategic Projects Consultant confirmed that the slide pack was for the Board alone; it was not intended to share it more widely.

The Board observed that being clear on the environmental improvements required to the stock would be key in making refinancing decisions and in financial planning for the next 30 years. The Director of Assets confirmed that a 100% stock condition survey would be undertaken, and that affordability options, including procuring with partners, would be explored. The Director of Resources & Deputy Chief Executive added that an incremental figure would be included in the Business Plan, which would be presented to the Board in May 2022.

The Board requested that a description of the scope of the document be included at the start of the Strategy, and was of the view that a wider approach to net zero carbon, for instance including offices, vehicles and culture, should be set out in the document.

RESOLVED: That the Homes and Community Maintenance Strategy be approved, subject to the additions described above.

98/21 DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Confidential item

99/21 REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE TREASURY TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Andrew Hill, Chair of the Treasury Task and Finish Group, presented the Chair's report, which included the minutes, of the Task and Finish Group's meeting held on 30 September 2021.

The Board noted the report.

100/21 REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE GOVERNANCE AND REMUNERATION COMMITTEE

Simon Smith, Chair of the Governance and Remuneration Committee, presented the Chair's report, which included the minutes, of the Committee's meetings held on 4 and 25 October 2021.

The Board observed that it was intended to seek approval of the Committee's recommendations via written resolution, subsequent to this meeting. The Board accepted that this would be appropriate for the recommendations around Standing Order and policy changes, and the Development Committee terms of reference, as there was some more work to do on these in relation to development; however, the Board was in a position to approve the other recommendations now.

The Chair thanked all Board Members for their support in taking on and carrying out committee roles.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That a Development Committee be established with effect from the January/February 2022 cycle.
- 2) That review dates for the committee structure in January 2022 (customer voice) and June 2022 (annual effectiveness review) be approved.
- 3) That the following appointments be made:

Body	Membership
Audit and Risk Committee	Donald McKenzie (Chair) Gill Rejzl Andrew Hill Independent vacancy
Governance and Remuneration Committee	Simon Smith (Chair) Andy Walder Jo Barrett Independent vacancy
Customer Service Committee	Jas Rigg (Chair) Jo Barrett (Vice-Chair) Simon Smith 3 tenant members
Development Committee	Vicky Savage (Chair) Andy Walder Anita Jones Independent vacancy
Repairs Task and Finish Group	Gill Rejzl (Chair) Jas Rigg Anna Simpson Tenant Panel Member
Treasury Task and Finish Group	Andrew Hill (Chair) Donald McKenzie Anna Simpson
Bridgegate Homes Board	Independent Chair Independent Member Vicky Savage Andy Walder Anna Simpson

101/21 **REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE**

Donald McKenzie, Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee, presented the Chair's report, which included the minutes, of the Committee's meeting held on 11 October 2021.

Donald McKenzie highlighted that the Committee was recommending a new set of corporate risks. The Chair asked the Director of Resources & Deputy Chief Executive to prepare a session on the new corporate risks for the Board's strategy afternoon in December 2021.

RESOLVED: That the new corporate risks be approved.

102/21 **REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE CUSTOMER SERVICE COMMITTEE**

Jasmine Rigg, Chair of the Customer Service Committee, presented the Chair's report, which included the minutes, of the Committee's meeting held on 18 October 2021.

The Board noted the report.

103/21 **REPORT OF THE TENANT PANEL – QUARTER 2 ACTIVITY**

The Director of Customer and Communities presented a report which set out the activities of the Tenant Panel during July – September 2021.

The Board noted the report.

104/21 **ANNUAL REPORT OF PLACESHAPING ACTIVITIES**

The Board noted the annual report of Placeshaping activities.

105/21 **APPOINTMENT OF SHAREHOLDERS**

The Board noted a report on applications to become shareholders which had been approved.

106/21 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 July 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

The minutes would be signed by the Chair once the office had reopened following the current coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak.

107/21 **MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising.

108/21 ACTION SHEET

The Board noted the action sheet.

109/21 CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair said that he had attended networking events with other housing associations, at which discussions had included:

- rent increases;
- net zero carbon; and
- equality, diversity and inclusion.

He had also attended a meeting of the Chairs and Chief Executives of the Independent East associations, to review achievements so far and future opportunities.

110/21 LEADERSHIP TEAM UPDATE

The Board noted the Leadership Team update.

111/21 WRITTEN RESOLUTION

The Board noted the following written resolution:

- Recommendation from the Treasury Task and Finish Group – LIBOR SONIA Transition

112/21 FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME OF THE BOARD

The Board noted its work programme for the ensuing year.

113/21 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- **Meeting Review**

The Chair thanked the Board Members for their input to the meeting and for the high level of discussion.

114/21 NEXT MEETING

The Board noted that it would have a strategy afternoon on Monday 6 December 2021.

It was noted that the Board would shortly receive communication about the meeting dates for 2022.

The meeting closed at 7.10pm.

CHAIR