

## **FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING BOARD**

### **Minutes of a Meeting of the Board held on Monday 2 November 2015 at 6.30pm in "The Barn", 2 Chapel Lane, King's Lynn**

#### **PRESENT:**

Ray Johnson (Chairman)  
Matthew Brown  
Steve Clark  
Marie Connell  
Tony Hall (Chief Executive)  
Sean Kent (Deputy Chief Executive)  
Brian Long  
Ian Pinches  
Jasmine Rigg  
Colin Sampson (Minute Numbers 214/15 - 223/15)

#### **IN ATTENDANCE:**

John Crowther	-	Interim Director of Finance
Howard Burton	-	Business Assurance Manager
Vince Warren	-	Head of Regeneration (Minute Numbers 214/15 - 220/15)
Angus MacQueen	-	Company Secretary

#### **OBSERVER:**

Liz Potter	-	Campbell Tickell
------------	---	------------------

#### **214/15      WELCOME AND APOLOGIES**

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

There were no apologies for absence.

#### **215/15      MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 October 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### **216/15      MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising.

## **217/15      DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Brian Long declared an interest in the item at minute number 225/15 – Proposed Terms of Reference for Liaison Group with Borough Council – as he was a Cabinet Member at the Borough Council. The Board was content that he remain in the room for the duration of the item, but he did not vote.

## **218/15      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 and the Chief Executive had attended a seminar and discussion group on the future of social housing, hosted by AECOM in Norwich on 8 October 2015. This had been interesting and useful, and a good opportunity for networking.
- He had attended the launch event for Freebridge's Keeble Court development, on 21 October 2015. It had been disappointing that he had been the only Non-Executive Board Member present. The event had achieved good press coverage, and had been attended by two past Board Members.

## **219/15      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:

- Land and Property Disposals – General Consents
- Coronation Avenue, West Winch
- Out and About Visits
- Plaxtole House
- Housing Bill
- Elizabeth Avenue Fire – Envirovent Units
- Hillington Square

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

### **(b) Land and Property Disposals – General Consent**

The Chief Executive explained that the Homes and Communities Agency's new form (DC5) for General Consent in relation to Land and Property Disposals required the signature of the Company Secretary and one other person from the organisation. It was suggested that the other signatory should be a member of the Executive. It had been included in the update as it had been believed that some disposals requiring General Consent were

imminent. Although there was less urgency than had at first been thought, it would be useful to have Board agreement to the signatories for when the General Consent did need to be invoked. This would, in any case, be included in the scheme of delegation when Standing Orders were reviewed in January 2016.

**RESOLVED:** That the Homes and Communities Agency's General Consent form for land and property disposals be signed by the Company Secretary and a member of the Executive.

**(c) Elizabeth Avenue Fire – Envirovent Units**

The Chief Executive advised that it had still not been possible to gain access to two properties in order to inspect their Envirovent units. Court action had, therefore, been instructed.

**(d) Rampant Horse Site, Gayton**

Although not included in the written update, the Board raised the issue of the site of the former Rampant Horse Public House at Gayton. Freebridge's plans for the site had recently been granted planning permission, but had received some negative publicity in the previous week's local press. The Chief Executive said that it was disappointing that such significant coverage had been given to the small group of people who objected to the plans. The plans had been drawn up in consultation with the community and were supported by the parish council.

**220/15 HILLINGTON SQUARE – PHASE 3 COMMISSIONING REPORT**

Confidential item

**221/15 REVIEW OF THE BUSINESS CONTINUITY POLICY**

The Business Assurance Manager presented a report which reviewed the Business Continuity Strategy and renamed it as the "Business Continuity Policy".

The Board noted that the Policy set out Freebridge's own means of response to emergency situations, and where necessary, this would fit in with the plans and direction of civil authorities and emergency services. In answer to a question, the Business Assurance Manager confirmed that the new Policy would be tested through a mock scenario, as had been the case with the previous Strategy.

**RESOLVED:** That the Business Continuity Policy be approved, as presented.

**222/15      TREASURY MANAGEMENT AND STRATEGY UPDATE**

Confidential item

**223/15      LEGAL CHARGING OF PROPERTIES TO FUNDERS**

The Interim Director of Finance presented a report which requested authorisation for a Legal Charge on 118 properties purchased or developed by Freebridge, in favour of the funders.

The Board was pleased to note that the 118 properties referred to in the report had been added to Freebridge's stock over the past year.

In answer to a question, the Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that, when a property was sold, it was removed from the mortgage.

As there was little choice but to authorise the Legal Charge on the 118 properties, the Board considered whether it would be appropriate for future Legal Charge approvals to be made under delegated authority. The Board determined, however, that it should retain ultimate control of the approvals and so they should remain at Board level.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the properties identified in Appendix 1 to the report be charged to Prudential Trustee Co Ltd (Prudential) to the benefit of Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS).
- 2) That the terms of the Legal Mortgage in Appendix 2 to the report be noted and that authority be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Legal Services Manager to ratify the terms of and the entry into the Legal Mortgage and resolving that it executes such Legal Mortgage once finalised.
- 3) That the Association's seal be authorised to be affixed to such Legal Mortgage if it is to be executed by the Borrower under seal or for such Legal Mortgage to be executed by the Borrower as a deed.
- 4) That authority be delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive to apply for consent to grant a security interest over the relevant social housing dwellings in order to secure private finance, using Form DC1 from the Homes and Communities Agency.

**224/15      PROCUREMENT APPROVALS**

Confidential item

**225/15**      **PROPOSED TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR BOROUGH COUNCIL LIAISON GROUP**

The Company Secretary presented a report which set out proposed terms of reference for a formal liaison group which was being established with the Borough Council.

In answer to a question, the Chief Executive explained that the liaison group would not be a decision-making body, but was rather intended to enable a closer working relationship between the two organisations.

**RESOLVED:** That the terms of reference for the liaison group with the Borough Council be approved, as presented.

**226/15**      **TENANT PANEL QUARTERLY UPDATE**

The Company Secretary presented a report which provided a quarterly update on the Tenant Panel's work.

The Board noted that the Tenant Panel was recommending a response time to emails, text messages and social media of "within two working days". The Board was of the view that this was too long for text messages and social media, and so decided to ask the Tenant Panel to look at this again. In answer to a question, the Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the relevant employees were trained in how to respond to customers on social media.

The Board observed that the Tenant Panel had recently lost two members, and so now had a membership of 10 out of a possible 12; however, there were no current arrangements to recruit to the vacancies. The Board felt that the vacancies should be filled as soon as possible, in order to maximise tenant participation in governance.

The Board was pleased to acknowledge that the Panel was becoming increasingly assertive and challenging. It was now meeting quarterly with the Board Vice-Chairman and annually with the Board Chairman, and this was helping to develop its role in supporting the Board.

The Board noted the report and

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the Tenant Panel Development Plan be endorsed and the progress made be noted.
- 2) That, with regard to the Service Standards, the following be approved:
  - the response to letters remain as 5 working days; and
  - an automatic acknowledgement email be sent for externally received emails.
- 3) That the Tenant Panel be asked to revisit the following recommended addition to the Service Standards:

“response should be given to emails, text messages and from social media, there should be a response within 2 working days”,

specifically to consider reducing the response time for text messages and social media.

- 4) That recruitment to the two vacancies on the Tenant Panel be undertaken as soon as possible.

#### **227/15      APPOINTMENT OF SHAREHOLDERS**

The Company Secretary presented a report which listed an application for tenant shareholding, and which requested delegated authority to the Company Secretary regarding future applications.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the application for tenant shareholding set out in Appendix 1 to the report be approved.
- 2) That authority be delegated to the Company Secretary to approve applications for shareholding, provided that approval is granted to all applications that meet with the requirements in Freebridge’s Rules and Shareholding Policy.
- 3) That a report be made to the Board on a quarterly basis of all shareholding applications approved.

#### **228/15      OPERATIONS PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW**

The Interim Director of Finance presented the Operations Performance Overview report for the quarter ending 30 September 2015.

The Interim Director of Finance advised that the Tenant Panel had discussed the report earlier that day with the Director of Housing. The Panel had made some comments, which would be summarised in the next Tenant Panel Quarterly Update.

In answer to questions, members of the Executive made the following points:

- The annual rent arrears target of 5% took into account the final quarter, when arrears tended to increase owing to the timing of Housing Benefit payments. A quarterly target for rent arrears would be introduced from 2016/17, which would allow trends to be more easily monitored.
- Not all jobs were appropriate to be carried out by appointment, and this was identified in the figures.
- Further detail would be brought to the next meeting on the eight properties requiring major repair (150 average days empty), including

whether there was any opportunity to gain some income from the properties while they were empty.

- Staff receiving compliments were acknowledged or rewarded as appropriate.
- Contractors were informed if complaints or compliments were received about them or their work.
- Complaints would be considered as part of the forthcoming Internal Audit review on culture and behaviours.

The Board welcomed the report and in particular the number of compliments that had been received.

The Board noted the report.

**229/15      FINANCE AND HUMAN RESOURCES QUARTERLY MANAGEMENT REPORT**

Confidential item

**230/15      RISK MANAGEMENT AND FRAUD AWARENESS UPDATE**

The Business Assurance Manager presented a report which detailed risk management activity during the quarter ending 30 September 2015. The report included a summary of the Homes and Communities Agency's "Sector Risk Profile 2015", which had recently been issued.

The Business Assurance Manager highlighted that a full review of the Risk Map was currently being undertaken. A Board Member asked that this include Phase 3 of the Hillington Square project.

The Board observed that, while risk management processes were in place, it would like further assurance of their effectiveness. It was acknowledged that Internal Audit undertook an assessment of the organisation's risk profile each year. Furthermore, the risk management methodology was being reviewed and would be presented to the Board in the early part of 2016; effectiveness of risk management processes would be included in this. Additionally, the Board requested that this issue be included in the Internal Audit Plan for 2016/17.

The Board noted the report.

**231/15      UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENT OF THE FINANCIAL PLAN**

The Interim Director of Finance presented a report which provided an update on the development of the Financial Plan and associated activities.

The Interim Director of Finance highlighted that the report included modelling of the impact of no inflationary rent increases beyond 2020, as requested by the Board at its previous meeting. The Board asked that the Executive provide a list of proposed additional efficiencies that would be required to mitigate such a scenario. The Deputy Chief Executive advised that this would be undertaken as part of next year's budget-setting exercise.

The Board observed that the revised Financial Forecast Return, and accompanying documents, had been submitted to the Homes and Communities Agency by the required deadline of 30 October 2015.

The Board noted the report.

**232/15      PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL TREND REPORT**

The Interim Director of Finance presented a report which described Freebridge performance and financial trends over the last nine years.

The Board welcomed the report as an interesting and useful summary. The Interim Director of Finance advised that it was intended to provide an update to the report on an annual basis.

The Board noted the report.

**233/15      CHANGES TO THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK:  
COMPLIANCE UPDATE**

The Business Assurance Manager presented a report which provided an update on the actions undertaken to date in order to achieve compliance with the Regulator's standards and which described emerging experience from the piloting of the In-Depth Assessments.

The Board noted the report.

**234/15      URGENT ACTION TAKEN – RIGHT TO BUY VOLUNTARY  
APPROACH**

The Board noted a request for urgent action that had been approved, to support the proposal for an agreement between the Government and the National Housing Federation to voluntarily extend Right to Buy discounts to relevant tenants, in order to avoid a legislative solution which was likely to be more detrimental to the Association.

**235/15      URGENT ACTION TAKEN – DISREPAIR CLAIM**

The Board noted a request for urgent action that had been approved, to write off rent arrears in relation to a disrepair claim.

**236/15      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.

**237/15      ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**(a)      Development at Coronation Avenue, West Winch**

The Chairman reminded the Board that the official opening of the new Freebridge development at Coronation Avenue, West Winch, would take place on Monday 9 November. All Board Members were invited.

**(b)      Security Arrangements**

In answer to a question, the Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that there were clear procedures in place should a security alarm sound at one of Freebridge's office buildings outside working hours.

**238/15      NEXT MEETING**

The Board noted that its next meeting was scheduled for Monday 11 January 2016 at 6.30pm. A Board "away afternoon" would be held on Monday 7 December 2015.

**The meeting closed at 8.05pm.**

**CHAIRMAN**