



# **Board Meeting 6 December 2010**

# **Minutes and Associated Reports**

*Developing Homes and Creating Opportunities for People within West Norfolk*

**FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING (FCH) BOARD**

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Board held on  
Monday 6 December 2010 at 6.30pm in the  
Conference Room, Juniper House,  
Austin Street, King's Lynn**

**PRESENT:**

Ray Johnson (Chairman)  
Lesley Bambridge  
Matthew Brown  
Sylvia Calver  
Nigel Donohue  
Irene Gammon  
Bill Guyan  
Geoffrey Hipperson  
Michael Jervis  
Colin Sampson

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Tony Hall	-	Chief Executive
Sean Kent	-	Executive Director (Resources)
Abigail Ellis	-	Executive Director (Operations)
Jacqueline Fry	-	Hillington Square Project Manager (minute numbers 163/10 - 170/10)
Angus MacQueen	-	Governance Officer

**163/10      APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was received from Paul Leader.

**164/10      MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2010 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**165/10      MATTERS ARISING**

**(a)      Serious Fire (Minute Number 142/10)**

In answer to a question, the Chief Executive said that he would give an update to the next meeting on the situation following the serious fire at Ten Mile Bank at the beginning of September 2010.

**(b)      Thornage (Minute Number 146/10(a))**

The Chairman referred to the fact that the Board's visit to Thornage, scheduled for 2 December 2010, had been cancelled owing to bad weather. The visit would be rearranged for spring 2011.

## **166/10      DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Irene Gammon, as a resident of Hillington Square, and Lesley Bambridge, as the ward councillor for Hillington Square, declared interests in the items at minute number 169/10 – Hillington Square Vision – and at minute number 170/10 – Purchasing and Disposal Scheme for Hillington Square. At the invitation of the Board, they remained in the room during the items and took part in the discussions, but did not vote.

Angus MacQueen declared an interest in the item at minute number 176/10 – Company Secretary, as he was the candidate for the position. He withdrew from the room for the duration of the item.

Tony Hall, Sean Kent and Abigail Ellis declared interests in the item at 177/10 – Resources and Risk Committee Recommendation, as the recommendation related to a review of the three Executive contracts. At the invitation of the Board, they remained in the room during the item.

Matthew Brown declared an interest in the item at minute number 179/10 – Appointment of Shareholders, as he was one of the applicants for shareholding. At the invitation of the Board, he remained in the room for the item, but did not vote.

## **167/10      CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE**

The Chairman gave an update on his activities as Chairman since the last meeting, as set out below.

The Chairman had attended the Resources and Risk Committee meeting held on 8 November 2010.

The Chairman had attended a lunch with other Chairmen, hosted by Saffron Housing Trust on 10 November 2010. This had been a very useful opportunity to discuss current issues.

The Chairman had attended a meeting of the Complaints Panel on 11 November 2010. The main issue arising from the meeting had been FCH's position on under-occupancy; the Executive Director (Resources) was considering this.

On 22 November 2010, the Chairman, Nigel Donohue and the Chief Executive had attended a meeting with the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) in London. There had been two reasons for the meeting; firstly, to discuss recent governance issues and, secondly, as part of the assessment of FCH's regulatory judgement. The meeting appeared to have been very positive from FCH's point of view, although the TSA had recently been in touch to say that there would be a delay until it contacted FCH with its judgement. The Chief Executive advised that preparation for this meeting had involved a significant effort from a number of staff, with a large file of background papers and a summary overview prepared for the TSA. He would circulate the summary overview to Board members.

On 24 November 2010, the Chairman had undertaken the first set of this year's Board member appraisals

On 26 November 2010, the Chairman had visited Smartlife, a firm which provided advice and training on carbon reduction. This was relevant to a bid which FCH had made largely for funding towards training for Property Services staff in retro-fitting with a view to carbon reduction. The Chief Executive added that this bid had been made to the European Growth Fund, with support from the Borough Council and Shaping Norfolk's Future. Other aspects of the bid included links with the Construction Industry Training Board and the training of tenant representatives in giving advice on energy saving.

On 2 December 2010, the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman and the Chief Executive had attended a meeting of the e<sup>2</sup> Joint Members Group. This had included an overview of the implications of the Government consultation document, "Fairer Futures".

## **168/10      CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE**

### **(a)      Business Planning Day**

The Chief Executive referred to a Business Planning Day for Board members being organised for 27 January 2011. All Board members had been contacted about this. This would form a key component of FCH's business planning.

### **(b)      "Fairer Futures" Consultation Paper**

The Chief Executive said that officers were in the process of analysing the Government's recent consultation paper, "Fairer Futures". Responses were due on 17 January 2011. A report would be prepared for the Board at its next meeting. There were proposals about issues such as allocations, overcrowding and under-occupation. FCH would need to work closely with the Borough Council as the strategic housing authority. Some of the implications could take effect as early as April 2011. There would be choices for the Board to make.

### **(c)      Governance Training**

The Chief Executive reminded the Board that governance training for all Board members would be held on Monday 13 December 2010 at the West Norfolk Professional Development Centre. The training would be given by Karen Cooper, an associate with Campbell Tickell, who had a wealth of experience at senior management and Board level in the sector.

### **(d)      Operations Committee**

The Executive Director (Operations) said that she would be reviewing the role of the Operations Committee, in liaison with the new Chairman of the Committee, Nigel Donohue. She would bring proposals to the Board at its

meeting in March 2011. The review would be undertaken in conjunction with the introduction of the new Tenant Panel.

**169/10      HILLINGTON SQUARE – “VISION”**

Confidential item

**170/10      PURCHASE AND DISPOSAL SCHEME FOR HILLINGTON SQUARE**

Confidential item

**171/10      REVIEW OF THE SIZE OF THE BOARD (click here to go to the report)**

The Chief Executive presented a report which proposed reducing the size of the Board to 12 members, in line with the requirements of the National Housing Federation's Code of Governance 2010.

Some members expressed concern that the proposal would involve reducing the number of tenants on the Board from seven to five. One of the tenant promises at transfer had been that there would be five tenants out of 15 members on the Board initially, and seven out of 15 from September 2007. The proposal would, therefore, represent a departure from this promise, and its necessity was questionable.

In response, it was explained that the National Housing Federation's Code of Governance stipulated 12 as the maximum number that should be on a Board. The TSA would require a good explanation should the Board choose not to adhere to this. A Board of 12 or fewer was generally viewed as good practice, as it was a manageable number. Furthermore, this was an opportune time to reduce the size of the Board, as there were currently three tenant vacancies. However, it was accepted that consultation on the proposal should be undertaken before the Board came to a view on this issue.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That consultation be undertaken with all tenants and with key stakeholders on the proposal to reduce the size of the Board from 15 to 12 members (with a make-up of five tenants, five independents and two Council nominations).
- 2) That the results of the consultation be reported to the Board, to inform the Board's decision as to whether to recommend the proposal to a General Meeting.

**172/10      REVIEW OF EMPLOYEE-RELATED POLICY AND PROCEDURES IN LIGHT OF THE REPEAL OF SCHEDULE 1 (click here to go to the report)**

The Executive Director (Resources) presented a report which set out proposals for rules governing employee conduct and probity following the repeal of Schedule 1 to the Housing Act 1996.

The Executive Director (Resources) highlighted that it was intended to discard the Employee Code of Conduct as a separate document, as all of the areas that it had covered would now be contained within the Employee Handbook. He also pointed out that it was proposed to remove the limit of £50 regarding the value of hospitality that could be accepted by employees; this had inadvertently been retained within the amended pages of the Employee Handbook.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the continued application of the principles set out by the 13 exemptions to Schedule 1 be approved, subject to the amendments set out in the report to exemptions 2, 9 and 13.
- 2) That the definition of “close family member” be amended to discount estranged relatives where there is confirmation or evidence of no personal contact for a number of years, and that close friends and business colleagues be included with close family members in relation to possible conflicts of interest, in line with the guidelines contained in the National Housing Federation’s “Excellence in Standards of Conduct” Code.
- 3) That the Board receives and considers any report to determine whether a genuine business case exists to continue, or enter into, any action causing or likely to cause a conflict of interest in respect of the close relationship between an employee and a contractor.
- 4) That the amendments to the Employee Handbook be approved, as presented, subject to the removal of the £50 limit on hospitality that can be accepted by employees, and subject to consultation with the trade unions.

**173/10 [REVIEW OF GOVERNANCE DOCUMENTS RELATING TO THE BOARD \(click here to go to the report\)](#)**

The Governance Officer presented a report which reviewed various governance documents relating to the Board.

The Governance Officer pointed out that it was proposed to remove the Tenant Board Member Succession and Appointment Policy from FCH’s suite of policies, as tenant Board member succession and appointment had now been incorporated into the Board Membership, Recruitment and Succession Policy.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the Board Member Agreement be adopted, as presented.

- 2) That the role profiles for Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen be adopted as presented.
- 3) That the Board Membership, Recruitment and Succession Policy be adopted, as presented.
- 4) That the Board Conduct Issues Policy be adopted, as presented.

**174/10      BUSINESS PLAN 2010/11 – SECOND QUARTER UPDATE**  
**(click here to go to the report)**

The Chief Executive presented a report which set out the second quarter update to the 2010/11 Business Plan.

The Board requested the following amendments for future updates:

- Rename the “Comments” column as “Progress”, and include a progress update for each entry, where possible.
- Highlight where there has been a change to the “red-amber-green” status.

The Board noted the report.

**175/10      QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE MONITORING (click here to**  
**go to the report)**

The Executive Director (Resources) presented a report which provided quarterly performance information for the period to 30 September 2010.

The Executive Director (Resources) highlighted that the quarterly performance trend in all areas was either static or improving. There had been a slight dip in performance in some areas for September; this had continued in October and was likely to have continued in November. However, this was temporary and was the result of the reorganisation required to establish the First Contact Centre. The First Contact Centre had just started its launch procedure, and it was anticipated that, once it was established, performance would recover by the end of the financial year.

In answer to questions, officers made the following points:

- Although there had been some turnover of staff in the Income team, these had been junior posts. The performance of the team had not been significantly affected by this turnover, and continued to be excellent.
- Where there were properties without gas servicing certificates, this was because the tenant would not allow entry. Every effort was made to gain entry, with court injunctions used if necessary. Gas servicing was

on an 11-month cycle, to minimise the risk of exceeding the requirement for servicing every 12 months. Procedures for gaining entry at the earliest possible opportunity were kept under review.

The Committee noted the report.

**176/10**      **COMPANY SECRETARY (click here to go to the report)**

The Chief Executive presented a report which sought the Board's approval to transfer the duties of the Company Secretary to the Governance Officer.

**RESOLVED:** That the duties of the Company Secretary be transferred to the Governance Officer from 13 December 2010.

**177/10**      **RESOURCES AND RISK COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION (click here to go to the report)**

Michael Jervis, Chairman of the Resources and Risk Committee, presented a report highlighting the recommendation from that Committee's meeting held on 8 November 2010.

In answer to a question, Michael Jervis confirmed that the results of the proposed review of the three Executive contracts would initially be considered by the Resources and Risk Committee.

**RESOLVED:** That a review of the three Executive contracts by a consultant, to ensure that they are competitive and up-to-date, be approved.

**178/10**      **MEETINGS TIMETABLE 2011 (click here to go to the timetable)**

The Governance Officer presented the proposed timetable of Board, committee and AGM meetings in 2011.

It was noted that the special meeting of the Resources and Risk Committee scheduled for 17 January 2011 was tentative at this stage, depending on progress with preparing the Financial Plan update.

**RESOLVED:** That the 2011 meetings timetable be approved, as presented.

**179/10**      **APPOINTMENT OF SHAREHOLDERS** (report not available – confidential)

The Governance Officer presented a report which requested the Board to consider applications for shareholding.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the three applications for tenant shareholding contained in the list attached at Appendix 1 to the report be approved.

2) That Matthew Brown be appointed as an independent shareholder.

**180/10**      **GOVERNANCE WORKING GROUP REPORT (click here to go to the report)**

The Governance Officer presented a report of the Governance Working Group meeting held on 29 November 2010.

The Board noted the report and

**RESOLVED:** That the Register of Board Members' Interests be published on FCH's website as a separate document.

**181/10**      **FCH COMMUNICATIONS AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIC ACTIVITY PLAN 2010-12 (click here to go to the report)**

The Executive Director (Resources) presented a report which introduced FCH's new Communications and Customer Engagement Strategic Activity Plan 2010-12.

Members commented that this was an excellent document, and that they were very pleased with FCH's higher media profile since the new Assistant Director of Communications and Customer Engagement had joined the organisation.

The Board noted the report.

**182/10**      **URGENT ACTION TAKEN – PROPOSED PURCHASE OF 2 CHAPEL LANE, KING'S LYNN** (report not available – confidential)

The Board noted a request for urgent action that had been approved, to purchase 2 Chapel Lane, King's Lynn.

The Board expressed its gratitude to the members of staff involved for the swift action taken in acquiring the property, and at the very reasonable price that had been achieved. An options appraisal for use of the property would be presented to the Board at a future meeting. One possible use was as a tenants' resource centre.

**183/10**      **URGENT ACTION TAKEN – PROVISION OF A TENANCY TO AN EMPLOYEE** (report not available – confidential)

The Board noted a request for urgent action that had been approved, to provide a tenancy to an employee.

**184/10**      **URGENT ACTION TAKEN – CLEANING CONTRACT** (report not available – confidential)

The Board noted a request for urgent action that had been approved, to enter into a contract with BCS (Brights) Ltd following a recent tender exercise.

**185/10**      **WORK UPDATE** (report not available – confidential)

The Governance Officer presented the work update, which included the following:

- Action Sheet
- Future Work Programme of the Board.

It was noted that, as the Board's visit to Thornage had been postponed (see minute number 165/10(b) above); this action was not completed and would be retained on the action sheet

The Board noted the update.

**186/10**      **COMMITTEE MINUTES** (Committee minutes not available – confidential)

Michael Jervis, Chairman of the Resources and Risk Committee, presented the minutes of the Committee's meeting held on 8 November 2010.

The response of the ICT team to a virus infection of FCH's systems was highlighted (minute number R83/10). Five members of the team had worked into the night to resolve the problem; three of them from home and the other two in the office all night. Their actions had resulted in minimal disruption to the business and had shown exceptional dedication, beyond the call of duty. The Board asked that its thanks, in addition to those of the Resources and Risk Committee, be placed on record to the staff involved. Managers had also been impressed by the flexibility of staff across the organisation in helping to address the problem and maintaining continuity of service. The source of the problem had been identified and procedures had been put in place to reduce the likelihood of it happening again.

**187/10**      **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**(a)**      **Urgent Actions Taken – Purchases at Hillington Square** (report not available – confidential)

The Board noted two requests for urgent action that had been approved, in relation to purchases at Hillington Square.

**(b)**      **Community Composting**

In answer to a question, the Chief Executive said that FCH involvement with community composting initiatives would be pursued; one was already in the pipeline, being run by the Discovery Centre, North Lynn.

**(c) Purfleet Trust**

A member mentioned that, last winter, FCH had provided emergency accommodation to the Purfleet Trust for homeless people in King's Lynn, and asked whether anything similar was planned for this winter. The Chief Executive responded that no approach had been received from the Purfleet Trust to date this winter; however he would check the position.

**The meeting closed at 8.25pm.**

**CHAIRMAN**

## Freebridge Community Housing

## Report to the Board

<b>Author</b>	Tony Hall	<b>Report Type</b>		<b>Impact</b>		
<b>Related Work Ref.</b>		<b>For Decision</b>	√	<b>High</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Low</b>
Governance Working Group		<b>For Information</b>		√		
<b>Consultation</b>	Governance Working Group					

**Meeting Date:** 6<sup>th</sup> December 2010

**Report Title:** Review of the Size of the Board

**Purpose:** The purpose of this report is to review the size of the Board with the aim of aligning our governance policies with the National Housing Federation's Excellence in Governance Code for Members. It proposes to reduce the size of the board from fifteen members to twelve.

**Policy/Strategy Implications:** This decision would change both the Board's Governance Policy and rules and therefore implementation would be subject to consultation with key stakeholders and the outcome of a Special General Meeting.

**Finance and VFM Implications:** None as a result of this report.

**Customer Care/Equality and Diversity Implications:** None as a result of this report.

**Risk Assessment (cross-reference with FCH Risk Map):**

1.1 Failure to comply with regulatory requirements. (impact) critical; (likelihood) very low.

**Recommendations:** It is recommended that the Board:

- (i) Approve option (ii) to reduce the size of the Board from fifteen members to twelve, subject to necessary stakeholder approval and the outcome of a vote of a Special General Meeting.

## 1 **Background**

- 1.1 Members will be aware that the Governance Working Group has been conducting a review in order to align our policies and procedures with the National Housing Federation's Excellence in Governance Code for Members.
- 1.2 One of the outstanding issues is the size of the Board. It is generally accepted that larger Boards are less effective. NHF Code ref: A4 states "It is up to each organisation or group parent organisation to decide on the best Board composition. Board members who are executive staff must normally be in a clear minority. Boards should have at least five members and no more than twelve, including co-optees." This has to be balanced with the range of skills required for the Board to lead and direct the business.
- 1.3 Historically stock transfer Associations work on a Board of fifteen members; five tenants, five Council nominations and five independents. In the early development of a new

Association this model helps to manage the workload and build trust amongst stakeholders. The shadow Board in consultation with the Council agreed that in order to demonstrate the principles of the Community Gateway Model at the second AGM, the Council would relinquish two places on the Board in favour of two additional tenant board members.

## **2 Opportunities for Tenant Involvement**

- 2.1 The restructuring of the Communications and Resident Engagement Team has expanded the opportunities for tenants to become involved in shaping services in a variety of ways from Facebook, Twitter and texting, to focus groups and mystery shopping. From April 2011 there will be more structured involvement through a Service Improvement Panel.

## **3 Options for Consideration**

- 3.1 There are probably three realistic options:

### i. Status Quo - Retain a Board of Fifteen

While not impossible it has been difficult to attract candidates with the necessary skills and it has not been necessary to hold tenant elections since the first vacancy as limited numbers of tenants have been put forward.

It is generally accepted that larger Boards are less effective and while it is not a requirement to align ourselves with the NHF code, the Board would need to demonstrate why if felt fifteen members was necessary.

The advantage of fifteen members at the present time is to support the committee structure.

### ii. Reduce the Board to Twelve

In order to deliver a Board of twelve, the component parts would be five independents, five tenants and two Council nominations. It is felt that a reduced Board would improve the effectiveness of meetings. It brings the Board in line with the Code, but still enables Freebridge to operate with reduced size committees as we are currently doing.

### iii. Reduce the Board to Nine

A number of associations have reduced their Boards further to nine members. For Freebridge this would probably require five independents, three tenants and one Council nomination.

If the Board wanted to pursue this option it would have to rethink its committee structure and move to a Board without an Operations Committee or Resources Committee. While smaller more frequent Board meetings could be advantageous, it would be essential to ensure that the right skills were readily available in a smaller number of members.

## **4 Present Situation**

- 4.1 At the present time there are three tenant vacancies and one independent vacancy. Paul Leader (tenant) and Nigel Donohue (independent) end their current terms in September 2011. The Council make annual appointments following the May Council meeting; it is understood that Geoff Hipperson plans to retire from the Council in May which will create a further vacancy.

## **5 Proposal**

- 5.1 Issues relating to committee structures have not been debated by the Board. Until the Scrutiny/Improvement Panel is up and running it is difficult to predict if the Operations Committee will be required. It is proposed that the Board use the current opportunity to adopt option (ii) and start consultations to move to a Board of twelve. This would achieve the benefits of a smaller Board and retain the flexibility to restructure the Board/committee relationship in future.

## **6 Next Steps**

- 6.1 On completion of the Board appraisal process the Board should commence a recruitment process for a new independent Board member; and a tenant Board member using the revised tenant Board member recruitment process.

### **Timetable**

6 <sup>th</sup> December	Board decision
7 <sup>th</sup> December	Commence consultation with stakeholders; Council, RBS and tenants
January	Commence recruitment process for new board members
April	Special General Meeting in order to change rules
May	New Board in place

## **7 Governance Working Group**

- 7.1 The Governance Working Group considered this report at its meeting on 29 November 2010, and supported the recommendation.

## Freebridge Community Housing

## Report to the Board

<b>Author</b>	Jo Whaley	<b>Report Type</b>		<b>Impact</b>		
<b>Related Work Ref.</b>		<b>For Decision</b>	√	<b>High</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Low</b>
		<b>For Information</b>			√	
<b>Consultation</b>	This has been the subject of discussion by the Governance Working Group.					

**Meeting Date:** 6<sup>th</sup> December 2010

**Report Title:** Review of Employee-related Procedures in Light of the Repeal of Schedule 1

<b>Purpose:</b> To consider proposals for retaining amended rules governing employee conduct and probity following the repeal of Schedule 1.
<b>Policy/Strategy Implications:</b> There will be amendments to the Staff Handbook policy and procedure with contractual implications for the Executive Team requiring external advice and guidance for the Board.
<b>Finance and VFM Implications:</b> Proposed Board consideration of the business case for entering into or continuing with a contract which brings about a conflict or potential conflict of interest, would take account of finance and vfm considerations. There may be financial implications in determining appropriate revised contractual arrangements for the Executive.
<b>Customer Care/Equality and Diversity Implications:</b> None as a result of this report
<b>Risk Assessment (cross-reference with FCH Risk Map):</b> 1.1 Failure to comply with Regulatory requirements – Impact Critical, Likelihood High 3.1 New business development – missed opportunities - Impact Marginal, Likelihood Very Low 7.3 Inappropriate organisation image – Impact Significant, Likelihood Significant.
<b>Recommendations:</b> It is recommended that the Board: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Approves the continued application of the principles as set out by the 13 Exemptions, subject to the proposed amendments to Exemptions 2, 9 and 13</li> <li>ii) Approves the amendment to the definition of close family member to discount estranged relatives where there is confirmation or evidence of no personal contact for a number of years and the addition of 'close friend' and 'business colleague' to possible conflicts of interest, in line with NHF guidelines.</li> <li>iii) Receives and considers any report to determine whether a genuine business case exists to continue, or enter into, any action causing or likely to cause a conflict of interest in respect of the close relationship between an employee and a contractor.</li> <li>iv) Approve the proposed amendments to the Staff Handbook</li> </ul>

### Background

After the repeal of Schedule 1 in April 2010, the Board agreed that, pending the Association developing policy and procedure to replace those elements of Schedule 1 we wished to retain (in the interests of maintaining standards of conduct and probity), we would continue to apply the principles of the legislation. Schedule 1 prohibited the making of non-contractual payments or benefits to staff, Board members or their close family and in addition contained legal

measures to ensure that Board members and staff did not abuse their positions for personal (or family) gain and dealt with potential conflicts of interest that might have arisen.

The Association's codes of conduct for both Board members and employees were due for review and as a number of elements of these codes reflected the need for probity it was decided to combine the two reviews into one exercise.

The National Housing Federation document 'Excellence in Standards of Conduct' has been used to support the review of the Board Member Agreement and Code of Conduct, dealt with separately at this meeting, enabling the principles of Schedule 1, in relation to Board members, to be incorporated. It also falls to the Board to oversee several aspects of probity in relation to employees and where 'rules' applied, relating to Schedule 1, such as:

- Employment and Housing of employees and their relatives
- Non-contractual severance and redundancy settlements to staff
- Grant of benefits (including the award of contracts for employment and service and employee declarations of interest)

Schedule 1 impacted on so many day to day activities of housing providers that 13 general exemptions were drawn up by the Housing Corporation to enable Boards to agree to certain actions locally, within limits set by the Corporation. In reviewing our code of conduct for staff and the staff handbook, we have taken account of these general exemptions as suggested good practice but in doing so were mindful of occasions when adopting Schedule 1 'to the letter of the law' was onerous and impractical. We have been able to incorporate additional guidelines into our staff handbook so that we no longer see a need for a separate staff code of conduct.

Attached as Appendix 1 is a document produced by the Housing Corporation to explain all 13 of the general exemptions. The recommendation, discussed with the Governance Working Group, is that, subject to the amendments listed below, the Board approves the continued application of the principles as set out by the 13 exemptions, with Board approval needed to act on any of the matters covered:

- 2<sup>nd</sup> Exemption – the re-engagement of an employee who has left within the last 12 months, as either an employee or a contractor, should not require Board approval, unless that person is a member of the Management Team.
- 9<sup>th</sup> Exemption – in relation to the payment of non-contractual severance or redundancy settlements to members of the Executive, it is recommended that external guidance is sought to advise the Board of any contractual amendments it would be prudent and good practice to consider and on appropriate terms of settlements, particularly in the case of mergers. This is important in providing re-assurance to both the Board and the individuals concerned.
- 13<sup>th</sup> Exemption – in the interests of developing effective business relationships and increasing the profile of the Association, no limit need be applied to the value of hospitality received by employees, subject to the current requirement that a Director's approval is needed, in advance, for the individual to attend.(the Chairman's approval is needed for the Chief Executive). The limits to be applied to gifts and hospitality provided by the Association for employees should remain. Gifts and hospitality from outside the Association will be reported to the Audit Committee, as now, internal gifts and hospitality need not be reported, however should it be proposed to exceed the annual limits for any employee, Board permission will be needed.

In addition it is recommended that the TSA definition of 'close family' extending even to estranged family members, be amended and that Freebridge accepts that estranged family will not be 'caught' by the requirements, where there is confirmation or evidence of no personal contact for a number of years. The NHF document 'Excellence in Standards of Conduct' also

introduces the addition of 'close friend' and 'business colleague' to 'close family member' when considering where conflicts of interest may arise and it is recommended that we also adopt this.

Where in the past any breach of schedule 1, or any request for a special determination to allow a breach would have been reported to the TSA, for example where it is known that a contractor has a close family link to an employee, however that contractor is deemed to be the most appropriate to deliver a particular product or service, following a full investigation it is recommended that any such report be received by the Board, to determine whether a genuine business case exists to continue with the action causing the breach.

Staff will be made aware of these proposals and any changes as a result of them, through amendments to the Staff Handbook. The Board must approve changes to the handbook and attached as Appendix 2 are all the policies/procedures it is proposed to amend as indicated. These will then be discussed with the union representatives in the usual way.

# Appendix 1:

## The general exemptions

The full text of these exemptions can be found in Payments and Benefits: General Determination, April 2007, a copy of which is at Appendix 2.

### 1st exemption

#### **Employment of employees' relatives**

This exemption allows an association to employ close relatives of employees, if they turn out to be the best candidates after a full and fair competitive recruitment process. There is no similar absolute ban on the employment of family members in other areas of public service.

### 2nd exemption

#### **Re-employment of former employees or engagement as self-employed contractors**

This exemption allows associations to re-employ a member of staff who worked for the association during the previous 12 months. It also allows associations to engage as a self-employed contractor a member of staff who left during the previous twelve months.

### 3rd exemption

#### **Housing of employees and their relatives**

This exemption allows associations to provide accommodation (tenancies etc) to its employees, former employees and their close relatives. This exemption needs to be used with care to avoid any risk of the association seeming to favour its employees unfairly. The person in question should receive exactly the same consideration as any other applicant. This means, for example, that a person who is moving to the area to work for the association cannot be given priority ahead of any other job-mover.

Accommodation should not be offered with the job unless it is necessary for the post holder to carry out his or her duties properly – for example, as a warden or caretaker. In such cases, the contract of employment should refer specifically to the provision of accommodation. If the association wishes to re-house ex-wardens it is better for this, too, to be dealt with as part of the standard contract of employment for wardens. Trying to deal with it under this exemption may not be appropriate.

If an employee is housed under the exemption, the association will need to be

very careful in the way that matters such as maintenance, rent arrears, neighbourhood disputes and other housing management issues are dealt with. They will need to avoid any possibility of acting or appearing to act in a way that favours the tenant employee. They will also need to avoid situations where a conflict of interest might arise — an employee should not, for example, be responsible for chasing his or her own rent arrears.

## 4th exemption

### **Housing by tenant-based associations of officers and their relatives**

This exemption applies only to non-charitable tenant-based associations: those which are defined as having a high level of tenant participation and involvement. The term ‘tenant’ here includes residents on long leases.

The definition of tenant-based is set out in the determination. There are three criteria. The first two are that at least one third of the governing body and that at least one third of the membership is made up of tenants or prospective tenants. (A ‘prospective’ tenant is one who has been allocated a tenancy, either in principle or for a particular home, but has not yet taken it up.) These criteria

are to ensure that control of the association is substantially in the hands of the tenants. The third criterion is that there should be a broad membership base for tenant involvement. In larger associations the number of tenant members should be least 100; in smaller associations with fewer than 200 units, it should be more than half the number of units owned.

This exemption allows tenant-based associations to provide accommodation to members and former members of governing bodies and their families. This essentially puts them in a similar position to fully mutual co-operatives.

## 5th exemption

### **Housing of officers’ relatives with special needs**

This exemption allows associations that manage specialist supported provisions for the elderly, the disabled or others with special needs to give accommodation to the relatives of board members who would otherwise qualify. It does not cover general elderly accommodation where no special services are provided.

## 6th exemption

### **Housing of officers and their relatives**

This exemption allows associations to house a board member or relative provided they fully meet the association's published criteria and priorities.

The applicant must have no involvement in or influence over the decision-making process, but it is for the association rather than the applicant to assess whether or not there is alternative housing available. What is most important in making the allocation is that housing need is the key consideration and that the process is scrupulously fair.

## 7th exemption

### **HomeBuy/VPG payments for tenants who are employees or officers**

This allows both board members and employees who are tenants of the association to benefit from HomeBuy or Voluntary Purchase Grant offers, provided they meet the published criteria.

## 8th exemption

### **Purchase of services by fully mutual and tenant based associations**

This allows a fully mutual or tenant-based association to enter into a contract with a person who has resigned from the governing body within the last 12 months provided the normal procedures for letting a contract are observed. This means a full and fair sealed bid competitive tender process is carried out, and the contract is awarded to the person who submits the lowest tender.

## 9th exemption

### **Payment of non-contractual severance and redundancy settlements**

This exemption allows the payment, in certain circumstances, of non-contractual severance or redundancy payments to staff who are leaving. It recognises the occasional need for associations to make discretionary payments if staff have to leave because of restructuring, early retirement or redundancy.

The exemption cannot be used in cases where the member of staff is subject to any disciplinary action related to the reason for

their leaving. However, a disciplinary action which has expired should not prevent a payment being made under the exemption and nor should a disciplinary action which is clearly unrelated to the reason the individual is leaving.

Associations considering using this exemption will probably need to take legal advice, as this is a complex area and associations must avoid making payments which could be unlawful.

The level of payment as well as the context is important, and the determination sets out the limits. The association can pay out up to the equivalent of one year's gross remuneration as a non-contractual settlement. Remuneration may be defined as any quantifiable payment or benefit related to the person's employment.

This will include such things as pension contributions, car provision, health insurance and performance bonuses. Other payments or benefits may also count, but associations need to be sure that only legitimate ones are included in the calculation. All this can be complicated, and associations should consider getting advice from actuarial and pensions specialists when they are thinking about making

pension payments as part of a severance package.

The one-year equivalent payment can be paid only to staff with ten or more year's service. Staff with fewer years should be paid on a strictly pro rata basis on completed years' service. The calculation of service should be based on continuous employment, but if staff have transferred under TUPE, or within a group structure, their total years of service can be used for the purposes of the calculation.

Any payments made under this exemption are in addition to any contractual entitlement the employee may have. The one year payment is not a recommended amount but the absolute maximum non-contractual settlement that is acceptable and lawful. We expect associations to be particularly sensitive to the reputation of the sector when considering non-contractual payments made in these circumstances. This exemption does not apply to a situation where a person is involved in an employment related dispute with an association.

## 10th exemption

### Settlement of employment related disputes

This exemption allows an association to make a payment to a person in full and final settlement of an employment related dispute subject to the four conditions detailed in 10 (2) of the Determination:

- the association must have sought legal advice;
- the association must not be under Supervision by the Corporation;
- the payment must not exceed £30,000; and
- the payment must not be made to the chief executive or a director of the association.

The purpose of the exemption is to allow associations to settle without seeking a special determination where they have received legal advice that the merits of the claim are strong or the cost of disputing the claim is disproportionate to its value. The requirement that an association must seek legal advice before using the exemption is to ensure that decisions made are on a sound basis, and that the association could demonstrate this to the Corporation if necessary. For this reason, written advice

is recommended. Where a particularly sensitive issue arises which may endanger the reputation of the association or sector, the Corporation expects the association to consult the Corporation beforehand.

‘Supervision’ is the level of regulatory engagement we apply when, in our judgement, an association is significantly underperforming against the Regulatory Code. An association will be placed under supervision where serious performance concerns have been identified, and we believe that:

- it is either unwilling or unable to deal with them satisfactorily; or
- the case raises matters of wider concern to the Corporation; or
- the risks and potential impact involved warrant the use of the Corporation’s statutory powers. See How We Regulate 9:Supervision for more details on supervision.

For the avoidance of doubt, a payment made in accordance with a decision of an Employment Tribunal is not considered to a breach of Schedule 1 and therefore does not require an exemption or a special determination.

## 11th exemption

### **Payments to businesses trading for profit in the management of which an association's employees or officers are directly concerned**

In response to various challenges faced by the sector including the need to achieve greater efficiencies, improve services and provide more affordable housing, a number of associations have chosen to work with other organisations in order to pool resources, expertise, create efficiencies and deliver specific projects. Associations involve themselves in these arrangements in a variety of ways ranging from participating in informal groupings to being members of legally constituted organisations. Associations also form subsidiaries to engage in activities which fall outside their own permitted objects, but are complementary – for example a charitable association may form a trading company to develop properties for sale or market rent.

Previously a special determination has been required when an association has decided to enter a joint venture which acts for profit, and wants to assert a degree of control by putting an officer or employee on the board, or similar senior position, of the business. This exemption is aimed at facilitating

some of the joint work undertaken by associations, by allowing an association to make payments or grant benefits to a business trading for profit in which the association has a significant interest and where its officers or employees are directly concerned in the management of that business. Some of these terms are explained in more detail below. The exemption also confirms that an association can allow officers or employees to serve on the board of a subsidiary company.

The association's involvement with the business trading for profit must have the objective of furthering the association's social housing objectives. We expect the association to demonstrate this objective in the decision making process to use the exemption and that it is recorded in the separate register for use of the exemptions. These objectives may be achieved either directly (because activities of the joint venture relate to the provision of social housing) or indirectly – for example, where an association invests in a business with a view to generating a return for the association which is re-invested in social housing, or where the business is 'complementary' to the association's social housing activity. If an association is in any doubt as to whether its proposed venture

falls under this exemption, we would expect it to consult with the Corporation.

### **‘Significant interest’**

The association must have a ‘significant interest’ in the business. An association will be treated as having an ‘interest’ in a business trading for profit if it is:

- a shareholder in a company;
- a partner in a conventional partnership, limited partnership (LP) or limited liability partnership (LLP);
- a holder of other rights which entitle the association to an interest in the underlying assets or revenues of the business; or
- a lender to the business.

This list is not intended to be exhaustive, but if in doubt associations should contact the Corporation. The association’s interest is ‘significant’ if it justifies the association appointing an officer or an employee as a representative to become directly concerned in managing the business and so protect the association’s interest in it. This includes an association’s holding in a 100% owned subsidiary.

For the exemption to apply, the association’s officer or employee must not receive any benefit, reward or remuneration from any party other than the association. That is, if the representative receives remuneration for his/her role in the business, this must be payable by the association. The exemption will not apply where the representative owns a stake in a trading business which is another party to the joint venture, or is involved in the management of that business. For example, if a board member of an association is a shareholder or a senior manager of a contractor, and the association wants to form a joint venture of which the contractor is a member, that individual could not ordinarily sit on the board of the joint venture.

Typically, where the business is a company, an association will appoint one or more officers or employees as directors. In the case of partnerships (including LPs and LLPs), ordinarily the association itself (corporately) is a member, and if the association appoints an officer or employee to represent it at partnership meetings, that officer or employee acts in the name of the association rather than as an individual. Some partnerships, LPs and LLPs are establishing ‘management committee’ structures. A person appointed

by an association to such a management committee might be regarded as engaged in the management of the partnership/LP/LLP, but this will not prevent the association doing business with it so long as the requirements of the 11th exemption are met.

The 11th exemption applies only where the association's representatives in the management of the business are serving officers or employees as opposed to their former officers/employees or their close relatives.

The 11th exemption does not apply where the association's representatives are, themselves, principal proprietors of the business.

## 12th exemption

### **Provision of indemnity**

This exemption allows an association to indemnify a relevant officer against specified expenses in connection with any civil or criminal proceedings in relation to the association or application for relief from liability for negligence, default, breach of duty or breach of trust in relation to the association so long as the officer is not found guilty or judgment is given against him or her.

If, under the indemnity, an association is advancing legal costs by way of a loan, that loan will be permitted under this exemption.

For the purposes of this exemption a relevant officer means any director or board member or former director or board member of the association.

The Corporation expects associations to take legal advice on the terms of issuing such an indemnity and on setting appropriate limits.

## 13th exemption

### Permitted payments and benefits

An association may make specific payments or grant benefits as permitted by this exemption to any eligible person.

Part 1 of Schedule 1 to the Housing Act 1996 prohibits all non-contractual payments and benefits to staff, board members and their families. There is no cut-off point in the legislation and any kind of gift or bonus payment, however small, is technically a breach. Even events such as staff parties, unless they are very low key events – just a glass of wine and a few crisps perhaps – are technically benefits granted and thus breach the Act. Where the payment or benefit is small, the time and effort involved for the association in making the application and for the Corporation in producing the special determination are out of proportion to the value of the benefit granted. This exemption is aimed at such cases i.e. it is a ‘de minimis’ exemption.

### What does this exemption cover?

This exemption covers two classes of payments or benefits and sets separate limits for each:

- token gifts or payments to staff or board members up to a value of £300 per person per year;
- corporate events providing hospitality or entertainment specifically for employees or board members. In this category there is a limit of £50 per person for an individual event and an overall limit of £250 per person per year.

### What sort of gifts and payments would be allowed?

The association can decide, within the limits set out above and in line with its own policy, what kinds of rewards it might wish to offer. These could include (and this list is by no means exhaustive):

- token payments – perhaps in the form of vouchers – for staff who have made a special contribution, done extra work or been involved in a high-profile project;
- a gift for a staff or board member on retirement or to mark a special event such as long service with the association;
- gifts to staff or board members to mark a corporate anniversary; and
- health incentives such as rewards for giving up smoking or for losing weight.

We do not expect it to cover performance-related pay or substantial bonuses which should be part of a contract of employment.

The annual limit of £300 per person for such payments or benefits might be granted as a single amount/benefit or as two or more smaller ones.

The limits do not provide a norm. We do not expect that every one in an association will receive payments and benefits up to the limit. They are set at this level to allow, for example, a generous present to be bought for a departing chairman, or for the recipient of a small gift marking an anniversary to be able to receive an award for making a special contribution as well.

#### **What kinds of events are covered?**

We have made a separate limit to cover staff events such as Christmas parties or occasional staff lunches or receptions. This is to avoid the absurdity of creating a breach by the attendance at a party of a staff member who had already received one or more special token awards during the year.

We do not have in mind here the kind of corporate function to which other stakeholders are invited and which members

of staff or board members might be expected to attend as part of their duties. We would not regard these as being caught by Schedule 1. But an event put on as a social occasion mainly for the benefit of staff and/or board members seems to us to be caught by the provisions and for the avoidance of doubt we have included it in the exemption.

The determination indicates how to calculate the cost for an individual to attend an event. This may appear complicated, but the principle is that only the amount spent on staff or board members is relevant. If a few tenants or other stakeholders have been invited to the party the cost of providing them with food and drink should be excluded for these purposes.

The £250 annual limit is not a norm, but should allow a senior member of staff, say, to attend more than one team event in a year.

#### **Are these sums taxable?**

Associations must take their own advice on the tax implications of any payments made or benefits granted under this determination.

### **What about people who have recently left the association?**

The exemption also applies to staff and board members who have left the association within the previous 12 months. This allows presentations to be made to those who have just retired and recently departed employees or board members to attend corporate events.

After 12 months Schedule 1 no longer applies to former employees or board members. After this there are no restrictions on, say, inviting old colleagues back for a celebration

### **Reporting and recording**

While the individual sums involved may be small, overall amounts could be significant if a number of staff receive payments or benefits in one or both of the categories during the year. As a matter of good practice, we therefore expect an annual report to be presented to the board, detailing both the rewards and events paid for under this determination and the total cost to the association during the year.

Account managers may ask to see the annual report to the board. Where an

association's total expenditure during the year is significant they will need to be convinced that it has been in the interests of the association and those it serves.

### Section 1 - Your Career with the Company

#### Introduction

The Company will aim to involve employees as much as possible in the running of the Company and their area of work. Through the internal communication processes, employees will be kept informed about what is going on in the organisation and how well the Company is doing. Employees will be asked for their views on matters affecting them wherever possible. If an individual is unsure about anything, they are encouraged to speak to their line manager. If the line manager cannot answer the question it will be referred to someone who can. The Company will make every effort to ensure a proper answer is received quickly.

Freebridge Community Housing has adopted the National Housing Federation's ' Excellence in Standards of Conduct' code for Employees and Board Members, to ensure we maintain the highest standards of conduct and probity in how we deliver affordable homes and services to our customers and neighbourhoods.

Employees should bring to the attention of the Governance Officer or Chair of the Board, any alleged or suspected breaches of the code. Where this is not appropriate, for example, where the allegations relate to the conduct of these post holders, then employees may use the company's Whistle –Blowing Policy, which can be found in the Employee Handbook in Section 4, Policies and Procedures.

## 7. Outside interests

Employees are required to devote all of their time during working hours to fulfilling their duties at the Company. They are not permitted to engage in any other unrelated activities in working time, whether carried out on Company premises or not.

The ability to carry out duties fully at Freebridge Community Housing may be compromised by the commitments of any other jobs, or work, which may be undertaken outside the Company. Employees should therefore inform their line manager of any other paid or unpaid work currently undertaken, or due to be undertaken in the future. Whilst the Company will at all times try and accommodate these additional commitments, the Company reserves the right to insist that they are curtailed in the event that they adversely impact on the ability to carry out duties for Freebridge Community Housing.

In any event employees must not be directly or indirectly engaged, concerned or interested in any trade, business or occupation that operates in competition to Freebridge Community Housing **or where a conflict of interest could arise**. In addition employees must ensure that any personal transaction with one of Freebridge Community Housing's approved contractors/consultants/suppliers does not compromise their employment with Freebridge Community Housing.

If employees are involved in any charitable or other voluntary work that requires significant commitment of their time, they must consult with their line manager to discuss how this will affect their work at Freebridge Community Housing. Wherever possible, the Company will try to support employees in continuing with this kind of work, as long as they are still able to fully meet the requirements of their duties for the Company. **Such discussions must be documented by managers and any agreements must be put in writing.**

Employees must not, during their employment, except with Freebridge Community Housing's prior written consent, introduce to any other competing business, orders for goods or services with which Freebridge Community Housing is able to deal. **Neither may they enter into any agreement, for the purchase of goods and services by Freebridge Community Housing, from another business in which they or any Freebridge colleague or Board member or their close family member\*, close friend or business colleague are involved as either Owner, Director or Senior Manager with financial responsibility, without disclosing in writing the nature and extent of their or their colleagues involvement and interest, and seeking the approval of the Board. This information must be sent to the Governance Officer in the first instance for Executive Directors to consider.**

**It is important that FCH is seen to be politically neutral and must not be linked, directly or indirectly to any political organisation. Employees are free to join political groups and work and campaign on their behalf. However, such political activity must be such that it does not compromise the organisation's neutrality.**

**Employees must discuss with their manager any intentions to stand for political office. There may be circumstances in which holding office may conflict with the organisation's interests. For example, it is unlikely that members of Management Team could avoid this conflict.**

**\* A close family member includes parents, grandparent, children or grandchildren, spouse, civil partner or long-term partner, either by birth or marriage, but does not include estranged relatives where there has been no contact for a number of years.**

## 8. Confidentiality

In the ordinary course of employment, employees will be exposed to information about Freebridge Community Housing and suppliers and customers of Freebridge Community Housing which is confidential or is commercially sensitive, and which may not be readily available to competitors or the general public. The disclosure of such information would be liable to cause significant harm to Freebridge Community Housing.

For the purposes of this clause:

- (i) Confidential Information includes:
- information concerning the organisation, business, finances, transactions or affairs of Freebridge Community Housing, including lists of Freebridge Community Housing tenants and other information about them;
  - Personal information in respect of other employees or individuals which has come to their knowledge during their employment.
- (ii) References to Freebridge cover Freebridge Community Housing (the Company/Association).

Employees must not either during or after their employment, (unless authorised or required by their duties as an employee of Freebridge) reveal to any person, firm, company or organisation, or make use of any Confidential Information, (other than that within the public domain) concerning Freebridge, its suppliers and/or its customers which may come to their knowledge during their employment. Nothing in this clause prevents employees from disclosing information to comply with a Court Order, or perform any statutory obligation on them to do so.

The wilful or reckless disclosure of confidential information will be regarded as gross misconduct under the Company's disciplinary policy and procedure.

### Taken out Media

The Media Policy can be found in Section 4 and is incorporated into the contract of employment

## 1. Pension Schemes

Employees joining Freebridge Community Housing after 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009, will, on commencement of employment, be given the opportunity to join the Stakeholder pension scheme. Employees will be given an information pack which gives details of benefits, contributions and scheme rules. Pension queries should be directed to the HR department.

The 'normal' retirement age for Freebridge Employees is 65 years, however, employees can request to work beyond this age. Such requests will be considered on an individual basis and take account of personal circumstances and the needs of the business at the time.

### Early/Flexible Retirement

In relation to an employee who is a member of the Local Government Pension Scheme, who is over 55 (50 for some employees who were LGPS members as at 31 March 2008) and who wishes to leave Freebridge's employment early and receive their pension (whether reduced or un-reduced) or to reduce their hours, grade or both and receive part or all of their pension, Freebridge Community Housing would wish to reserve the right to consider each individual's request on their own merits. Applications must be made in writing to the relevant Departmental Director and decisions will take account of the individual's relevant personal circumstances, the benefit to Freebridge of agreeing to exercise the discretion and any cost to the association of doing so.

Decisions are delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chair of the **Resources** and Risk Committee and **the Executive Director (Resources)**. The **Assistant Director of HR** will oversee the process to ensure a consistent approach is applied to the decision making process.

**In the event that the Chief Executive or the Executive Director (Resources) requests an early or flexible retirement, the decision will be referred to the board.**

### **Ill Health/Medical Retirements**

**In relation to an employee who is a member of the Local Government Pension Scheme, please refer to the Sickness Absence Policy in section 4 of the Employee handbook. As above any discretionary decisions will be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chair of the Resources and Risk Committee and the Executive Director (Resources).**

**In the event that the Chief Executive or the Executive Director (Resources) is ill health/medically retired, the decision will be referred to the board.**

## 6. Voluntary Non Contractual Benefits

FCH will, from time to time offer its employees the opportunity to enjoy a range of small gifts or one-off benefits such as:

- Flowers
- Vouchers
- Retirement gatherings
- Competition prizes etc

Examples of circumstances when such gifts may be offered could include the birth of a baby, ill health, bereavement and so on.

In addition rewards may be made from time to time for outstanding performance and achievements and demonstration of the Freebridge Values as well as suggestions made which contribute to business efficiencies.

FCH will also strive to obtain corporate benefits for employees such as:

- Small discounts on retail/leisure goods and services
- Reduced membership fees
- Healthcare, etc.

FCH will notify employees of the range of current available benefits and reserves the right to amend, vary, withdraw or replace any or all of the benefits at its absolute discretion.

## 2. Gifts, conflict of interest and Fraud

Freebridge is fully committed to ethical behaviour of the highest standards throughout all aspects of our business, and this includes the relationship of all our employees with external parties such as customers and suppliers.

### Gifts

Giving and receiving gifts creates a relationship that could be seen to influence an employee's judgement, therefore, employee's should always avoid gifts except in very limited circumstances.

- Personal gifts must not be sought.
- Gifts of cash must not be accepted.
- Only small personal gifts of nominal value (under £15), such as diaries, calendars, stationery etc, may be accepted. Gifts above this value should not be accepted, other than in exceptional circumstances, such as when not to do so could cause offence.
- In these exceptional circumstances where gifts over the nominal value are accepted, these should be donated to charity and proof of this given to the Governance Officer, who will include this in a register. Alternatively, the gifts should be passed to the Governance Officer, who will arrange for them to be given to charity, and for proof of this to be included on the register.
- All gifts offered of more than nominal value, whether accepted or not, must be recorded in a register held by the Governance Officer within 28 days.
- Gifts to another individual or organisation, other than those of nominal value, are only to be made in exceptional circumstances, with the approval of the Board. They will be entered onto a register held by the Governance Officer.

### Hospitality

Normally, visits to exhibitions, demonstrations, conferences, business meals or social functions by employees in connection with their official duties will be at Freebridge's expense to avoid jeopardising the integrity of subsequent purchasing or contract decisions.

Employees must not seek hospitality and should not give or receive hospitality that could be seen as lavish or as a way of exerting an improper influence over the decision of another person or organisation. Significant hospitality may not be provided by the association without Board approval. Occasional and modest hospitality (given or received) will be allowed but only with the prior approval of an Executive Director and should not exceed £50 in value in respect of a Freebridge employee.

All hospitality accepted or offered should be formally notified to the Governance Officer within 28 days who will record it in the register.

"Working lunches" (given or received), or similar, of a value of under £20, are not covered by this rule.

If an employee is in any doubt in respect of the receipt or giving of any gift or hospitality, advice should be sought from the Governance Officer.

The gift and hospitality register will be reviewed at each meeting of the Audit Committee.

### Supplier entertaining

There may be occasions when an employee (or employee and a partner), are invited by a supplier to an external entertaining event. Employees may attend these as long as it is clearly related to the business relationship with the supplier, and is appropriate and reasonable in all the circumstances. However, employees must consult with

the Governance Officer for advice and record the offer in the hospitality register before accepting any such invitations.

#### Conflict of interest

The need to ensure that all relationships between employees and external parties are always at arms length extends beyond business gifts. Every employee has a responsibility to avoid putting themselves in a position where their role within the Company conflicts with a business or personal relationship or interest they have outside of the Company. **Employees with responsibility for the appointment or supervision of consultants, suppliers and contractors must take particular care to avoid any suggestion of impropriety in their relationship with individuals or companies. Where any conflicts, or potential conflict of interest involving the selection of consultants etc arise these should be declared to HR who will ensure the employee has no influence or involvement in the selection process**

**By conflict of interest the company means a consultant, supplier or contractor where an employee, a close relative, close friend or business colleague in that company could financially gain ie through being employed by that company or have a shareholding, with the exception of monopolies or near monopolies such as utilities eg Gas, Water.**

**In addition, the letting of a property, including garages, to members of staff, their close family, close friend or business colleague needs to be responsibly dealt with. Any member of staff whose job role could conflict with such lettings must not involve themselves and must speak to their line manager. Any member of staff seeking a Freebridge property to rent or who is aware of a close family member or others (as above) seeking to rent, must also discuss this with their line manager and the Governance Officer must be made aware. Any such letting will require the authority of the Board but would not normally be refused where all criteria and conditions, which would apply to any member of the public seeking housing by us, are met i.e. no advantage can be given to employees or their families.**

**Any employee who holds a tenancy or has close family or others (as above) who hold a tenancy must not involve themselves in any business activities in relation to that tenancy, such as rent transactions, repairs requests etc.**

#### Fraud

Employees shall only use Freebridge's monies and assets for their intended and lawful purpose. If employees are aware of potentially corrupt or fraudulent activities of other employees they have a duty to report this in accordance with the Company Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy, which can be found on the Intranet/Corporate Information/Policies. All employees are protected under the Whistleblowing policy. See section 4.

Employees are expected at all times to abide by their contractual obligations in respect of gifts, conflicts of interest and fraud.

If an employee is at all unsure about their responsibilities in this respect, please consult the Governance Officer for clarification.

Breaches of this policy could lead to disciplinary action.

## 29. Recruitment and selection policy

### Introduction

It is critical to the success of the Company that vacancies are filled by the most competent candidate available. It is also essential that people are selected for positions in a consistent, fair and objective way. The Company is committed to ensuring that vacancies are filled by the person with the most appropriate skills, knowledge and behavioural competencies, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, race, religion or beliefs, age or any disability.

If a candidate for employment is known to be or discloses that they are a close relative, close friend or business colleagues of a Board Member or an existing Employee, HR will ensure that:

- There is disclosure of the individuals connection
- Consideration of the applicant is based solely on merit and suitability for the position
- No person having any personal knowledge of the applicant will be involved in the recruitment process

Where this connection is to a Board Member, Executive Director or Assistant Director, the decision to recruit will be made only after full and careful consideration by the Board.

The definition of a close relative is Parent, Grandparent, Child, Grandchild, Brother and Sister, Spouse, Civil Partner or Long Term Partner, and also applies to relatives by marriage, civil partnership or long term partner. Exemptions would include estranged relationships where there has been no contact with a family member for several years.

### Process

Any manager wishing to recruit must first check that provision has been made against the manpower establishment and budget. A 'Request to Recruit' form will then need to be raised and authorised.

All vacancies will be supported by a role description, which must be written by the line manager in conjunction with the Human Resource Advisor.

It is Company policy to advertise vacancies internally on notice boards. However in some circumstances, where for example a succession plan exists, an employee may be promoted into the position without the job being advertised.

Vacancies may be advertised externally and internally at the same time.

To apply for an internal vacancy, applicants will be asked to either complete an internal application form or send a CV to the Human Resource Advisor. They must inform their line manager of their application. The line manager will also be required to sign the Internal Application form where this has been raised. Internal application forms are available on the Intranet/Human Resources/Forms.

### Selection process

In the case of some positions, applicants will be required to take aptitude or psychometric tests, or they may be invited to attend an Assessment Centre. Any testing used will have been carefully designed and selected and internal candidates will be expected to participate if they wish to be considered for the vacancy.

Line managers will be responsible for conducting interviews and they may consult the Human Resource Department for assistance. With all recruitments, applicants will be given adequate notice of interviews and testing to enable them to prepare thoroughly.

Letters informing applicants of the outcome of their interview will be forwarded to them as soon as is reasonably practicable after a decision has been made.



## **41. Media Communication Policy**

### **Introduction**

This policy outlines:-

- the procedure to be followed when making pro-active approaches to the media.
- the action that must be taken where enquiries are received from the media or from any other organisation seeking information which is going to be published in the public domain.

Communications and marketing help Freebridge Community Housing to achieve its business objectives, ensure that it is open and accountable, and manage its reputation.

### **Contacting/Responding to the Media**

#### **Media Releases**

Media releases/statements may only be issued if they have been agreed by a member of the Executive Team or the Board Chairman, Board Vice-Chairman or the relevant Committee Chairman. Sign-off will also need to be given by the relevant Assistant Director, or member of their team, who has provided the details of the story. Partner approval will also need to be gained for any media release which is produced about joint projects and schemes. Any media release/statement that attributes a quote to an individual should not be released without that individual's agreement. All pro-active media releases/statements should only be produced and issued by the Communications and Customer Engagement Team.

#### **Responding to Media Enquiries:**

The following have authority to act as Freebridge spokespeople in media interview: members of the Executive Team or the Board Chairman. In certain circumstances, the Chief Executive may authorise another employee to respond to media enquiries, but only after the response has been agreed by one of those listed.

All media enquiries should be diverted to the Assistant Director of Communications and Customer Engagement who will gather the details of the journalist's request before determining the response from Freebridge. This may be a written quote or statement or telephone or broadcast interview with one of the spokespeople.

If another employee/Board member is approached by the media, he/she should not attempt to respond, but should refer the matter to the Assistant Director of Communications and Customer Engagement. It should be noted that a Board member's contact details should not be released outside Freebridge without the permission of that Board member.

The Chief Executive should be informed of all responses to the media.

In the interests of maintaining good relationships with the media, those responding to media enquiries should bear in mind that journalists are often working to tight deadlines, and should attempt to provide the response at the earliest opportunity unless the journalist has indicated that there is no urgency.

#### **Situations Where it is Not Clear if a Caller is a Journalist**

Some journalists may try to elicit comments on issues from employees/Board members without declaring their journalistic interest. Any employee/Board member finding themselves in a position where they believe they may inadvertently have been talking to a journalist should contact the Assistant Director of Communications and Customer Engagement immediately and give as much detail about the conversation as possible. Contact details should always be requested from a caller so that follow-up actions can be taken.

#### **Newsworthy Items**

Any employee/Board member who is aware of a potentially newsworthy item, either positive or negative, should get in touch with the Communications and Customer Engagement team who will follow the story up.

## **Out of Hours**

Where any employee or Board Member is contacted by a media representative out-of-hours, the Assistant Director of Communications and Customer Engagement should be contacted on 07824 894208 or 07834 578872 who will liaise with the Executive Team in formulating a response. If the Assistant Director of Communications and Customer Engagement is unavailable, the Chief Executive should be contacted on 07769 643281.

### **3. Standards of behaviour, appearance and conduct**

In order that the Company always provides quality and service of the highest standards, a high standard of behaviour, appearance and conduct is expected from all employees. Conduct which is prejudicial to the principles of the Company and the needs of all its stakeholders will not be tolerated. Conduct that persistently fails to meet the needs of the business is likely to lead to disciplinary action.

In respect of office areas, at all times dress should be appropriate to the role being performed and the perception that it creates with internal and external customers.

Employees should always act in an efficient and impartial manner, avoiding any personal relationships that may give rise to conflict of interests or the appearance of any such conflict.

Employees' should be aware of and work to any service standards that apply to their area/department.

Employees' general behaviour, actions and demeanour whilst at work or out of work (in a Freebridge Community Housing recognisable uniform) shall be such as to portray FCH as a professional, reputable organisation.

## **8. Care of the workplace**

All employees have a responsibility to maintain their work environment in a tidy and safe manner, whether they are operational or office based. Individuals should inform their line manager of any hazards, faults or defects which need to be rectified.

Employees are expected to take reasonable measures to protect FCH's property and assets from theft, damage or misuse.

The Company's equipment and premises may be used only for the purposes of the Company's business.

## Freebridge Community Housing

## Report to the Board

<b>Author</b>	Angus MacQueen	<b>Report Type</b>		<b>Impact</b>		
<b>Related Work Ref.</b>		<b>For Decision</b>	√	<b>High</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Low</b>
		<b>For Information</b>		√		
<b>Consultation</b>	Governance Working Group					

**Meeting Date: 6 December 2010**

**Report Title: Review of Board-related Governance Documents**

**Purpose:** To review various governance documents related to the Board.

**Policy/Strategy Implications:** As set out in the body of the report.

**Finance and VFM Implications:** None directly arising from this report.

**Customer Care/Equality and Diversity Implications:** This report seeks to improve FCH's governance arrangements, and this can only be of benefit to our tenants. The Board Member Agreement has undergone an Equality Impact Assessment, and no equality and diversity implications have been identified.

**Risk Assessment (cross-reference with FCH Risk Map):** Risk 1.1 – Failure to Comply with Regulatory and Legislation Requirements – Critical Impact, High Likelihood. It is intended that this report will assist the Board to achieve the regulatory requirement of good governance.

**Recommendations:** It is recommended that the Board:

- (i) Adopt the Board Member Agreement, as presented.
- (ii) Adopt the role profiles for Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen, as presented.
- (iii) Adopt the Board Membership, Recruitment and Succession Policy, as presented.
- (iv) Adopt the Board Conduct Issues Policy, as presented.

## 1.0 Introduction

1.1 As part of the governance review, a number of Board-related governance documents have been reviewed or revised, as set out below. These documents have been considered by the Governance Working Group, at its meeting on 29 November 2010, and views of the Working Group are incorporated into the documents now presented to the Board.

## 2.0 Board Member Agreement and Board Code of Conduct

2.1 The Board Member Agreement and Board Code of Conduct have been reviewed. In light of Arvinda Gohil's comment that FCH's governance documents are "onerous and

duplicate”, the Code of Conduct has been incorporated into the Board Member Agreement, so that they are no longer separate documents.

2.2 The Code of Conduct contains the large majority of FCH provisions affecting the Board that support the NHF “Excellence in Standards of Conduct” Code for Members 2010, which has been adopted by the Board. These provisions are part of the suite of FCH provisions that replace Schedule 1.

2.3 The opportunity has also been taken to combine other matters relevant to Board members into the Board Member Agreement. The Agreement (which is attached at Appendix 1) is, therefore, split into a number of sections, as follows:

- Board Member Code of Conduct
- Board Member Role Profile
- Induction, Appraisal and Training
- Board Member Expenses and Allowances
- Media Protocol
- Miscellaneous (Insurance and Data Protection)
- Notice and Termination

### **3.0 Role Profiles**

3.1 Whilst FCH already had a role profile for Board members (contained in the Board Member Agreement), another of Arvinda Gohil’s recommendations was that we should develop role profiles for all Board members. By this, she meant that we should have role profiles for all Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen. These have, therefore, been developed, and are attached at Appendix 2.

### **4.0 Signature Sheet**

4.1 All Board members will be asked to sign that they will adhere to the Board Member Agreement. Those Board members who are also Chairmen or Vice-Chairmen will be asked to sign that they will adhere to their respective role profiles. A sample signature sheet is attached at Appendix 3.

### **5.0 Board Membership and Recruitment Policy**

5.1 The Board Membership and Recruitment Policy (attached at Appendix 4) has been updated on four counts. The first is a new paragraph g) under “Recruitment”, which requires all applicants for Board membership to complete a declaration of interest form. This is in line with the “Excellence in Standards of Conduct” Code.

5.2 The second relates to the recruitment of tenant Board members. This was previously done under the Tenant Board Member Succession, Appointment and Recruitment Policy, and required TOWN to nominate from within its own membership individuals to fill vacancies for tenant Board members. This has become increasingly difficult, as the pool of applicants within TOWN has diminished. It has also resulted in there only once being an election for tenant Board members; it had always been intended that the whole tenant body would be entitled to take part in a ballot to appoint tenant Board members. It is, therefore, suggested that the Tenant Board Member Succession, Appointment and Recruitment Policy is discarded. An additional paragraph f) has been added in the “Recruitment” section of the Board Membership and Recruitment Policy regarding a new procedure for recruiting tenant Board members.

In composing this paragraph, account was taken of the Board's views, expressed at its meeting on 7 December 2009 (minute number 153/09 refers), which were as follows:

- The current process of recruiting through TOWN is not resulting in open elections for Tenant Board members, and so is in breach of both the Rules and the Offer Document.
- This method of recruitment is also limiting the pool of candidates for Tenant Board membership.
- Opening up the possibility of standing for the Board to all tenants could be achieved. Each candidate should be required to be accepted by a selection panel before they are included on a list of candidates to be chosen by a ballot of all tenants.

5.3 The third count relates to succession planning. The wording in the Policy has been strengthened to show that succession planning is part of our Board recruitment processes. The word "Succession" has also been added to the Policy's name.

5.4 The fourth count is some minor changes to wording under "Monitoring and Reporting" to reflect the new regulatory regime.

## **6.0 Board Member Conduct Issues Policy**

6.1 This Policy (attached at Appendix 5) has been amended on four counts. The first is at paragraph 2.2.2, where wording has been inserted to cover situations whereby it would not be appropriate to report concerns about a Board member's conduct to either the Chairman or the Vice-Chairman.

6.2 The second count is at paragraph 2.2.3, where wording has been inserted to clarify that a special Board meeting can be called to consider whether a Board member has a case to answer; this does not have to wait until the next Board meeting.

6.3 The third count is at paragraph 2.2.7, which has been amended to include "withholding information or providing misleading information about interests" within the list of acts that could result in removal from the Board.

6.4 The fourth count is the insertion of a new paragraph 3, to cover situations where allegations relating to conduct are made against an individual who has been nominated to the Board but has yet to take up their position on it.



# Board Member Agreement

*Developing Homes and Creating Opportunities for People within West Norfolk*

# SECTION 1: Board Member Code of Conduct

## 1.1 Introduction

The Freebridge Board has responsibility for all the activities of the organisation, its Board members and its staff. This includes responsibility for large sums of public and private money and the housing care of large numbers of people. Therefore, the Board is determined:

- that the conduct of Board members should give our tenants, other customers, regulators and funders confidence.
- that as representatives of Freebridge, we should all demonstrate integrity.
- that our actions are transparent and therefore at all times our professionalism allows us to avoid any suggestion of influence by improper motives.
- that Board members, staff, tenants and funders, will want to be associated with an organisation that publicises and upholds its values.

Board members will strive to uphold the spirit, as well as the wording, of this Code of Conduct.

The following framework documents are relevant to the conduct of Board members, and Board members have a duty to comply with each and all of them. They are listed in order of precedence. In the event of a conflict or inconsistency between two or more of these documents, the higher or highest in the list will take precedence:-

- The Rules
- The Standing Orders
- This Code of Conduct
- Freebridge Policies (e.g. – Anti-Fraud and Corruption, Equality and Diversity)
- Codes of Conduct and Governance of other organisations, adopted by Freebridge

## 1.2 Findings of the Nolan Committee

The seven principles of public life, identified by the Nolan Committee in its first report, guide the content of the Freebridge Code of Conduct for Board members. Board members are expected to demonstrate these principles in their conduct and behaviour.

**Selflessness:** - Board members will take decisions solely in terms of Freebridge's values and mission. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family and friends.

**Integrity:** - Board members will not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their duties.

**Objectivity:** - Board members will ensure that, in the delivery of services, the appointment of staff or other Board members, or the awarding of contracts, they ensure impartiality and that choices are made on merit alone.

**Accountability:** - Board members will accept accountability for their decisions and actions to Freebridge's tenants, the providers of public funds and other stakeholders, and submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate.

**Openness:** - Board members will be as open as possible about all decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when individual or commercial confidentiality clearly so demand.

**Honesty:** - Board members will declare any private interests relating to their duties and take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that is lawful, and protects Freebridge's reputation, values and mission.

**Leadership:** - Board members will promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

### **1.3 Disclosure of Interest**

Board members must pay particular care to the management of personal interests, and in particular to actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest, in order to protect the organisation and individuals from any appearance of impropriety.

Each Board member must ensure that that all relevant personal interests are declared and, where conflicts arise, or are perceived to arise, these are managed to avoid any financial or non-financial personal gain (whether real or capable of being perceived), to themselves or to any person or body closely connected to them. A register of Board members' declared interests will be maintained by the Company Secretary and published annually.

Board members should declare interests if in any doubt and should abstain from any discussion/vote in relation to anything in which they have or could reasonably be perceived to have a conflict of interest.

Relevant personal interests take many forms. Some of the usual ones are:

- employment, ownership or significant shareholding in a company or partnership providing or that could potentially provide products or services to Freebridge;
- significant ownership of land and/or property in the area of operation of the association;
- tenancy or leasehold interest of a property owned by the association;
- membership of a campaigning, residents' or community organisation which has interests in the business and/or operation of the association;
- membership of political parties or pressure groups;
- membership of secret societies;

- membership of a local authority, another public body, or another association or unregistered “not for profit” body with interests in the area of operation of the association. (Board members who are councillors should declare an interest in any significant matter, such as a proposed development, affecting their own ward.)

Board members should review their continuing membership, and if necessary, take advice on whether they should stand down, when changes occur in either their own interests or those of a person closely connected to them, which give rise to a potentially serious or continuing conflict with the association.

Board members should ensure that, where an item of business arises at a Board or committee meeting, in which they, or a person closely connected to them, have an interest, whether or not already entered into the register, this is declared to the Chairman before the item is discussed, normally under an initial agenda item. (The Chairman should notify the Board/committee if such an interest occurs that affects them.) Where the declared interest is a financial one or where a personal benefit may arise or be seen to arise, the Board member should withdraw from the meeting when that matter is considered, or not attend the meeting. Board members should only remain in the relevant part of the meeting where the Board or committee decides that this is appropriate and this is formally minuted. In this case, the Board member should not vote on the matter and, if they participate in the discussion relating to the matter, this must be minuted.

Board members who are residents of the organisation should regard matters specifically concerning their individual circumstances as a clear and substantial conflict; matters affecting residents more generally need be declared only where they create a specific conflict of interest.

#### **1.4 Gifts**

Giving and receiving gifts creates a relationship that could be seen to influence a Board member’s judgement. Therefore, Board members should always avoid gifts except in very limited circumstances.

- Personal gifts must not be solicited ;
- Gifts of cash should not be accepted.
- Only small personal gifts of nominal value (under £15) (e.g. diaries, calendars, stationery etc) may be accepted. Gifts above this value should not be accepted, other than in exceptional circumstances.
- In exceptional circumstances where gifts over the nominal value are accepted, these should be donated to charity and proof of this given to the Company Secretary, who will include this on the register. Alternatively, the gifts should be passed to the Company

Secretary, who will arrange for them to be given to charity, and for proof of this to be included on the register.

- All gifts offered of more than nominal value, whether accepted or not, must be recorded in a register held by the Company Secretary within 28 days.
- Gifts to another individual or organisation, other than those of nominal value, are only to be made in exceptional circumstances, with the approval of the Board. They will be entered onto a register held by the Company Secretary.

## **1.5 Hospitality**

Normally, visits to exhibitions, demonstrations, conferences, business meals or social functions by Board members in connection with their official duties will be at Freebridge's expense to avoid jeopardising the integrity of subsequent purchasing decisions.

Board members may not solicit hospitality and should not give or receive hospitality that could be seen as lavish or as a way of exerting an improper influence over the decision of another person or organisation. Significant hospitality may not be provided by the association without Board approval. Occasional and modest hospitality (given or received) will be allowed but only with the prior approval of the Chief Executive and the Board Chairman/(or, in situations involving the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman). This could include, for instance, networking dinners attended by Board members during the course of a conference.

All hospitality accepted or offered should be formally notified to the Company Secretary within 28 days. The Company Secretary will record it in the register.

"Working lunches" (given or received), or similar, of a value of under £20, are not covered by this rule.

If a Board Member is in any doubt in respect of the receipt or giving of any gift or hospitality, advice should be sought from the Company Secretary.

The gift and hospitality register will be reviewed at each meeting of the Audit Committee.

## **1.6 Section 122, Housing and Regeneration Act 2008**

Under Section 122 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008, the association is not permitted to grant any gifts, dividends or bonuses to its shareholders or former shareholders. The large majority of Freebridge Board members are also shareholders, and Freebridge extends this provision to all of its Board members..

## **1.7 Provision of Services**

Other than duly agreed remuneration, Board members may not be paid for services provided to the association. This includes situations where a Board member is an owner, director or major shareholder of a company. Should a Board member become aware that a breach of this rule has inadvertently occurred, they must report it immediately to the Company Secretary. This rule

is not applicable to situations where Board members are directors of non-profit making organisations, provided that there has been no undue influence in the procurement process.

Should a person closely connected to a Board member become a potential contractor or supplier to Freebridge:

- The Board member concerned must declare their interest in the matter to the Company Secretary immediately on becoming aware of it.
- The Board member concerned must have no involvement in or influence over the selection process.
- Usual selection criteria will be applied.
- A decision to engage the contractor/supplier can only be made by the Board. In making this decision, the Board must have regard to:
  - the reputational risk to Freebridge and the sector; and
  - whether the Board member stands to make a direct financial gain from the contract (in which case the contract should not be awarded to the contractor/supplier in question).

The requirements in 1.7 apply to former Board members who have left the Board within the previous 12 months and to persons closely connected to them.

## **1.8 Housing**

In the event that a Board member or a person closely connected to them is nominated for a Freebridge property, or are existing tenants and apply for a transfer:

- The Board member concerned must declare their interest in the matter to the Company Secretary immediately on becoming aware of it.
- Freebridge must consider the matter in accordance with the usual allocations policies and procedures. No preferential consideration will be given to the nomination/application, and the Board member concerned must have no involvement in or influence over the consideration.
- The allocation of the property must be approved by the Board.

The requirements in 1.8 apply to former Board members who have left the Board within the previous 12 months and to persons closely connected to them.

## **1.9 Employment**

In the event that a person closely connected to a Board member is a candidate for employment with Freebridge:

- The Board member concerned must declare their interest in the matter to the Company Secretary immediately on becoming aware of it.
- The Board member concerned must have no involvement in or influence over the recruitment process.
- Consideration of the application will be based solely on merit and suitability for the position
- A decision to appoint the candidate can only be made by the Board.
- Where the vacancy is for an Assistant Director or Director, the general presumption will be against offering employment. However, if the Board is satisfied that the candidate meets all the requirements for the post and has been selected solely on merit, employment may be offered, subject to approval from the regulator.

The requirements in 1.9 apply to former Board members who have left the Board within the previous 12 months and to persons closely connected to them.

#### **1.10 National Housing Federation “Excellence in Standards of Conduct” Code for Members 2010**

Freebridge has adopted the National Housing Federation “Excellence in Standards of Conduct” Code for Members 2010, and Board members are expected to adhere to it. Any breach or alleged breach of this document will be deemed to be a breach or alleged breach of this Code of Conduct, and will be dealt with in the same way (see below)

#### **1.11 Freebridge Mission and Values**

Freebridge’s work and reputation relies on us all upholding and promoting the association’s mission and values, as agreed by the Board. Board members are expected to incorporate these values into their conduct in relation to Freebridge.

##### **Freebridge Mission**

**“Developing Homes and Creating Opportunities for People within West Norfolk”.**

**‘Developing Homes’** represents the Board’s commitment to the tenant promises to deliver the decent homes programme, but also reflects their desire for growth, delivering new affordable housing and, in doing so, assisting in meeting housing need within West Norfolk.

**‘Creating Opportunities for People’** reaffirms the Board’s desire to ensure that Freebridge Community Housing is more than a ‘bricks and mortar’ association. This aspect of the mission builds on the people issues, both in terms of tenant and employee stakeholders. Through initiatives such as the Tenant Empowerment Strategy and Investors in People???, Freebridge aims to empower individuals to help the Board meet its objectives.

**'Within West Norfolk'** denotes the area of operation for Freebridge Community Housing. The focus of activity, as a result of transfer of homes from the Borough Council of Kings Lynn and West Norfolk, is the Borough Council area. However, many of our tenants look outside this area for other services, for example Fakenham, Swaffham and Wisbech. New development could take place in those areas, subject to there being no compromises in the quality of services that are delivered.

## **Freebridge Values**

The Board has articulated the following values to describe how the organisation does business.

### **Working Together – helping each other to deliver more**

Using interpersonal skills to work co-operatively with colleagues and internal and external partners and working proactively across teams and organisational boundaries, sharing information, new knowledge and innovation.

### **Empowerment - providing freedom with responsibility**

Empowerment is allowing or enabling someone to make decisions or take actions for themselves by providing sufficient information, guidelines, support and sometimes parameters, for them to make an informed choice. Being empowered means using the information, support and guidelines provided to make decisions or take actions for yourself.

### **Integrity – openly reliable and flexible**

Acting with integrity means being transparent and fair in our actions, reliable and flexible. It is honesty and trustworthiness, with a high degree of knowledge and skill to do our job, so people trust us to deliver what we have said we will deliver.

### **Customer Focus – Ask, Listen, Act, Learn**

Customer Focus is the commitment to putting customers first and the ability to deliver a consistently high quality, pro-active service. Customers are both internal and external.

### **Enthusiasm – delivering energetic solutions**

Demonstrating an understanding of and commitment to your own role and the organisation as a whole. Working in a positive and confident way and producing and implementing new and innovative ideas.

By conducting ourselves in ways that demonstrate these values, we can ensure that Freebridge will be an organisation people will be proud to be associated with.

## **1.12 Anti-Fraud and Corruption**

Board members are expected to make themselves aware of and adhere to Freebridge's Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy.

### **1.13 Personal and Political Activities**

Freebridge's work may take it into the political arena but Board members must ensure that they demonstrate its non-political nature and keep their personal political activities totally separate from Freebridge's work.

Board members may well be involved, in their private lives, in political activity. At the same time they must be aware that Freebridge is non-political. They must ensure that Freebridge itself cannot be brought into the political arena or its reputation or status damaged by their personal political activities. When making any political representation, Freebridge must clearly be seen as presenting a balanced case in support of Freebridge's key objectives - to provide good homes and quality housing services for people in need.

More broadly, Board members must take care that their personal, family or private interests do not conflict with the interests of Freebridge Community Housing and that their role and actions as Board members are kept separate from their personal, family or employment activities. Board members should avoid engaging in outside activities that could bring the association into disrepute or adversely impact on their work and/or contribution to the association.

### **1.14 Confidentiality**

Board members' work involves confidential information about tenants, staff and Freebridge business and they must respect that confidentiality.

Board members must treat as confidential and/or proprietary:

- information concerning people - tenants, Board members, staff, applicants, etc;
- those matters of Freebridge's business which are confidential or commercially sensitive such as:
  - contract details
  - financial statements and business projections
  - information concerning the terms of negotiations relating to the acquisition or disposal of property
  - marketing plans and strategies
  - development plans
  - information concerning labour relations, consultations or negotiations with staff
  - information concerning legal proceedings
  - software and computer programmes

The obligation to maintain confidentiality applies both during a Board member's period of office and afterwards.

### **1.15 Equality and Diversity**

Freebridge is committed to achieving equality of opportunity in every area of its work. Our aim is that everyone should be treated fairly.

Board members should be aware of Freebridge's Equality & Diversity Policy. They should also be aware of the scope for discrimination in Board recruitment and selection activities and in the granting of tenancies, contracts of employment, and contracts for services. Board members

must follow established procedures when involved with such issues, to prevent either direct or indirect discrimination from occurring.

Sexist, racist, homophobic or other discriminatory behaviour from Board members will not be tolerated.

Freebridge monitors the diversity profile of its Board members. Board members are encouraged to supply this information. The aim is to ensure, as far as possible, that the Freebridge Board profile reflects the communities it serves.

### **1.16 Relationships**

Mutual respect and trust between Board members, employees and tenants is important for good working relationships and organisational effectiveness. Personal relationships should not be allowed to adversely affect the conduct of the organisation's business.

Undue or inappropriate familiarity or antagonism to and/or among Board members and between or among Board members, members of staff and/or tenants, which could compromise Freebridge's integrity or reputation, must be avoided.

Board members must not allow any personal relationship with a tenant to conflict with their best interests by bringing undue pressure to bear in matters concerning their rights as a tenant. Board members must not allow themselves to be compromised by or take advantage of their relationship with tenants.

Board members must not form or enter into any relationship, understanding, association or agreement with a tenant or tenants whereby the impression is or may be given that a Board member is representing, acting or advocating for that tenant or tenants' individual case, cause or interest.

Board members must always behave in a respectful, professional and courteous way in their dealings with colleagues, staff, residents and stakeholders.

### **1.17. General**

Advice on any matter in this Code of Conduct should be sought first from the Company Secretary.

All Board members should carry out their responsibilities in accordance with Freebridge policies and procedures.

All Board members are expected to dress and conduct themselves appropriately for the duty or function that they are carrying out or attending.

### **1.18. Breaches of the Code of Conduct**

#### **Confidential reporting**

Freebridge is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with this commitment it is expected that Board members, employees and

others that the organisation deals with, who have serious concerns about an apparent failure by a Board member to follow this Code of Conduct will come forward and raise those concerns. This can be done without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage. Concerns must always be made in writing to the Company Secretary.

All allegations and concerns expressed in writing to the Company Secretary should be recorded and reported to the Chief Executive and the Board Chairman in the first instance. However, should the subject of the allegation / concern relate to the Chairman, the allegation / concern will be reported to the Vice Chairman, to avoid any conflict of interest.

In the event of an alleged breach of the Code by a Board Member, any investigation or action will be initiated by the Chairman (or Vice-Chairman if the allegation is against the Chairman), of the Board. Subsequent action will be considered in accordance with Freebridge constitution and policies.

### **1.19 Definition**

The term “closely connected person” when used in this Code of Conduct refers to:

- close relatives (including spouse, partner, parents, grandparents, children, grandchildren, brothers, sisters, and similar relations by marriage, but not including estranged relatives where there has been no contact for a number of years)
- close friends
- business colleagues.

## SECTION 2: BOARD MEMBER ROLE PROFILE

2.1 The role as an individual Board member has the following requirements:

- a. **Leadership:** To share with Executive Directors accountability for both the direction and control of Freebridge. This includes sharing in setting the mission and values of Freebridge and ensuring that obligations to stakeholders are understood and reflected in policy and strategy;
- b. **Policy and Strategy:** To constructively challenge and participate in the development of the policy, strategy and key priorities of Freebridge;
- c. **Performance:** To scrutinise the performance of the management of Freebridge in meeting agreed goals and objectives and to monitor the performance on key performance indicators;
- d. **Risk:** To satisfy yourself that information is accurate and that controls and systems of risk management are robust and defensible;
- e. **People:** To share with Executive Directors in ensuring that Freebridge has appropriate capacity and capability (HR) in place to meet its objectives.
- f. **Legal:** To act within constitutional and legal powers and satisfy yourself that Freebridge complies with all legal and statutory obligations, and that all regulatory requirements are met.
- g. **Personal Development:** To keep yourself up to date about the key challenges and risks faced by Freebridge, particularly in areas where you are able to contribute specialist expertise and experience. You should also involve yourself in discussing, agreeing and participating in Board development/training activities.
- h. **Representation:** To work to enhance the reputation, image and values of Freebridge at both internal and external events and ensure that any external communications and activities do not have the potential to harm the reputation of the organisation or bring its integrity into question.
- i. **Judgement:** To exercise independent judgement and reasonable care, skill and diligence, avoiding conflicts of interest..

2.2 In fulfilling their duties, Board members must have regard to:

- The likely consequences of any decision in the long term
- The interests of Freebridge's customers and employees
- The need to foster Freebridge's business relationships with business partners, suppliers, and other stakeholders
- The impact of Freebridge's operations on the community and the environment

- The desirability of Freebridge maintaining a reputation for high standards of business conduct
  - The need to act fairly
- 2.3 All Board members are expected to work with and through the Board. You are not expected to undertake executive duties or to take on executive responsibilities.
- 2.4 The Board as a whole is collectively responsible for ensuring and promoting the success of Freebridge and ensuring its compliance with all legal and regulatory obligations by directing and supervising Freebridge's affairs.
- 2.5 The Board and the Executive team will work together in a way that:
- Demonstrates mutual respect
  - Draws on their respective skills, knowledge and perspectives
  - Ensures sharing of information about Freebridge and the context in which it operates
  - Recognises the clear separation between governance and management roles and responsibilities
  - Enables an active and ongoing dialogue about the Freebridge's performance and future direction
  - Identifies opportunities and risks, maximises performance and enables learning and development
- 2.6 Board members are expected to allocate enough time to enable them to meet the requirements of the role. As well as attending meetings and training sessions, this includes reading papers before a meeting and contacting officers in advance of the meeting for further information. If a Board member is unable to attend a meeting, they should submit apologies in advance, either to the Chairman of the Board/Committee or to the Governance team.
- 2.7 A Board member who is going to be unable to attend Board meetings for a period of time must seek special leave of absence from the Board. Freebridge's Rules stipulated that a Board member will be removed from the Board if they have absented themselves from four consecutive Board meetings without special leave of absence.
- 2.7 The Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the Board and its standing committees will be provided with an additional role profile and expected to adhere to this

## **SECTION 3: INDUCTION, APPRAISAL AND TRAINING**

### **3.1 Induction**

All new Board members are required to take part in a formal induction.

### **3.2 Appraisal and Review**

The effectiveness and performance of the Board, its committees and individual members will be evaluated annually. Board members are required to attend and participate in all performance reviews related to individual performance as a Board member and performance on the Board as a whole. Individual training plans will be developed for each Board member following this process.

If a Board member has any concerns about their role, they should discuss this with the Chairman at the earliest opportunity, and not wait until their next appraisal.

### **3.3 Training**

Relevant training will be offered to Board members periodically. Board members are expected to commit to their own development by attending training events.

# SECTION 4: BOARD MEMBER EXPENSES AND ALLOWANCES

## 4.1 Loss of Earnings Scheme

### 4.1.1 General Principles

- Board members conduct business on behalf of Freebridge as unpaid volunteers and as such no payments will be made for carrying out their duties.
- It is recognised that while the role of Board member is unpaid, compensation should be offered for loss of earnings.

### 4.1.2 Compensation for Loss of Earnings

- It is recognised that Board members come to their role from diverse backgrounds. Dependant on their paid job and extent of time spent on Board activities, costs to the association could be significant.
- Payments will therefore be made to compensate members who find themselves “out of pocket” when carrying out Freebridge business through loss of earnings. Such payments are not a reward for carrying out Freebridge business; rather they are some compensation for any loss that members may have incurred.

### 4.1.3 Rates of Payment

- A flat rate payment of £50 per half day and evening will be paid (as at December 2010). Unless decided otherwise by the Board, the payment will be increased annually in line with the Retail Price Index (RPI).

### 4.1.4 Making a Claim

- Loss of earnings will be paid following submission of a signed declaration from board members that a loss has been incurred on the prescribed form. No other evidence will be required.
- Claims should be made within six months of the loss being incurred.

## 4.2 ICT Allowances

- 4.2.1 Freebridge will provide appropriate ICT equipment to any Board member that requests it, provided that it is used solely for work connected to their role as a Freebridge Board member.

4.2.2 For any Board member who wishes to use their own ICT equipment for Freebridge work, Freebridge will provide a £200 annual allowance towards the cost of hardware and a £250 annual allowance towards the cost of communications equipment (eg telephone line/broadband). The payment of each of these allowances is subject to the receipt of a signed application on the prescribed form, which must be made annually. No other evidence will be required.

4.2.3 The level of the allowances will be reviewed annually.

### 4.3 Other Expenses and Allowances

4.3.1 Freebridge will pay other expenses and allowances incurred by Board members in the course of their duties, as set out below (rates correct as at December 2010). Claims must be made on the prescribed form, duly signed.

#### 4.3.2 Travel

##### **Private Vehicles:**

Mileage rate of	40p
Plus for every passenger (max 4) for whom a travel allowance would otherwise be payable	5p

Overnight garaging (absence 24 hrs)	Actual cost (receipt required)
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Car parking	Actual cost (receipt required)
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##### **Public Transport**

Actual cost of second class fair (or first class fair only if approved in advance by the Board Chairman (or by the Board Vice-Chairman in the case of a claim by the Board Chairman). (Receipt/ticket required.)

<b>Motor Bike</b> – mileage rate	24p
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<b>Bicycle Allowance</b> – mileage rate	20p
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#### 4.3.3 Subsistence

For an absence exceeding four hours from the normal place of residence, allowances are payable as shown below and according to the appropriate period:

<b>Allowance</b>		£
Breakfast 4+ hours	- ending before 11am	6.24
Lunch	- including noon - 2pm	8.62
Tea	- including 3pm - 6pm	3.40
Dinner	- ending after 7pm	10.67

#### 4.3.4 Carer's Allowance (for child care or a dependant relative)

Minimum wage (locally determined) £5.93 per hour  
(Receipt required. Non payable to  
Relatives.)

4.3.5 Hotel/Accommodation

Actual cost payable (proof required)

4.3.6 Postage, Stationery and Telephone

Actual cost payable (proof required).

4.3.7 All of the rates listed in section 3.3 will be subject to annual review.

4.3.8 Claims should be made within six months of the expense being incurred.

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# SECTION 5: MEDIA PROTOCOL

## Introduction

This protocol outlines:-

- the procedure to be followed when making pro-active approaches to the media.
- the action that must be taken where enquiries are received from the media or from any other organisation seeking information which is going to be published in the public domain.

Communications and marketing help Freebridge Community Housing to achieve its business objectives, ensure that it is open and accountable, and manage its reputation.

## Contacting/Responding to the Media

### Media Releases:

Media releases/statements may only be issued if they have been agreed by a member of the Executive Team or the Board Chairman, Board Vice-Chairman or the relevant Committee Chairman. Sign-off will also need to be given by the relevant Assistant Director, or member of their team, who has provided the details of the story. Partner approval will also need to be gained for any media release which is produced about joint projects and schemes. Any media release/statement that attributes a quote to an individual should not be released without that individual's agreement. All pro-active media releases/statements should only be produced and issued by the Communications and Customer Engagement Team.

### Responding to Media Enquiries:

The following have authority to act as Freebridge spokespeople in media interview: members of the Executive Team or the Board Chairman.. In certain circumstances, the Chief Executive may authorise another officer to respond to media enquiries, but only after the response has been agreed by one of those listed.

All media enquiries should be diverted to the Assistant Director of Communications and Customer Engagement who will gather the details of the journalist's request before determining the response from Freebridge. This may be a written quote or statement or telephone or broadcast interview with one of the spokespeople.

If another employee/Board member is approached by the media, he/she should not attempt to respond, but should refer the matter to the Assistant Director of Communications and Customer Engagement.. It should be noted that a Board member's contact details should not be released outside Freebridge without the permission of that Board member.

The Chief Executive's office should be informed of all responses to the media.

In the interests of maintaining good relationships with the media, those responding to media enquiries should bear in mind that journalists are often working to tight deadlines, and should attempt to provide the response at the earliest opportunity unless the journalist has indicated that there is no urgency.

## **Situations Where it is Not Clear if a Caller is a Journalist**

Some journalists may try to elicit comments on issues from staff/Board members without declaring their journalistic interest. Any member of staff/Board member finding themselves in a position where they believe they may inadvertently have been talking to a journalist should contact the Assistant Director of Communications and Customer Engagement immediately and give as much detail about the conversation as possible. Contact details should always be requested from a caller so that follow-up actions can be taken.

## **Newsworthy Items**

Any member of staff/Board member who is aware of a potentially newsworthy item, either positive or negative, should get in touch with the Communications and Customer Engagement team who will follow the story up.

## **Out of Hours**

Where any member of staff or Board Member is contacted by a media representative out-of-hours, the Assistant Director of Communications and Customer Engagement should be contacted on 07824 894208 or 07834 578872 who will liaise with the Executive Team in formulating a response. If the Assistant Director of Communications and Customer Engagement is unavailable, the Chief Executive should be contacted on 07769 643281.

## **SECTION 6: MISCELLANEOUS**

### **6.1 Insurance**

Freebridge has officers' liability insurance in place that covers all non-executive Board members. A copy of the policy document will be supplied to all Board members. Board members must bring any potential claim under this policy to the attention of the Company Secretary immediately that they become aware of it.

### **6.2 Data Protection**

By signing this agreement, Board members are consenting to the processing of their personal data for use to support their duties as a Board member. Board members' details will be retained until one year after Board membership ends. Board Members' names and addresses will also be entered into the statutory Register of Officers and Duplicate Registers of Officers. For further information, contact the Company Secretary (01553 667754) or the Data Protection Officer via the Freebridge ICT Servicedesk (01553 667800).

## SECTION 7: NOTICE AND TERMINATION

- 7.1 Any Board member who is considering resigning from the Board, or has any concerns about their ongoing commitment to the Board, should discuss this with the Chairman or the Company Secretary.
- 7.2 A Board member who wishes to resign from the Board should give four weeks' notice of their intention to do so, in writing to either the Chairman or the Company Secretary.
- 7.3 Section D7 of Freebridge's Rules states:

"No one can become or remain a board member at any time if:

D7.1 they are bankrupt or subject to an agreement with their creditors; or

D7.2 they have been convicted of an indictable offence within the last five years or any other offence which in the opinion of the board brings the association into disrepute or which is not considered by the board to be compatible with the role of board member and the board resolves (by a two thirds majority) that they should be removed; or

D7.3 they have absented themselves from four consecutive meetings of the board without special leave of absence; or

D7.4 he is, or may be, suffering from Mental Disorder (as defined by Section 1 The Mental Health Act 1983 (as amended)) and either:-

(i) he is admitted to hospital in pursuance of an application for admission for treatment under the Mental Health Act 1983 or, in Scotland, an application for admission under the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1960;

(ii) an order is made by a court having jurisdiction (whether in the United Kingdom or elsewhere) in matters concerning mental disorder for his detention or for the appointment of a receiver, curator bonis or other person to exercise powers with respect to his property or affairs; or

(iii) in the opinion of a registered medical practitioner he is suffering from a mental disorder by reason of which he is incapable of carrying out the duties of a board;

D7.5 an employee and their employment with the association is terminated for any reason,

D7.6 they are a tenant board member and they cease to be a tenant; or

D7.7 they are an independent board member and they become a tenant or a local authority person; or

D7.8 the number of board members who are local authority persons exceeds the limit in rule D2.3. When such limit is exceeded, the board member who has most recently become a local authority person shall immediately cease to be a board member, but a board member nominated by the council member shall cease to be a board member after all other local authority persons have ceased to be board members;

and any board member who at any time ceases to qualify under this rule shall immediately cease to be a board member.”

Any Board member who becomes aware that they fall into any of the categories above must immediately inform the Chairman or the Company Secretary.

- 7.4 Other situations whereby a Board member ceases to be a Board member are set out in Freebridge’s Rules, the Board Member Conduct Issues Policy, and the Board Membership and Recruitment Policy.
- 7.5 When a Board member ceases to be a Board member for any reason, they must immediately resign from all of the positions that they held as a Board member, including any other organisations where they represented Freebridge.
- 7.6 Independent Board members will cease to be shareholders of Freebridge at the point at which they cease to be Board members.
- 7.7 On ceasing office, Board members must return to the Company Secretary any property or documents provided to them by Freebridge in relation to their duties as a Board member.

**FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING**

**ROLE PROFILE**

**BOARD CHAIRMAN**

**Reproduced from Standing Order 5**

1. To ensure the efficient conduct of the Board's business and of the Association's general meetings.
2. To ensure that the organisation provides appropriate role profiles and competency frameworks for all Board members.
3. To ensure that all Board Members are given the opportunity to express their views, and that appropriate standards of conduct and behaviour are maintained in accordance with the code of conduct approved by the Board.
4. To establish a constructive working relationship with, and provide support for, the Association's Chief Executive, and ensure that the Board as a whole acts in partnership with the Executive Directors.
5. To ensure that the Board delegates sufficient authority to its Committees, the Chairman, the Association's Chief Executive and others to enable the business of the Association to be carried out effectively between meetings of the Board; and also to ensure that the Board monitors the use of these delegated powers.
6. To ensure that the Board receives professional advice when it is needed, either from its staff or from external sources.
7. To ensure that the Association follows the recommendations of the National Housing Federation Code of Governance 2009 – "Excellence in Governance – Code for Members".
8. To represent the Association as appropriate.
9. To take decisions delegated to the Chairman.
10. In consultation with the Resources and Risk Committee, to ensure that proper arrangements are in place to appraise the performance of the Chief Executive and to determine the remuneration of the Chief Executive and Executive Directors.
11. To ensure, when necessary, that the Chief Executive is replaced in a timely and orderly fashion.
12. To lead on the appraisal process to ensure proper and appropriate arrangements for the overall Board appraisal and that of individual Board members, including the Chairman and Vice-Chairman.

13. To implement a succession plan for future Board membership.
14. To ensure that the level of any agreed Board member remuneration results from an approved process that minimises the potential for conflicts of interest.
15. To ensure that the Board agrees the role of the Vice-Chairman.

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**FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING**

**ROLE PROFILE**

**BOARD VICE-CHAIRMAN**

1. To support the Chairman of the Board in his/her role (attached).
2. To undertake the role of the Board Chairman in their absence, including the signing of documents.
3. To carry out the Board Chairman's appraisal.

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## **FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING**

### **ROLE PROFILE**

#### **CHAIRMAN OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE**

1. To provide leadership and direction to the Committee, ensuring that it fulfils its responsibilities effectively.
2. To prepare thoroughly before chairing meetings of the Committee.
3. To manage meetings of the Committee effectively, ensuring that the style and tone of discussions promote effective decision-making and constructive debate.
4. To establish effective working relationships with the Executive Director (Resources), other senior staff involved in the work of the Committee, the Internal Auditor and the External Auditor.
5. To promote effective relationships and open communication between the Committee members and the Management Team.
6. To ensure effective communication between the Board and the Committee, and, in particular, to ensure that the Board is made aware of any recommendation from the Committee or of any issue that the Committee wishes to raise with the Board.
7. On an annual basis, to prepare a formal report to the Board on the work of the Committee.
8. If he/she sees fit, to exercise the right to report to the External Auditor (and where necessary to external regulatory bodies) any decision of the Board which has overridden a decision of a Committee, after discussion at a Board meeting about this proposed course of action.
9. If he/she sees fit, to exercise the right to access paid legal advice from the organisations appointed or usual legal advisers.
10. To promote and uphold the highest standards of integrity, probity and behaviour in the work of the Committee.

## **FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING**

### **ROLE PROFILE**

#### **CHAIRMAN OF THE RESOURCES AND RISK COMMITTEE**

1. To provide leadership and direction to the Committee, ensuring that it fulfils its responsibilities effectively.
2. To prepare thoroughly before chairing meetings of the Committee.
3. To manage meetings of the Committee effectively, ensuring that the style and tone of discussions promote effective decision-making and constructive debate.
4. To establish effective working relationships with the Executive Director (Resources) and other senior staff involved in the work of the Committee.
5. To promote effective relationships and open communication between the Committee members and the Management Team.
6. To ensure effective communication between the Board and the Committee, and, in particular, to ensure that the Board is made aware of any recommendation from the Committee or of any issue that the Committee wishes to raise with the Board.
7. To chair meetings of the Chief Executive's Appraisal Panel.
8. To respond promptly to delegated decisions requiring consultation with the Chairman of the Resources and Risk Committee.
9. To promote and uphold the highest standards of integrity, probity and behaviour in the work of the Committee.

## **FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING**

### **ROLE PROFILE**

#### **CHAIRMAN OF THE OPERATIONS COMMITTEE**

1. To provide leadership and direction to the Committee, ensuring that it fulfils its responsibilities effectively.
2. To prepare thoroughly before chairing meetings of the Committee.
3. To manage meetings of the Committee effectively, ensuring that the style and tone of discussions promote effective decision-making and constructive debate.
4. To establish effective working relationships with the Executive Director (Operations) and other senior staff involved in the work of the Committee.
5. To promote effective relationships and open communication between the Committee members and the Management Team.
6. To ensure effective communication between the Board and the Committee, and, in particular, to ensure that the Board is made aware of any recommendation from the Committee or of any issue that the Committee wishes to raise with the Board.
7. To promote and uphold the highest standards of integrity, probity and behaviour in the work of the Committee.

**FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING**

**ROLE PROFILE**

**COMMITTEE VICE-CHAIRMEN**

1. To support the Chairman of the Committee in his/her role (attached).
2. To undertake the role of the Committee Chairman in their absence, including the signing of documents.

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**FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING**

**BOARD MEMBER AGREEMENT**

**SIGNATURE SHEET**

I hereby confirm that I have received, read and understood the Freebridge Community Housing Board Member Agreement, and that I will fully adhere to its contents.

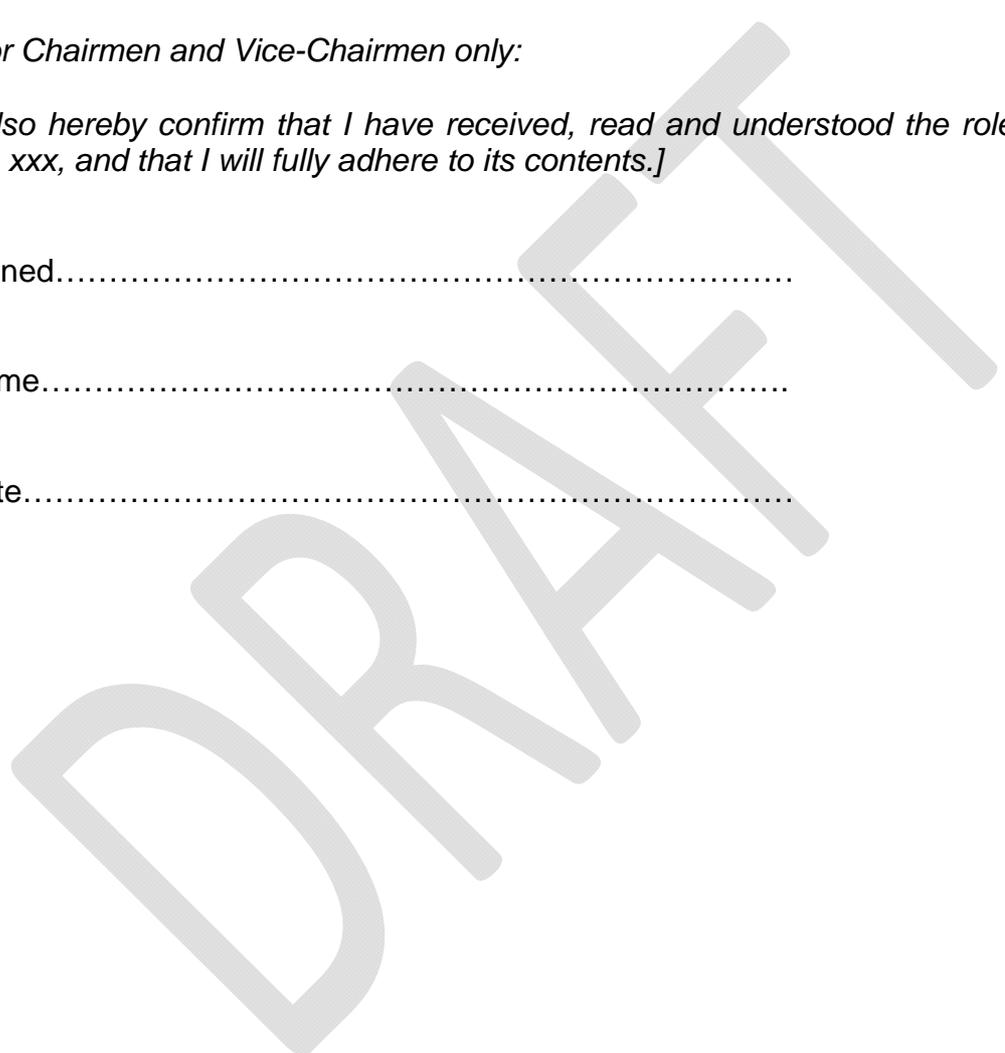
*[For Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen only:*

*I also hereby confirm that I have received, read and understood the role profile for the xxx, and that I will fully adhere to its contents.]*

Signed.....

Name.....

Date.....



Objective 4 – Fit For Purpose



Policy 4f Board Membership, <del>and Recruitment</del> and Succession			
Last Reviewed	Dec 09	Next Review	Dec 11
Responsible Officer	Chief Executive		

**Policy statement**

Freebridge Community Housing (FCH) aims to ensure that its affairs are managed and directed by a Board which has members offering the widest possible range of relevant skills and experience and which also is accountable to and representative of the tenants and the wider community in which FCH operates.

This policy should be read in conjunction with Standing Order 3 – Terms of Reference of the Board, the FCH Rules, Part D dealing with details of the Board’s responsibilities and membership succession, and also the Tenant Board Member Recruitment and Succession Policy.

**Our Commitment**

We will aim to ensure that Board members collectively possess the qualities and skills to take decisions and monitor performance. FCH will seek to ensure that they have experience and understanding of most or all of the following if they are to discharge their responsibilities effectively:

- a) The housing needs to be met by FCH;
- b) General business skills, including the management of staff and property,
- c) Finance;
- d) Other relevant or specialist skills, such as commercial, investment, risk management, legal, health, social services, property management, housing development and building, public relations, marketing, and information technology;
- e) Direct knowledge of the needs and aspirations of the communities and people served by FCH, including equal opportunities;
- f) Working with local authorities and other public sector agencies;
- g) Strategic management and planning in a public or private body;
- h) Leadership and working as an effective team;
- i) Knowledge of the external framework as it affects FCH, including financial markets, political imperatives and operating environment;

- j) Effective communication skills and an ability to focus on key issues facing the organisation;
- k) The ability to foster a culture that enhances commitment, enthusiasm and excellent performance from the staff.

## **Our approach**

### Annual Review and Performance Appraisal

The Board will undertake an annual review and performance appraisal, which will:

- a) identify the Board's ability to scan the operating environment, think strategically and adapt as necessary;
- b) review how well the Board performs its key roles and how successful it has been;
- c) review the effectiveness of Board relationships and its role as a team;
- d) assess how the Board is viewed by key contacts, eg regulators, investors, local authorities, tenant groups, etc
- e) review the composition of the Board, the skills and contribution of its individual members;
- f) review the organisation's ability to recruit and retain the balance of Board members it needs, [and assess any current or imminent skills gaps](#);
- g) take an overview the breakdown of Board membership in terms of each diversity strand, including the Black and Minority Ethnic lettings target adopted annually by the Board, and consider whether there are any options to recruit under-represented groups;
- h) assess the effectiveness of Board processes, including its accountability;
- i) assess the level and quality of the information the Board receives;
- j) review the training and development needs of individual Board members as well as the Board as a whole;
- k) include the assessment of the Chair and the Vice-Chair;
- l) result in a clear plan to support continuous improvement of the Board to meet the challenges faced by the organisation;
- m) address whether the Board provides enough support, scrutiny and challenge to the senior team; and
- n) review the performance and effectiveness of each of the Board's standing committees.

The annual review and performance appraisal process will be carried out through an independent third party.

### Recruitment

- a) The Board will ensure that new members are recruited or elected on a continuous basis either to fill existing vacancies. Co-option may be used where there is a need for specific skills. Regard will be held to the Rules relating to tenant and council nominated representatives.
- b) The annual review and appraisal process will inform each recruitment exercise in terms of skills/diversity gaps on the Board.
- c) Every effort will be made to attract a strong pool of candidates for Independent Board membership, maximising the use of widely available media.
- d) All prospective new Independent members will be formally considered for membership by the Board or by a Committee appointed by the Board.
- e) A nominations protocol will be sought with the Borough Council, whereby the Borough Council would agree to take into account skills gaps and diversity when appointing a new Council nominated Board member. See also the Tenant Board Member Recruitment and Succession Policy and Equal Opportunities Policy.
- f) Vacancies for Tenant Board members will be advertised to all tenants. Applications will be shortlisted by a panel of Board members, which will include at least one Tenant Board member. The panel will then interview the shortlisted applicants. The panel will seek to select more applicants from the interview process than there are vacancies. The selected applicants will then be put forward to a ballot of all tenants, which will determine which applicant(s) assumes Board membership.
- g) All applicants for Board membership will be asked to complete a declaration of interest form before they are appointed to the Board, so that any potential interests can be identified. An appointment will not be made if the declaration reveals an actual or potential serious or continuing conflict.

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### Training

- a) A Board Induction Programme will be provided for all new Board members.
- b) On-going training will be provided. Members will be able to attend appropriate conferences and training events.
- c) Following the Board's annual review and performance appraisal, training needs will be identified for the Board as a whole and for individual Board members.

### Executive

Members of the FCH Executive will not sit on the FCH Board.

### Other Housing Providers

The Board at all times will be aware of potential conflicts of interest and will use its policies to manage this; however, no more than three members of staff or Board members of other housing providers may be FCH Board members, with a maximum of one from any such organisation.

### Board Member Agreement

All Board members will be required to sign a Board Member Agreement. The Agreement will be approved by the Board and reviewed every two years. It will include a Board member role profile and competency framework.

### Maximum Period of Board Service

The maximum period of Board service for each Board member will be no more than nine years.

## **Monitoring and reporting**

The Board will receive a report on the outcomes of the annual review and performance appraisal process.

Monitoring will take place through ~~Tenant Services Authority Assessment~~ [the regulator's assessment](#) and the [Board's](#) annual self-assessment exercise ~~against the Regulatory Code~~.

Equality and diversity issues for the Board will be considered as part of the annual review and performance appraisal process.

This Policy will be reviewed every two years.

## **Action Plan**

We will achieve our policy statement and commitments through the following key actions:

<b>Area</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>When By</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
Board annual review and performance appraisal	Arrange	Oct 2010 and Oct 2011	Jo Whaley/Angus MacQueen, Governance
Board recruitment processes	Administer and support	Sept 2010 and Sept 2011	Jo Whaley/Angus MacQueen, Governance
Board	Review	Mar 2010	Jo Whaley/Angus

Member Agreement			MacQueen, Governance
Board Induction	Undertake	Oct 2010 and Oct 2011	Jo Whaley/Angus MacQueen, Governance
Board training	Arrange and monitor	Ongoing	Jo Whaley/Angus MacQueen, Governance
Nominations Protocol with Borough Council	Develop	Summer 2010	Tony Hall, Chief Executive
Equalities Impact Assessment	Undertake	Jan 2010	Jo Whaley, AD HR and Governance

<b>Objective 4 Fit For Purpose</b>			
			
<b>Policy 4I Board Member Conduct Issues</b>			
<b>Last Reviewed</b>	<b>Oct 2010</b>	<b>Next Review</b>	<b>Oct 2012</b>
<b>Responsible Officer</b>	<b>Chief Executive</b>		

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## 1. Policy Statement

This Policy sets out the procedure which the Board must follow before exercising its power under the Constitution to deal with issues of conduct amongst Board Members and the ultimate power to remove a Board Member by a 75% resolution.

## 2. Strategy

### 2.1 Constitution and Principles

The Board have the power under the Rules to remove a Board Member by a resolution of at least three quarters of all the other Board Members.

The Board is ultimately responsible for the Company, especially in regard to governance issues. Good governance can on occasion be undermined by an individual Board Member. Removal is an essential sanction.

### 2.2 Procedure for Removing Board Members under the Rules

2.2.1 The Board must follow the following procedure (to the extent applicable) before exercising its power under the Rules to remove a Board Member.

2.2.2 The Chairman (or either in his or her absence or where the issue concerns the Chairman, then the Vice-Chairman) will be notified that there is an issue concerning a Board Member. This will usually be because of a breach of the Code of Conduct or some other act or omission which is not in keeping with the individual's holding office as a Board Member. (If the issue concerns both the Board Chairman and Vice-Chairman, or it is not felt appropriate for some other reason to notify one of these individuals in the first instance, the Company Secretary will be notified.)

2.2.3 An agenda item will be included for the next Board meeting (which may be a special Board meeting called for this purpose) to discuss whether or not there is a case to answer, and if so, to authorise the procedure to be followed. - It will normally be appropriate to exclude the Board Member from this part of the meeting but it will be made clear that the Board Member will be given a chance to respond at a later date. The Board may suspend the Board member from Board membership for such time until the conclusion of the investigation as it believes this to be in the interests of the Association

and/or of the individual concerned. Such a suspension would require a resolution of at least three quarters of all the other Board Members.

- 2.2.4 A sub-committee will be established with terms of reference agreed by the Board as to how the issue is to be dealt with.
- 2.2.5 A senior officer of Freebridge Community Housing or an independent third party will be delegated the task of investigating the facts.
- 2.2.6 The sub-committee will consider the facts and any submission made by the Board Member. It is expected that the sub-committee should meet within 20 working days of the board meeting referred to in Paragraph 2.2.3. In particular, at this stage the Board Member should receive notice of all accusations made and where practicable the sources of these accusations
- 2.2.7 The sub-committee will make a recommendation to the Board. This could be a simple warning or requirement for an apology, or a recommendation for removal from the Board. The Board expects that if a recommendation for removal from the Board is made then the Board Member concerned will resign. Examples of conduct that could result in a recommendation for removal include, but are not exclusively limited to, serious acts of dishonesty or deception, bullying or harassment, [withholding information or providing misleading information about interests](#), conduct that could bring the Association into disrepute, and failure to observe confidentiality either in relation to the Association's business affairs or in matters concerning individuals.
- 2.2.8 The Board will consider any recommendation and any submission made by the Board Member. The Board Member will be entitled to attend and speak at that Board meeting.
- 2.2.9 The Board meeting will then be closed and the Board Member asked to leave at that point. The Board will then decide whether to remove the Board Member. The Rules require at least 75% of the other Board Members to agree.
- 2.2.10 If the Board Member is to be removed, they will then receive the notice together with reasons for their removal and the Secretary will update the statutory books accordingly.

### **3. Future Board Members**

**3.1** [The procedure set out in this Policy may also be used in relation to concerns about the conduct of an individual nominated to the Board but who has yet to take up their position on the Board. The Board may take proportionate and appropriate action as it sees fit in these circumstances, including, as an ultimate sanction, refusal to accept the individual onto the Board. Such a refusal would require a 75% resolution.](#)

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### **3.4. Copies**

Copies of this Policy will be made available to the Council, tenants and members of the public on receipt of a written request sent to the registered office of Freebridge Community Housing. The Policy will also be published on the Association's website.

## Freebridge Community Housing

## Report to the Board

<b>Author</b>	Tony Hall Chief Executive	<b>Report Type</b>		<b>Impact</b>		
<b>Related Work Ref.</b>		<b>For Decision</b>		<b>High</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Low</b>
		<b>For Information</b>	√		√	
<b>Consultation</b>	Management Team					

**Meeting Date:** 6<sup>th</sup> December 2010

**Report Title:** Business Plan 2010/11 - Second Quarter Update

<b>Purpose:</b> To present the 2010/11 Business Plan second quarter update.
<b>Policy/Strategy Implications:</b> None as a result of recommendation in this report
<b>Finance and VFM Implications:</b> None as a result of recommendation in this report
<b>Customer Care/Equality and Diversity Implications:</b> None as a result of recommendation in this report
<b>Risk Assessment (cross-reference with FCH Risk Map):</b> The risk map was used as one of the reference points for the development of the original plan.
<p><b>1.1</b> Governance Framework – Board direction not implemented, Impact Critical, Likelihood High. Regular reporting of progress against the Plan will help reduce the risk.</p>
<p><b>Recommendations:</b> It is recommended that the Board:</p> <p>(i) Note the 2010/2011 Business Plan - second quarter update.</p>

## 1. Background

- 1.1 The 2010/11 Business Plan second quarter update is set out at Appendix 1. Each action has been assessed with a RAG indicator and where appropriate there is commentary from the responsible officer.

VISION	2010/11	Status	Responsibility & Timescale	Comments
<b>1. Growth</b>				
<b>1.1 Developed balanced tenure portfolio in and around West Norfolk</b>	1.1.1 Alignment of development plans with sub-regional priorities/risk/submarkets	<b>A</b>	Tony Hall Ongoing	Continue to monitor national policy development. Focus now on the consultation paper "Fairer Homes".
<b>1.2 To deliver a sustainable new build programme</b>	1.2.1 Implement and review annual development plan	<b>A</b>	Stuart Mansell	12 units at Great Masingham scheduled completion for February 2011 -completed November 2010. Wisbech Rd and Fernlea Rd not approved by HCA.
<b>1.3 Completed Asset Management Review - identifying all possible development sites within existing land holding and implementation plans</b>	1.3.1 Review assets for development potential or disposal and prioritise	<b>A</b>	Stuart Mansell August 2010 March 2011	
<b>1.4 To establish a land bank to support development plans</b>	1.4.1 Identify sites for acquisition	<b>A</b>	Stuart Mansell Ongoing	2 Chapel Lane acquired November 2010.
<b>1.5 Strategy in place for merger, acquisitions and partnerships</b>	1.5.1 Research and review successful implementation of completed mergers.	<b>A</b>	Tony Hall March 2011	
<b>1.6 Increase the supply of affordable housing under new management</b>	1.6.1 Explore options to increase supply and identify most viable opportunities	<b>A</b>	Executive Ongoing	Discussions being pursued with a number of partners.

Business Plan 2010/11 - 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter Update September 2010

VISION	2010/11	Status	Responsibility & Timescale	Comments
<b>2. EMPOWERING TENANTS</b>				
<b>2.1 Fully developed empowerment framework with meaningful opportunities for customers to be involved as individuals and representative groups at all levels</b>	2.1.1 Complete Tenant Empowerment Service Review	A	Michelle Playford March 2011	
	2.1.2 Identify options for tenant scrutiny and implement	A	Michelle Playford April 2011	
	2.1.3 Develop structure for opportunities for customer involvement on individual and collective basis	A	Executive April 2011	Revised Tenant Engagement Service Review and development of Scrutiny and Improvement Panel link to 2.2.1.
	2.1.4 Identify partner to assist in the delivery of Tenant Empowerment training.	A	Michelle Playford Ongoing	
<b>2.2 A clear and transparent mechanism in place for tenant involvement to improve service delivery</b>	2.2.1 Establish a tenant panel to monitor service improvement	A	Executive April 2011	See comment on 2.1.3.

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VISION	2010/11	Status	Responsibility & Timescale	Comments
<b>3. FINANCIALLY SOUND</b>				
<b>3.1 Operating within Funding Covenants/ Requirements</b>	3.1.1 Compliance with funding covenants	<b>G</b>	Malcolm Fry March 2011	Still complying - forecast to comply by March 2010.
<b>3.2 Financially out-performed, transfer Financial Plan by £1m</b>	3.2.1 £0.33m out performance	<b>G</b>	Malcolm Fry March 2011	
<b>3.3 Financial capacity for the future plans</b>	3.3.1 Review funding options	<b>G</b>	Sean Kent September 2010	Ongoing.
	3.3.2 Explore opportunities to increase financial capacity	<b>A</b>	Sean Kent September 2010	Met with funders. Financial markets remain light.
<b>3.4 Overall core cost - basic average for LSVT's - more spent on 'front line' services, less on 'support'</b>	3.4.1 Efficiencies targeted in Service Reviews and Operational Plans	<b>A</b>	Malcolm Fry <del>June 2010</del> November - December 2010	Only one Service Review completed, benchmarking report to be analysed.
<b>3.5 Property Services operating at a surplus and winning external work</b>	3.5.1 Property Services in surplus for year	<b>A</b>	Colin Davison March 2011	
	3.5.2 Planning for winning external work - Market analysis Capacity Planning and annual plan.	<b>A</b>	Colin Davison March 2011	Areas of external work being reviewed and advice being obtained tax implications for growth.
<b>3.6 £5.5M VAT money allocated to specific plans</b>	3.6.1 £2.0m VAT contribution	<b>A</b>	Executive March 2011	Likely recovery this year £0.7m due to DHP under-spend.

Business Plan 2010/11 - 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter Update September 2010

VISION	2010/11	Status	Responsibility & Timescale	Comments
<b>4. FIT FOR PURPOSE</b>				
<b>4.1 Business– infrastructure fully aligned to future plans</b>	4.1.1 <i>Key initiative:</i> Investigate options for introduction of Customer Contact Centre and implement	<b>A</b>	Abigail Ellis November 2010	Phased takeover of full role and task by appointed staff will take place through beginning of December with go live from 13 <sup>th</sup> December.
	4.1.2 Sheltered Housing Service Charge Review and implementation	<b>G</b>	Abigail Ellis	Previous phase complete. Consultation of existing sheltered tenants until 31 <sup>st</sup> March. For phasing in over next 6 years.
	4.1.3 Prepare for short notice inspection.	<b>A</b>	Executive Ongoing	
<b>4.2 Upper quartile/Beacon Performance (quality/cost/ volume) across key processes</b>	4.2.1 <i>Key initiative:</i> Implement Performance Management Strategy including training	<b>A</b>	Sean Kent Ongoing	
<b>4.3 Asset Management Strategy fully implemented</b>	4.3.1 Commission stock condition survey with external validation	<b>A</b>	Stuart Mansell January 2011	Savills completed survey September 2010. Final report December 2010.
<b>4.4 ICT/Systems capacity aligned to current and future needs</b>	4.4.1 Website Phase 2b (Content Management) developed	<b>G</b>	Dave Clements August 2010	Completed - Website moved to hosted solution only.
	4.4.2 Electronic Document Management Phase 1 planned and implemented	<b>G</b>	Dave Clements September 2010	Preferred supplier appointed. POP/PIP system being tested with user training planned for October 2010. Planning for wider EDM roll out to follow.

**Business Plan 2010/11 - 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter Update September 2010**

<b>VISION</b>	<b>2010/11</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Responsibility &amp; Timescale</b>	<b>Comments</b>
	4.4.3 Asset Management database operational	<b>G</b>	Dave Clements October 2010	Requirements being reviewed with AD of Assets.
<b>4.5 Health &amp; Safety fully embedded, mainstreamed and promoted within the organisation</b>	4.5.1 Develop and deliver annual Health & Safety Plan	<b>G</b>	Jo Whaley Development – April 2010, re-schedule August 2010 Delivery – March 2011	Plan developed, agreed by MT and Board. (Appendix to revised H&S Policy).
<b>4.6 Embedded culture to support future plans</b>	4.6.1 Develop, agree and communicate behaviours that embed the values	<b>G</b>	Jo Whaley April 2010	Currently developing values competency framework to better embed required behaviours. Staff consultation phase currently - roll out by December 2010.
<b>4.7 Effective Governance Structure</b>	4.7.1 Implement Governance improvement plan	<b>G</b>	Tony Hall December 2010	Outcome from Governance Working Group Board Report 6 <sup>th</sup> December.
	4.7.2 Assess compliance with TSA new regulatory framework	<b>G</b>	Executive	TSA Regulatory Judgement January 2011.
<b>4.8 Effective Communicator to external Stakeholders</b>	4.8.1 Agree and implement Communications Strategy	<b>G</b>	Michelle Playford Ongoing	

Business Plan 2010/11 - 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter Update September 2010

VISION	2010/11	Status	Responsibility & Timescale	Comments
<b>5. INVESTING IN PEOPLE</b>				
<b>5.1 High calibre people want to work for and stay with Freebridge</b>	5.1.1 Review flexible working arrangements including Home Working	<b>G</b>	Jo Whaley – March 2011	
	5.1.2 Review Organisational Development Strategy	<b>G</b>	Sean Kent/Jo Whaley March 2011	Elements of organisational development strategy included in revised HR Policy – went to the Board September 2010.
<b>5.2 Effective/visionary leadership within the organisation and wider sector</b>	5.2.1 Coaching and mentoring approach developed	<b>G</b>	Jo Whaley – March 2011	All AD's to have attended ILM course by January 2011.
<b>5.3 A workforce representative of the community we serve, and of an organisational culture which values diversity and offers equality of opportunity</b>	5.3.1 E&D refresher training linked to Customer care	<b>G</b>	Jo Whaley – March 2011	
<b>5.4 Values embedded and lived</b>	5.4.1 Develop Staff Charter	<b>A</b>	Jo Whaley – June 2010 re-schedule December 2010	On hold pending development of values framework which will form part of staff charter.
<b>5.5 Principles of IIP embedded (IIP accredited)</b>	5.5.1 Self Assessment for accreditation and action plan	<b>G</b>	Jo Whaley – March 2011	
<b>5.6 Effective channels of communication throughout the organisation</b>	<b>Target 75% satisfaction</b> 5.6.1 Implement internal Communication Strategy	<b>G</b>	Jo Whaley – Sept 2010  Split between Jo Whaley and Michelle Playford – December 2010	Satisfaction level of 81% achieved. Further analysis of results being undertaken for action plan. JW and MP working together on this.

Business Plan 2010/11 - 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter Update September 2010

VISION	2010/11	Status	Responsibility & Timescale	Comments
5.7 Implemented competitive Remuneration Policy - rewarding staff according to their performance and contribution to the business	5.7.1 Revised pay and benefits package rolled out	G	Jo Whaley March 2011	Relates to PSD only – now completed.
	5.7.2 New appraisals for PSD	A	Colin Davison/Jo Whaley <del>June 2010</del> October 2010	Feedback being given to operatives on performance under new pay system. HR and PSD managers currently rolling-out appraisal.
	5.7.3 New Remuneration Strategy agreed and implementation begun	G	Jo Whaley – staged process	AD's considering funding options for proposed new strategy at budget review Oct 10. Following Executive agreement of new strategy, Union consultation and R&R Committee review November 2010.
<b>6. REGENERATING THROUGH PARTNERSHIP</b>				
6.1 A key partner in community development activities to build community capacity	6.1.1 Targeted networking	G	Executive Team Ongoing	
	6.1.2 Agree and implement Community Development Plan	A	Robert Clarke March 2010	Pilot rural project has started in Monk's Close – August 2010.
	6.1.3 Support key local initiatives	G	Robert Clarke Ongoing	Local initiatives continue to be supported.
6.2 Delivering homes within sustainable communities and developing skills, capacity and employment opportunities through effective partnerships	6.2.1 Establish project framework for the redesign of Hillington Square	G	Tony Hall Ongoing - Key Milestones to be established by September 2010	'Vision' Report to the Board 6 <sup>th</sup> December 2010.
	6.2.2 Secure 8 new training places and jobs	A	Stuart Mansell Ongoing	
6.3 Completed the Decent Homes Programme and agreed 'Decent Homes Plus'	6.3.1 Delivery in accordance with all targets	G	Stuart Mansell September 2012	

Business Plan 2010/11 - 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter Update September 2010

VISION	2010/11	Status	Responsibility & Timescale	Comments
<b>7. RESPONSIVE LANDLORD</b>				
7.1 Doing the 'Basics' very well	7.1.2 Complete Sheltered Housing Service Review	A	Jan Mitchell Due for completion late 2010	Two of the three elements, alarm upgrades and adaptations, have been completed – the third, sheltered housing, to be completed by end 2010.
	7.1.2 Asset Management Review	A	Stuart Mansell	Ongoing
7.2 Upper quartile on 'customer satisfaction with opportunities for involvement'.	<b>Target 85% customer satisfaction</b>	G	Tony Hall/Executive	
7.3 Deliver personalised customer care	7.3.1 <i>Key initiative:</i> To agree and implement a customer care strategy	G	Tony Hall Mary Gober Pilot March 2010	Full programme completed. Coaching programme completed. Contractors' Seminar 1 <sup>st</sup> December. Management Cascade training last phase scheduled for 15 <sup>th</sup> December.
	7.3.2 Develop local service standards	G	Robert Clarke March 2011	
	7.3.3 Customer care and complaint handling training.	G	Tony Hall/Abigail Ellis	Customer Care training incorporated into Mary Gober Customer Excellence programme now rolled out to all staff. Review of Complaints System April 2011.

## Freebridge Community Housing

## Report to the Board

<b>Author</b>	Darren Hudson – Accountant & Performance Accountant	<b>Report Type</b>		<b>Impact</b>		
<b>Related Work Ref.</b>		<b>For Decision</b>		<b>High</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Low</b>
		<b>For Information</b>	√		√	
<b>Consultation</b>	Executive Director (Resources), Assistant Director of Finance.					

**Meeting Date:** 6 December 2010

**Report Title:** Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report

**Purpose:**

To provide the Board with performance information to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2010.

**Policy/Strategy Implications:**

None

**Finance and VFM Implications:**

None as a direct consequence of this report.

**Customer Care/Equality and Diversity Implications:**

Performance monitoring is essential to maximising customer care.

**Risk Assessment (cross-reference with FCH Risk Map):**

2.5 Poor Income and Benefit Collection: Likelihood - low; Impact - critical

4.3 Incorrect balance of responsive and planned maintenance/Increase in demand for responsive maintenance: Likelihood – significant; Impact - critical

4.7 Fuel Servicing – Gas/Oil/Solid: Likelihood – low; Impact - critical

**Recommendations:** It is recommended that the Board:

- (i) Notes the information in and attached to this report.

Attached are the Performance Reports to provide the Board with an overall strategic view of Freebridge's performance as at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2010.

Appendices 1 & 2 detail how performance compares with previous years and with sector benchmarks. Both reports focus on the relevant business indicators that will enable the Board to have a strategic overview of performance. The intention of the report is to enable the Board to

monitor more effectively and prioritise areas of the business for improvement and by focusing on a smaller volume of information a better interpretation can be made.

#### Appendix 1 – Monthly Performance Reporting.

This report focuses on the last three months of performance to highlight current trends and a year to date figure to be compared against target.

Responsive emergency repairs remain above the target figure of 98.5% at 99.9% for July, August and September. Urgent repairs remain above the target figure of 96.5% for each month to 98.7% in July, 98.7% in August and 100% in September. Routine repairs remain above target of 96% for each month to 98.7% in July, 98.1% in August and 98.7% in September.

The number of properties without gas servicing certificates has decreased from 29 in June to 28 in September; 21 properties are more than 8 weeks overdue and currently with legal. 3 properties are in the process of having injunctions taken against them. PSD are now working closely with housing officers to try and gain access earlier in the process.

Re-let times remain the same in quarter 2 at 10 days year to date as at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2010.

#### Appendix 2 – Trend Report

This report focuses on the current year's performance compared to the previous year's performance and the target set for 2010/2011.

Emergency repairs done within KPI's are above target as are urgent and routine repairs. The likely trend indicates that the target figures should remain above target throughout the financial period 2010/2011.

The percentage for average re-let times in quarter 2 has remained at 10 days. It is likely to achieve around the target figure of 12 days in the financial period 2010/2011 with current trends.

Former Tenant Arrears is above target and previous year's figure. It is intended for the collection to be incorporated into the First Contact Centre in January 2011.

#### Appendix 3 – Complaints Analysis

During the quarter to September 2010, 12 new complaints were received which was a reduction from 13 and 16 in the previous two quarters. Half were dealt with at the first stage the remaining are still in progress but are within agreed timescales.

During a recent audit of customer satisfaction it became apparent that staff are not logging all complaints and reminders are being given to all staff to ensure that they do log all complaints. The issue seems to arise when a complaint is made and resolved at point of contact. Staff feel that as they have dealt with the problem and satisfied the customer, it is not a complaint. We are explaining to staff that we do want to log such calls so that we can look for patterns and trends in reasons customers are dissatisfied and need to ring in the first place and where possible to take action to address that so they are not dissatisfied to start with. The current complaints handling system deters staff from doing this as the standard acknowledgement letters do not fit these scenarios, changes are therefore being made to overcome this.



## FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING – MONTHLY PERFORMANCE REPORTING

### AS AT 30<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2010

Description	Target 2010/11	Monthly			Year to Date	Comments	A.Dir. Resp.
		31 <sup>st</sup> Jul 2010	31 <sup>st</sup> Aug 2010	30 <sup>th</sup> Sep 2010	Year to Date as at Sep 2010		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Rent Arrears as a % of Gross Rent:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inc HB Arrears %</li> <li>Inc HB Arrears (in £'000)</li> <li>Excl HB Arrears %</li> <li>Excl HB Arrears (in £'000)</li> </ul> </li> <li><u>Former Tenant Arrears %</u></li> <li><u>Other Arrears (in £,000)</u></li> <li><u>Write Offs (FTD) %</u></li> </ul>	<p><b>2.0%</b></p> <p><b>1.5%</b></p> <p><b>0.6%</b></p> <p><b>60</b></p> <p><b>0.5%</b></p>	<p><b>4.3%</b></p> <p><b>1,010</b></p> <p><b>1.3%</b></p> <p><b>300</b></p> <p><b>1.15%</b></p> <p><b>194</b></p> <p><b>0.00%</b></p>	<p><b>4.3%</b></p> <p><b>1,011</b></p> <p><b>1.3%</b></p> <p><b>304</b></p> <p><b>1.16%</b></p> <p><b>220</b></p> <p><b>0.00%</b></p> <p><b>0.00%</b></p>	<p><b>1.9%</b></p> <p><b>431</b></p> <p><b>1.6%</b></p> <p><b>379</b></p> <p><b>1.16%</b></p> <p><b>220</b></p> <p><b>0.00%</b></p> <p><b>(£584.30)</b></p>	<p><b>1.9%</b></p> <p><b>431</b></p> <p><b>1.6%</b></p> <p><b>379</b></p> <p><b>1.16%</b></p> <p><b>220</b></p> <p><b>0.06%</b></p> <p><b>(£13,153.25)</b></p>	<p>Decrease in inc. fig due to timing of hb payment; increase in exc. fig due to rise in net arrears – attributable to expected annual pattern, compounded by recent staff losses/recruitment etc</p> <p>Total rechargeable repair debt o/s (£42,000 invoiced April 2010 – Sep 2010). Provision is £175,000.</p>	RC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>% Responsive Repairs and Planned works completed on Time (includes PSD and External Contractors): (Monthly)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emergency</li> <li>Urgent</li> <li>Routine</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>98.5%</b></p> <p><b>96.5%</b></p> <p><b>96.0%</b></p>	<p><b>100%</b></p> <p><b>98.7%</b></p> <p><b>98.7%</b></p>	<p><b>100%</b></p> <p><b>98.7%</b></p> <p><b>98.1%</b></p>	<p><b>99.8%</b></p> <p><b>100%</b></p> <p><b>98.7%</b></p>	<p><b>100%</b></p> <p><b>98.8%</b></p> <p><b>98.1%</b></p>	<p><b>Emergency repairs</b> – Still above target but 1 job requiring further works for drain rodding that were unable to be resolved within set timescale.</p> <p><b>Urgent</b> – Monitoring and daily checking of appropriate reports has helped achieve this excellent result</p> <p><b>Routine</b> – Above target as result of monitoring and daily checks.</p>	CD

Description	Target 2010/11	31 <sup>st</sup> Jul 2010	31 <sup>st</sup> Aug 2010	30 <sup>th</sup> Sep 2010	Year to Date as at Sep 2010	Comments	A.Dir. Resp.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Gas Servicing Certificates completed on time</u></li> <li><u>Number of properties without certificates</u></li> </ul>	100%	98.76%	99.13%	99.13%	99.13%	17 - with Legal 11 - at letter stage 4 - more than three months old	CD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Total Void Rental Loss – Monthly (in £'000)</li> <li>Less:</li> <li>Decants (Monthly)</li> <li>Shared Ownership (Monthly)</li> <li>Major Repairs &amp; DHS (Monthly)</li> </ul>		19	18	21	112	89 properties void in the month of September 2010.	RC
Adjusted Void Rental Loss (in £'000)	150	7	6	9	41		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>“Average Re- Let Times”:</u> <u>(In Days) – From CORE Report. (General Needs)</u></li> </ul> <p>CORE Stands for “Continuous Recording System” data is collected by Social Housing Sector.</p>	12 Days	9 Days	9 Days	10 Days	10 Days		RC

**Appendix 2**  
Quarterly Trend Report



Performance Indicator	Target	Previous Year	Year to Date as at Sep 2010	Improvement Trend	2008/09 House Mark Benchmark Comparisons	Actions Only	
	2010/11	2009/10	2010/11		QUARTILE		
					UPPER		
% of Non-Decent Homes	29%	28%	25%	↑	2.0%		
Arrears as % of rent debit (Housing Quality Network GNPI 134) (Excl Housing Benefit Arrears)	1.5%	1.4%	1.6%	↔	2.5%		
Former Tenant Arrears %	0.6%	1.09%	1.16%	↔	-	Collection to be incorporated into First Contact Centre January 2011	
Service Charges and Other Arrears (in £,000)	-	55	54	↔	-	Shop arrears of £16,633 to be monitored.	
Rent Loss Voids + Bad Debts (in £,000)	292	285	80	↑	-		
% repairs done within KPI's (Year to date)	Emergency	98.5%	97.0%	100%	↑	99.3%	
	Urgent	96.5%	95.1%	98.8%	↑	97.6%	
	Routine	96.0%	95.7%	98.1%	↑	98.2%	
Right First Time Repairs	96%	97.3%	98.33%	↑	-		
Average time to re-let (GN excluding Major Repairs and New Lets) from Core (Days)	12	30	10	↑	24.73		
Overall customer satisfaction (STATUS Survey)	83%	N/A	N/A	↔	88.24%		
Gas Servicing Certificates Completed on Time	100%	99.15%	99.13%	↔	99.88%		
No of Properties without Certificates	0	27	28	↔	N/A		

Appendix 3 – Complaints to 30/09/2010

Service Area	Received 01/07/10 to 30/09/10	Resolved at Stage 1	Resolved at Stage 2	Out-standing
General				
Staff Attitude				
Anti-social Behaviour	1	1		
Estate Management				
FCH	1			1
Service Standards				
Tenancy				
Poor state of property				
Unfair Treatment				
<b>Housing Management - Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>
General				
Repairs				
Staff Attitude	1			1
Estate Management				
Decent Homes Work				
Tenancy				
FCH	4	2		2
Standard of Workmanship	1	1		
Poor state of property				
Unfair Treatment				
Incomplete Repair				
<b>Assets - Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>		<b>3</b>
General				
Staff Attitude				
Freebridge Community Housing	4	2		2
Decent Homes Work				
Procedure Failure				
Service Standards				
Standard of Workmanship				
Poor state of property				
Unpaid Invoice				
Unfair Treatment				
Incomplete Repair				
<b>PSD/Repairs - Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>		<b>2</b>
Member of staff				
<b>HR</b>				
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>6</b>		<b>6</b>



## Freebridge Community Housing

## Report to the Board

<b>Author</b>	Tony Hall	<b>Report Type</b>	<b>Impact</b>		
<b>Related Work Ref.</b>		<b>For Decision</b>	√	<b>High</b>	<b>Medium</b>
Governance		<b>For Information</b>		√	<b>Low</b>
<b>Consultation</b>	Governance Working Group				

**Meeting Date:** 6<sup>th</sup> December 2010

**Report Title:** Company Secretary

**Purpose:** The purpose of this report is to seek the Board's approval to transfer the duties of the Company Secretary to the Governance Officer

**Policy/Strategy Implications:** None

**Finance and VFM Implications:** The additional duties will be subject to job evaluation, and training and development requirements. These will be contained within the existing budgets.

**Customer Care/Equality and Diversity Implications:** None

**Risk Assessment (cross-reference with FCH Risk Map):**

- 1.1 Failure to comply with regulatory requirements (impact) critical, (likelihood) very low.
- 1.2 Board direction not implemented (impact) critical, (likelihood) very low.

**Recommendations:** It is recommended that the Board

- (i) Transfer the duties of Company Secretary to the Governance Officer from the 13<sup>th</sup> December 2010

## 1 Background

- 1.1 When Freebridge was established in 2006 the Board agreed to appoint the Chief Executive as the Company Secretary. The position is a Board appointment and at the time it was noted that the role could be passed to another member of staff. This was always seen as a temporary measure.

- 1.2 By 2007 the organisation was becoming established and the Board agreed a recommendation to transfer the duties of the Company Secretary to the Business and Performance Manager.
- 1.3 In 2008 the post holder resigned and I took the opportunity to restructure a number of activities and with these changes in mind the Board agreed that the Company Secretary role should be returned to the Chief Executive.
- 1.4 In the context of the current Governance Review it would be appropriate to consider transferring the duties of company secretary to the Governance Officer.

## **2 Role of the Company Secretary**

- 2.1 The main strategic role of the Company Secretary is set out in the Higgs Report 2003 and these are listed below. It is for this reason that while for good governance the role of Company Secretary and Chief Executive be separated, the two roles must work together closely with the Chairman. The Company Secretary will ensure that the day to day procedural activities are co-ordinated and executed within the organisation and these are contained in appendix 1.
  - The chairman, supported by the company secretary, should assess what information is required.
  - The role of the company secretary is important in supporting the effective performance of non-executive directors.
  - The company secretary is uniquely well placed to assist a non-executive director and to support the chairman in ensuring good use is made of the non executive directors.
  - The company secretary should provide impartial information and guidance on board procedures, legal requirements and corporate governance, together with best practice developments.

## **3 Proposal**

- 3.1 It is proposed that the role of Company Secretary is transferred to the Governance Officer. Many of the activities set out in Appendix 1 are currently undertaken by the post holder and he has recently commenced training in the role of Company Secretary.
- 3.2 The post holder will retain his substantive post and duties, reporting to the Assistant Director Governance and HR; however; there will be a reporting line to the Chief Executive on Company Secretary matters.
- 3.3 The additional duties will be subject t a job evaluation exercise and the change of responsibility should commence from 13<sup>th</sup> December 2010.

## **4 Governance Working Group**

- 4.1 The Governance Working Group considered this report at its meeting on 29 November 2010, and supported the recommendation.

The main duties of the Company Secretary are set out below:

The pursuit of all the duties of the Company Secretary to the Association including:

- a. The distribution of Notice and agendas of Meetings of the Board, any Committee, Sub-Committee, Annual General Meetings and/or Special General Meetings
- b. The recording and distribution of the minutes of the proceedings of the Board, Committees, sub-committees and General Meetings of the Association
- c. The maintenance of a Register of Members
- d. The maintenance of a Register of Officers
- e. Ensuring that Audited Annual Accounts are presented to each Annual General Meeting
- f. Ensuring that the Association monitors compliance with the regulatory requirements for the time being in force
- g. Responsibility for the completion of statutory/regulatory requirements and returns
- h. The opening of tenders, including the maintenance of a tender receipts register and of a tender opening register.
- i. The maintenance of a register of contract exceptions
- j. The maintenance of a fraud register
- k. The maintenance of records of compliance with the National Housing Federation "Excellence in Standards of Conduct" Code for Members 2010
- l. The maintenance of a gifts and hospitality register
- m. The maintenance of a declaration of interest register for Board members and staff
- n. The maintenance of a seal register
- o. The maintenance of a significant events register
- p. The maintenance of a register of documents stored in secure locations

## Freebridge Community Housing

## Report to the Board

<b>Author</b>	Angus MacQueen Governance Officer	<b>Report Type</b>		<b>Impact</b>		
<b>Related Work Ref.</b>		<b>For Decision</b>	√	<b>High</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Low</b>
Minutes: Resources and Risk Committee – 8 November 2010		<b>For Information</b>			√	
<b>Consultation</b>						

**Board Meeting Date: 6 December 2010**

**Report Title: Resources and Risk Committee Recommendation**

<b>Purpose:</b> To present the recommendation from the Resources and Risk Committee meeting held on 8 November 2010.
<b>Policy/Strategy Implications:</b> None directly arising from this report.
<b>Finance and VFM Implications:</b> None directly arising from this report.
<b>Customer Care/Equality and Diversity Implications:</b> None directly arising from this report.
<b>Risk Assessment (cross-reference with FCH Risk Map):</b> Risk assessment will have been considered at the committee stage.
<b>Recommendations:</b> It is recommended that the Board: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Consider the recommendation set out in the body of the report.</li> </ul>

### 1. Resources and Risk Committee – 8 November 2010

Presentation of recommendation by: Michael Jervis (Chairman of the Resources and Risk Committee)

#### **Recommendation –**

That the Board approve a review of the three Executive contracts, by a consultant, to ensure that they are competitive and up-to-date.

FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING - MEETINGS TIMETABLE 2011

ITEM 16

	JAN 2011	FEB 2011	MARCH 2011	APRIL 2011	MAY 2011	JUNE 2011	JULY 2011	AUG 2011	SEPT 2011	OCT 2011	NOV 2011	DEC 2011
Mon	3 Bank Holiday				2 Bank Holiday			1		3		
Tue	4	1	1		3			2		4	1	
Wed	5	2 Operations Committee	2		4 Operations Committee	1		3 Operations Committee		5	2 Operations Committee	
Thu	6	3	3		5	2		4	1	6	3	1
Fri	7	4	4	1	6	3	1	5	2	7	4	2
Mon	10	7	7 Board	4 Audit Committee	9 Resources & Risk Committee	6	4 Audit Committee	8 Resources & Risk Committee	5 Board	10	7 Resources & Risk Committee	5 Board
Tue	11	8	8	5	10	7	5	9	6	11	8	6
Wed	12	9	9	6	11	8	6	10	7	12	9	7
Thu	13	10	10	7	12	9	7	11	8	13	10	8
Fri	14	11	11	8	13	10	8	12	9	14	11	9
Mon	17 Board (Special Resources and Risk Committee at 4pm)	14 Resources & Risk Committee	14	11 Board	16	13	11	15	12	17 Board	14	12
Tue	18	15	15	12	17	14	12	16	13	18	15	13
Wed	19	16	16	13	18	15	13	17	14	19	16	14
Thu	20	17	17	14	19	16	14	18	15	20	17	15
Fri	21	18	18	15	20	17	15	19	16	21	18	16
Mon	24 Audit Committee	21	21	18	23 Board	20	18	22	19	24	21	19
Tue	25	22	22	19	24	21	19	23	20 AGM	25	22	20
Wed	26	23	23	20	25	22	20	24	21	26	23	21
Thu	27	24	24	21	26	23	21	25	22	27	24	22
Fri	28	25	25	22 Bank Holiday	27	24	22	26	23	28	25	23
Mon	31	28	28	25 Bank Holiday	30 Bank Holiday	27	25 Board	29 Bank Holiday	26	31 Audit Committee	28	26 Bank Holiday
Tue				26	31	28	26	30	27		29	27 Bank Holiday
Wed				27		29	27	31	28		30	28
Thu				28		30	28		29			29
Fri				29			29		30			30

Board - Meetings start at 6.30pm
Resources & Risk Committee - Meetings start at 5.30pm
Operations Committee - Meetings start at 5.30pm
Audit Committee - Meetings start at 3.30pm
AGM - Starts at 6.30pm

## Freebridge Community Housing

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<b>Related Work Ref.</b>		<b>For Decision</b>	√	<b>High</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Low</b>
		<b>For Information</b>			√	
<b>Consultation</b>	Governance Working Group					

**Meeting Date: 6 December 2010**

**Report Title: Governance Working Group Report**

**Purpose:** To report on the meeting of the Governance Working Group held on 29 November 2010.

**Policy/Strategy Implications:** None directly arising from this report.

**Finance and VFM Implications:** None directly arising from this report.

**Customer Care/Equality and Diversity Implications:** None directly arising from this report.

**Risk Assessment (cross-reference with FCH Risk Map):** Risk 1.1 – Failure to Comply with Regulatory and Legislation Requirements – Critical Impact, High Likelihood. It is intended that this report will assist the Board to achieve the regulatory requirement of good governance.

**Recommendations:** It is recommended that the Board:

- (i) Note the contents of the report.
- (ii) Agree that the Register of Board Members' interests is published on FCH's website as a separate document.

## 1.0 Background

The Governance Working Group met on 29 November 2010, and considered the following items:

1. Review of the size of the Board
2. Review of Schedule 1 Implications for Employment Policy and Procedure
3. Review of Board-related Governance Documents
4. Review of NHF Code of Governance Action Plan
5. Review of NHF Code of Standards of Conduct Action Plan
6. Board Improvement Action Plan
7. Position of Company Secretary

Items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7 above are covered in separate reports elsewhere on this agenda.

The latest updates to the action plans listed at items 4 – 6 are attached to this report for information as follows:

Review of NHF Code of Governance Action Plan – Appendix 1  
Review of NHF Code of Standards of Conduct Action Plan – Appendix 2  
Board Improvement Action Plan – Appendix 3

It can be seen that these action plans are almost complete.

## **2.0 Publication of Register of Board Members' Interests**

One further issue was considered by the Working Group, under “Matters Arising”. At its last meeting, the Working Group had considered a requirement of the NHF Code of Excellence in Standards of Conduct that the Register of Board Members' Interests should be published. One way of publishing the Register, as suggested by the Code, is in the annual accounts, and the Working Group had felt at its meeting on 30 June 2010 that this should be FCH's preferred method of publishing the Register.

However, having consulted subsequently with the Executive Director (Resources), the Working Group now believes that this method of publication is not ideal, for two reasons. Firstly, because anything in the accounts has to be audited, and it does not seem necessary to engage our auditors to audit this document. Secondly, because the document could be “buried” if it is contained in the accounts. The Working Group is, therefore, now of the view that the Register should be published as a separate document on FCH's website, which is another suggested method of publication contained within the Code.

**NEW NATIONAL HOUSING FEDERATION CODE OF GOVERNANCE – “EXCELLENCE IN GOVERNANCE”****ACTION PLAN TO ADDRESS FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING NON-COMPLIANCE AS AT DEC 2010**

Section	FCH Compliance	Suggested Action	Timescale	Comments/Progress
A1	We currently provide this statement in our annual accounts. However, we do not make a reasoned statement about areas where we do not comply.	Start making the necessary statement.	2009/2010 annual accounts	Completed – a statement is included in the 2009/10 annual accounts
B3	Largely comply	Ensure full alignment with Board Membership and Recruitment Policy.	Policy scheduled for review Oct 09	Completed – incorporated into Board Membership and Recruitment Policy
B4	Do not comply	Review size of Board and whether it should include Executive.	Size of Board to be revisited in summer 2010. Consider Executive membership then too. Include statement in Board Membership and Recruitment Policy on FCH's stance re Executives on the Board.	Completed – Report on size of Board to Board meeting on 6/12/10.  Statement included in Board Membership and Recruitment Policy on FCH's stance re Executives on the Board.

B9	Do not comply	Consider as part of review of Board Membership and Recruitment Policy.	Policy scheduled for review Oct 09	Completed – incorporated into Board Membership and Recruitment Policy
B10	Largely comply	Review Board Member Agreement to ensure full compliance. Extend existing Board member role profile to clarify roles of Vice Chairman and Committee Chairmen.	Dec 09	Completed – see report to Board on 6/12/10
C1	Partially comply	Review to ensure full compliance, especially relating to maximum terms. Consider as part of review of Board Membership and Recruitment Policy.	Policy scheduled for review Oct 09	Completed – incorporated into Board Membership and Recruitment Policy
C4	Largely comply	Review to ensure full compliance, eg re views of key contacts and appraisal of Vice-Chair.  Advise Board that appraisals should be carried out “through an independent third party”.	Oct 2009  Dec 2009	Completed – incorporated into Board Membership and Recruitment Policy  Completed – incorporated into Board Membership and Recruitment Policy
D1	Largely comply	Review Standing Order 3 to ensure full compliance	Review of Standing Orders scheduled for Dec 09.	Review of Standing Orders delayed to coincide with review of Financial Regulations. <b>Revised date: Feb 2010</b> Completed – incorporated into review of Standing Orders.

D2	Largely comply	Review Standing Order 3 to ensure full compliance	Review of Standing Orders scheduled for Dec 09.	Review of Standing Orders delayed to coincide with review of Financial Regulations. <b>Revised date: Feb 2010</b> Completed – incorporated into review of Standing Orders.
E1	Largely comply	Review Standing Order 5 to ensure full compliance.	Review of Standing Orders scheduled for Dec 09.	Review of Standing Orders delayed to coincide with review of Financial Regulations. <b>Revised date: Feb 2010</b> Completed – incorporated into review of Standing Orders.
G1	Largely Comply	Review Ch Exec job description	Autumn 2009	This is now being done by the Resources and Risk Committee. <b>Revised date: Spring 2011</b> <b>No longer required by 2010 Code (Good practice)</b>
G2	Partially Comply	Review Ch Exec contract	Autumn 2009	This is now being done by the Resources and Risk Committee. <b>Revised date: Spring 2011</b> <b>No longer required by 2010 Code (Good practice)</b>

G4	Largely comply	Remind Board of current process for disclosure of Chief Executive's remuneration package.	Feb 2010	Completed – Chief Executive's remuneration is disclosed in the annual accounts.
H1	Partially comply	Standing Orders, including that re committee structure, are reviewed every 2 years.	Suggest review of committee structure spring 2010 after completion of Tenant Emp Service Review, then every two years after that.	The Board appraisal and review process will inform the committee structure review. <b>Revised date: Winter 2010/11</b> <b>No longer required by 2010 Code (Good practice)</b>
H6	Largely comply	Review Standing Order 4 to ensure full compliance.	Review of Standing Orders scheduled for Dec 09.	Review of Standing Orders delayed to coincide with review of Financial Regulations. <b>Revised date: Feb 2010</b> Completed – incorporated into review of Standing Orders.
H8	Largely comply	We need to report committee memberships somewhere – in Board's report to AGM or in an annual report if we start doing one?	2010 Board's report to AGM or annual report	Included in appendix to Annual Report to Tenants
I2	Do not comply	Include in Board's Annual Report to the AGM and/or in Streets Ahead.	Autumn 2010	Annual Report to Tenants published

I4	Do not comply	Undertake regular review.	March 2010	Completed – review undertaken by Governance Working Group in April 2010 and by Board in May 2010. To be revisited when Standing Orders are reviewed.
I6	Do not comply	Incorporate in Board Membership and Recruitment Policy	Policy scheduled for review Oct 09	Awaiting guidance from the NHF Completed – incorporated into Board Membership and Recruitment Policy.
J1	Do not comply	Introduce consultation with Local Strategic Partnership members as part of the five year business planning process	Jan 2010	Consultation to be build into business planning process. <b>Revised date: March 2011</b> <b>No longer required by 2010 Code</b>
J3	Do not comply	Include in review of Customer Comments Policy	Policy scheduled for review Nov 09	Completed. The new complaints procedure makes provision for this.
J5	Comply re Tenant Shareholding	Have one policy covering all shareholding	Tenant Shareholding Policy scheduled for review Oct 09	Completed – Shareholding Policy adopted by Board on 19/10/09
J9	Do not comply	Consider as part of review of Tenant Shareholding Policy.	Policy scheduled for review Oct 09	Some wording is being developed in consultation with the NHF and will be brought to the Board for approval.

				<b>Revised date: Jan 2010</b> Completed – incorporated into Shareholding Policy.
K3	Do not comply – other than the symbols we have signed up to	Include in Board’s Annual Report to the AGM and/or in Streets Ahead.	Autumn 2010	Included within the Annual Report to Tenants
L1	Nearly comply – We don’t appraise the effectiveness of the Audit Committee	Appraise effectiveness of each committee	Spring 2010	Being undertaken as part of annual appraisal process <b>Revised date: Winter 2010/11</b> <b>No longer required by 2010 Code</b>
L2	Nearly comply – we don’t ask the Board to ratify all the decisions of the Audit Committee	Review how Board deals with decisions of Audit Committee. The Board does see the minutes of the Audit Committee and it is suggested that it is not necessary for the Board to actually ratify its decisions.	Dec 09	Completed – we do comply with this, as any important decisions of the Audit Committee are ratified by the Board.
L4	Nearly comply – our Resources and Risk Committee does this. We don’t ask the Board to approve the Risk Map.	Actually, the Board annually approves the Internal Assurance report, which includes the risk map, so we do comply in this respect. Although the Code says that it should be the Audit Committee producing the Risk Map, it is suggested that it fits better with our current	Dec 09	Completed. The NHF has confirmed that our use of the Resources and Risk Committee, rather than Audit Committee, to produce the Risk Map is perfectly acceptable.

		arrangements for the Resources and Risk Committee to do this.		
M5	Partially comply	Review to ensure reasons for Board member resignations are recorded in minutes.	Immediately	Completed – Resignations from the Board are recorded in Board minutes, with reasons as appropriate. <b>No longer required by 2010 Code (Good practice)</b>

Completed items are shaded.

<b>Actions from Arvinda Gohil's Report</b>				
	<b>Action</b>	<b>Time Scale</b>	<b>Responsible Officer</b>	<b>Comments/Progress</b>
<b>1</b>	The Board and staff need to clearly understand the governance framework agreed by the organisation and ensure individuals understand their responsibilities.	December 2010	TH (Campbell Tickell)	Appropriate staff to join board training. (Campbell Tickell) – to be held on 13/12/10.
<b>2</b>	The governance framework documents are onerous and duplicate in several places. The Board and senior staff would benefit from these being streamlined. This should be carried out through a gap analysis against the latest National Housing Federation Code of Governance and the Standards of Conduct.	December 2010	TH	Board - Governance Working Group Completed - Report to Board in December
<b>3</b>	The Board should ensure that training is provided for all Board members on the current governing instruments and policies used by FCH in order that everyone clearly understands their roles and responsibilities. Of particular assistance would be a programme on the role of advocacy and its relationship with operational matters and potential conflicts of interest.	December 2010	TH (Campbell Tickell)	Training identified in (1) to include specific reference to advocacy and conflict of interest. Training to be held on 13/12/10.
<b>4</b>	The Board should also consider providing role profiles for all Board members in order to further clarify expectations and responsibilities.	December 2010	TH/Governance Working Group	Governance Working Group Action Plan Completed – report to Board on 6/12/10.



**NATIONAL HOUSING FEDERATION “EXCELLENCE IN STANDARDS OF CONDUCT” – CODE FOR MEMBERS 2010**

**ACTION PLAN TO ENSURE FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING FULL COMPLIANCE AS AT DEC 2010**

<b>Section</b>	<b>Required Action</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Comments/Progress</b>
A2	State in relevant publicity that we comply with this Code	Ongoing Oct 2011 Annual Report?	Completed – stated in Appendix to 2010 Annual Report to Tenants
A3	Make a clear commitment to uphold the Code and adhere to high standards of conduct in each year’s annual report	Oct 2010 Annual Report initially?	Completed. Included in the Governance Appendix to the Annual Report.
B1	Maintain and publish at least annually a register of Board members’ interests	Jan 2011 and ongoing	We already have such a register and update it annually. Publish on website.
B2	Ensure that our Board member declaration of interest form complies with this list of declarable interests.	July 2010	Will be done before next round of Board declarations – <b>Dec 10</b> .
B3	Ask applicants for Board membership to complete declaration of interest form	July 2010	Completed
B5	Amend slightly declaration of interest wording on Board/committee agendas, to bring into line with the wording in the Code	July 2010	Checked and completed

C4 & C5	Enter details of Board payments into annual accounts	July 2011	
C6	Ensure that Board is responsible for recruitment and severance terms for the Executive and for Executive contracts.	Oct 2010	To be considered as part of review of Executive contracts. <b>Revised date: Spring 2011</b>
C9	Include in the annual accounts the level of the Chief Executive's remuneration	We already do this.	Completed
D	Ensure that Standing Orders contain correct delegations for decisions on non-contractual payments to staff  Publish policy on non-contractual payments to staff	Oct 2010  Oct 2010	Policy statement to be produced. <b>Revised date : Spring 2011</b>
D8	Disclose in annual accounts total of severance and redundancy payments	July 2011	
E	Ensure there are clear policies on the entitlement of staff and Board members to benefits	Oct 2010	Completed – see reports to Board on 6/12/10.
E1	Establish general guidelines for the provision of social or welfare benefits	Oct 2010	Completed – see reports to Board on 6/12/10.
E3	Establish clear guidelines in respect of the provision of housing for staff, Board members or closely connected people.	Oct 2010	Completed – see reports to Board on 6/12/10.

E7	Establish clear guidelines in respect of the offer of employment to persons who are closely connected to a member of staff or Board member.	Oct 2010	Completed – see reports to Board on 6/12/10.
E10	Clarify whether the Board wishes to abide by this entry, whereby Board members cannot be paid for services provided to the Association	Oct 2010	Completed – Board to abide by the entry.
F8	Include in Employee Handbook guidelines for taking leave for various non-FCH activities	Oct 2010	Completed – see reports to Board on 6/12/10.
F9	Establish gifts and hospitality rules and procedures	Oct 2010	Completed – see reports to Board on 6/12/10.
F10	Ensure there are clear and transparent policies relating to openness and confidentiality	Oct 2010	Completed – see reports to Board on 6/12/10.
G1	Make all Board members and staff aware of the requirements of the Code	July 2010	Will be done once new procedures adopted and staff reps have been consulted. <b>Revised date: Spring 2011</b>
G2	Board to carry out annual review of compliance in making self-assessment return and compliance statement to be included in annual report	July 2011 and Oct 2011	

G3	Ensure that auditors are required to include a review of compliance with the Code and disclosures in audit plans	April 2011	
G4	Reporting of breaches procedure to be included in Board Member Agreement and all staff contracts	Oct 2010	Completed – contained in Employee Handbook and Board Member Agreement.
G5	Establish procedure for dealing with reports of breaches	Oct 2010	Completed – contained in Employee Handbook and Board Member Agreement.

**BOARD IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN ARISING FROM CAMPBELL TICKELL REPORT – NOVEMBER 2009**

**PROGRESS UPDATE – DEC 2010**

<b>Suggested Action</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Comments/Progress</b>
<b><u>SUCCESSION</u></b>		
A recruitment process should be commenced in the New Year to recruit one or more new Board members with particular finance and business skills to fill the gap that may be let by the possible departure of a long-standing member with a high level of skills and experience at the next AGM; it will be desirable to have a “hand-over” period between existing and new Board members.	Start recruitment process earlier than usual – April Board meeting. Consider co-option if appropriate.	Completed – recruitment complete, subject to Board and AGM approval
A longer-term succession plan should be drawn up, drawing on what is now known about the possible departure/retirement of Board members, for the replacement of the skills they represent.	Start asap. Complete Dec 2010	Completed – succession planning included in Board Membership, Recruitment and Succession Policy.
The processes for the recruitment of new tenant and local authority Board members should be revisited, so that new Board members coming forward can – in advance of accepting nomination – be entirely clear about what is expected of them, their legal duties as company directors, and thus be ready to participate fully in the work of the Board.	Make this info available to potential candidates with effect from 2010 recruitment process	In progress. 2010 candidates were informed of obligations of Board members.  Board training on legal duties to take place on 13/12/10

<p>A dialogue with the local authority should be opened about how local authority Board nominations can be put forward who possess skills and experience relevant to the needs with the Board.</p>		<p>Completed. Letter from Borough Council dated 6/1/10 confirms its agreement to do this.</p>
<p><b><u>PLANNING AND TEAM BUILDING</u></b></p>		
<p>The proposed Board-led strategic planning process that has been proposed for the New Year is an important next stage in the Board's development, and an opportunity to enhance trust and team-working with the Executive.</p>	<p>1 Feb 2010, 12-13 March, and ongoing</p>	<p>Completed and ongoing.</p>
<p><b><u>TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT</u></b></p>		
<p>There is a need for all-Board training on the financial framework for housing associations, and understanding the financial capacity and constraints for FCH going forward – this is underlined by the wish of the Board to engage in the development of new homes in future.</p>	<p>Training on the financial framework to be organised by April 2010.</p> <p>The financial capacity and constraints going forward are explained as part of the financial planning process at both R&amp;R and Board meetings.</p>	<p>Completed – Board finance training organised for 20 April 2010.</p>

<p>As the new framework for the regulation and funding emerges, further training or briefing will also be required to ensure that the Board is up-to-date.</p>	<p>All Board members invited to regulatory framework training provided by e2 on 15 Feb 2010. Further briefing/training to be provided as necessary.</p>	<p>Completed and ongoing. Board received a talk from the TSA on 2 March 2010.</p>
<p>Board members should continue to engage with tenants and front-line staff on a regular basis – for instance “shadowing”, visiting schemes and estates, and having opportunities for informal discussion.</p>	<p>Board members to be reminded of these opportunities asap.</p>	<p>Board members to complete short questionnaire after shadowing. Completed and ongoing. Board members reminded of these opportunities at Board meeting on 22 February 2010.</p>
<p><b><u>CHAIR’S APPRAISAL</u></b></p>		
<p>The Chair should report back confidentially to the Board on his thinking and conclusions arising from the appraisal meetings, including his own.</p>	<p>Board pre-meeting, 22 Feb 2010</p>	<p>Completed</p>

<b><u>CONDUCT OF MEETINGS</u></b>		
<p>Board members need to maintain a good level of “discipline” in relation to the conduct of Board meetings, for instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Always reading papers carefully before the Board meeting</li> <li>• Contacting the authors of papers with any factual queries or clarifications before the meeting, so as to allow maximum time for strategic discussion in the meeting</li> <li>• Notifying the authors of minor spelling and grammatical errors in papers ahead of meetings wherever possible, rather than in the meeting</li> <li>• Agreeing that “for information” items are not normally to be discussed at Board meetings, allowing fuller discussion of strategic and decision items</li> <li>• Where possible, notifying the Chair in advance of any agenda items where there are likely to be major issues raised, so as to allow him to plan and timetable the meeting.</li> </ul>	All with immediate effect	<p>All completed and ongoing.</p> <p>There are occasions when it is appropriate to ask questions on “for information” items.</p>
<b><u>THE BOARD</u></b>		
<p>There is some appetite for reducing the size of the Board, although with some opposed. A small governance working party or panel needs to take this debate forward and report back to the Board on the pros and cons, and the practical implications.</p>	Governance Working Group to report back summer 2010	Completed – report to Board on 6/12/10.
<p>The debate on payment of Board members is for the time being resolved, with a majority of the Board voting against. If, in the future, it proves hard to recruit suitable new unpaid members, then the issue should be reopened at that time, with consideration of either payment, or recompense for loss of earnings.</p>	Summer 2010	Produce action plan for Loss of Earnings scheme. – Completed

Completed items are shaded.

## Freebridge Community Housing

## Report to the Board

Author	Michelle Playford	Report Type	Impact		
Related Work Ref.		For Decision	High	Medium	Low
		For Information	√	√	
Consultation	Management Team				

Meeting Date: 6<sup>th</sup> December 2010

Report Title: Freebridge Communications and Customer Engagement Strategic Activity Plan 2010-2012

<p><b>Purpose:</b> To present the new Communications and Customer Engagement Strategic Activity Plan 2010-2012 which it is intended to guide Freebridge's communications and customer engagement activity.</p>
<p><b>Policy/Strategy Implications:</b> - The Strategic Activity Plan 2010-2012 builds on the Communication Policy and its objectives are incorporated into the Plan to direct activity.</p>
<p><b>Finance and VFM Implications:</b> - Market testing will be carried out in the delivery of the plan to ensure Value for Money across all elements of Communications and Customer Engagement activity. Financial implications will be met by the Communications and Customer Engagement budget.</p>
<p><b>Customer Care/Equality and Diversity Implications:</b> - Implementation of the Strategic Activity Plan will impact positively on customer care and will support improved customer satisfaction. Equality and diversity has been considered throughout the production of the plan, as shown by recommendation around specific activities.</p>
<p><b>Risk Assessment (cross-reference with FCH Risk Map):</b> -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.3 Significant Events lead to adverse publicity – Critical Impact, Low Likelihood</li> <li>7.1 Failure in tenant communication – Critical Impact, Significant Likelihood</li> <li>7.3 Inappropriate organisational image – Marginal Impact, Significant Likelihood</li> <li>7.4 Failure to achieve tenant empowerment – Critical Impact, Low Likelihood</li> <li>7.5 Failure in internal communication – Critical Impact, Significant Likelihood</li> <li>12.0 Failure to address Equality and Diversity issues effectively – Marginal Impact, Significant Likelihood</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendations:</b> It is recommended that the Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Note the new Strategic Communications and Customer Engagement Plan 2010-2012.</li> </ul>

# **Freebridge Communications & Customer Engagement: Strategic Activity Plan 2010-2012 Executive Summary**

## **1. Where we are now**

Freebridge is currently delivering a range of planned communication and community engagement activity which meets the needs of our different stakeholders. This includes Streets Ahead, social media, the staff bulletin, networking and publications/leaflets.

## **2. Analysing existing communication and engagement methods**

We have analysed findings from the STATUS Survey, the Insight Track research, the staff satisfaction survey, the staff conference and informal discussions, together with feedback from media engagement. In addition, we have looked at the socio-demographic profile of the local area, the regulatory requirements and the national and political agenda to conduct a SWOT analysis. This has led to the following key findings:

- Customers need to feel their feedback has been taken into consideration, and feedback should be provided by Freebridge on where customer views have been actioned;
- Communications for those staff without IT access need to be considered;
- Some degree of face-to-face engagement is important;
- Freebridge needs to take a joined-up approach;
- The communication needs of different audiences – particularly beyond the urban centre – need to be responded to;
- There is a plethora of 'good news' being generated which is currently not being captured and promoted;
- Freebridge needs to be able to respond to political and policy changes.

## **3. Why communications and customer engagement matter**

Communications and customer engagement have an impact on how an organisation is perceived and can result in a negative or positive reputation. The quality of this reputation will have a direct impact on who wants to 'do business' with Freebridge – be them a customer, partner or influence. Communications and customer engagement must therefore be at the very heart of Freebridge so that these activities can support business success.

## **4. Recommendations – where we want to be**

Based on the analysis of communication and engagement methods, the policy objectives as agreed in May 2010, and incorporating the brand values as key messages, we have defined the following as the key principles which must guide communication and engagement activity:

- All communication and engagement activity should be joined-up and presented under a coherent identity;
- All communication and engagement activity should be accessible to all, reaching all audiences in the most appropriate manner;
- There should be a 360° approach to communication and engagement activity, meaning feedback should be sought and given continuously;
- Communications and engagement activity should be flexible and responsive to operational, geographical and political changes;
- Systems should be put into place to ensure communication and engagement opportunities and needs are captured and met regularly;
- Measurement and evaluation of the communication and engagement activity should be carried out on an ongoing basis;
- Everybody has a role to play in delivering excellent communication and engagement with our stakeholders.

Based on the research, objectives and principles, the following are suggested **new** (highlighted in yellow) and **reviewed** methods of communication and engagement:

STAKEHOLDER	ACTIVITY
ALL	<p>Coherent visual identity and brand guidelines</p> <p>Promotional materials</p> <p>Accessible communications – Plain English and ‘Goberise’ through using the ‘can-do’ language of service</p> <p>Accessible communications – ongoing improvement</p> <p>Press office service</p> <p>Website review</p> <p>Awards</p> <p>Campaign and place-marketing campaigns</p> <p>Photography library</p> <p>Sponsorship</p>
CUSTOMER	<p>Review and redesign of Streets Ahead</p> <p>Redesign of information leaflets/tenants handbook etc.</p> <p>Review of TOWN</p> <p>Review of Sheltered United</p> <p>Review of Sheltered News</p> <p>Scrutiny/Continuous Improvement Panel</p> <p>Scoping into the establishment of a youth panel</p> <p>Annual tenants’ event</p> <p>Review of tenants’ awards</p> <p>Audit of customer engagement activity/new plan</p> <p>Audit of existing local news channels</p> <p>Tenant Incentive Scheme</p>
STAFF	<p>Redesign of staff bulletin</p> <p>Review of intranet</p> <p>Redesign of staff handbook</p> <p>Staff learning sessions</p> <p>Chief Executive video blog</p> <p>Accessible communications for non-ICT users</p>

	Staff feedback mechanisms Work shadowing Staff Charter External peer learning visits
<b>PARTNERS</b>	Audit of partner engagement
<b>INFLUENCERS</b>	Influencer audit and engagement plan
<b>PARTNERS/ INFLUENCERS</b>	Freebridge Learning Seminars Partner and influencer database/Network Register Speaking opportunities

Systems will be established for capturing communication needs and opportunities and there will be ongoing measurement and evaluation of the methods adopted. The Strategic Activity Plan (this document) will be reviewed in October 2011.

DRAFT

## Stage one: Mapping existing activity - where we are now

Building on the communications mapping activity which was carried out in 2009, the Communications Policy which was refined in May 2010, and following on from discussion with the Assistant Directors, as well as an audit of existing activity, the following table represents the communication and engagement methods currently being delivered by Freebridge:

Stakeholder	Activity	Frequency	Description	Lead responsibility	Comments
ALL <sup>1</sup>	Media relations	Ongoing	Proactive press releases and reactive statements to the media.	Communications and Customer Engagement team (CCE)/external consultants	
	Website	Ongoing	Information portal providing an overview of all aspects of Freebridge's work.	CCE and ICT	Managed in-house.
	Ambient communications	Ongoing	This includes posters, signage, uniforms and anything else which is out in the public arena and conveys messages about Freebridge.	All	Difficult to measure
	Marketing materials	Ongoing	This includes materials such as display panels and 'giveaways' which Freebridge uses specifically for promoting the organisation.	All	Difficult to measure
	Advertising	Occasional	Advertising which is booked into	CCE	

<sup>1</sup> 'All' refers to all stakeholders, including customers, staff, partners, influencers and members of the wider community, including residents living in the surrounding areas and potential residents.

			the local press.		
<b>CUSTOMERS<sup>2</sup></b>	Streets Ahead	Quarterly – February, June, September, December	24-page newsletter for customers, containing information on issues affecting them e.g. Decent Homes programme, rents, as well as corporate news from Freebridge e.g. results of Audit Commission inspections	CCE	Feedback mechanisms have recently been introduced to ensure Streets Ahead becomes an engagement rather than an information tool.
	Social media	Frequently	Updates on Facebook and Twitter of news from Freebridge as well as opportunities for customers to provide feedback.	CCE	Members of the Facebook tenant empowerment page now number in excess of 350. Twitter is currently less successful with a more corporate following, (see Partners).
	Information leaflets	Available on an ongoing basis	These cover subjects such as aids and adaptations, complaints procedure etc.	Different service areas, depending on the subject.	These are written and produced internally.
	Customers handbook	Available on an ongoing basis	This covers the rules of the tenancy agreement between Freebridge and the customer. It also provides information about the service provided by	Housing management	

<sup>2</sup> The term 'customer' is used throughout for tenants, in line with Freebridge's focus on customer service.

			Freebridge to customers.		
	Leaseholders handbook	Available on an ongoing basis	This provides useful information to leaseholders.	Finance	
	Personal correspondence	Ad-hoc and ongoing	Letter, email, phone, face-to-face contact with customers.	All	The nature and frequency of this contact is difficult to capture as it can be formal/informal, although there is an amount of stock correspondence used by some teams
	Website	Ongoing	New and publications and there exists a special secure area for customers.	CCE and ICT	This activity has recently been brought in-house, making it easier to manage.
	Annual Report	Annually	Publication which contains key information for customers from the previous financial year.	CCE/MT	Consultation is carried out with customers in the production of the report.
	TOWN	Monthly	Regular meeting of the TOWN group, supported by CCE.	CCE	An independent group but with close links to Freebridge.
	Sheltered United	Regularly	Regular meetings by a formal group of customers of sheltered schemes.	Housing management (HM) and CCE	An independent group but with close links to Freebridge.
	Customer	Twice a	Free courses offered for	CCE	

	training courses	year	customers in subjects such as ESOL and Basic IT		
	Customers' event	Annually	Information event, hosted by Freebridge in King's Lynn.	Judith Carter (JC)/Management Team	Precedes the AGM
	ASB Conference	Annually	A conference bringing together partners and tenants to discuss how FCH deals with ASB and what changes we intend to make in this area.	HM	
<b>STAFF</b>	Staff bulletin	Bi-monthly	E-bulletin for staff containing news provided by staff.	HR	
	Staff conference	Bi-annually	An opportunity to communicate key corporate messages and participate in training/focus sessions.	HR and CCE	Structure of this event has changed from a single day annually to half days bi-annually.
	Intranet	Ongoing	Information portal for all staff which contains news, a telephone directory, meeting papers and a calendar of activity.	ICT	Automatically connects to staff by appearing instantly on the screen. Still a large amount of data held within the shared drive system rather than the intranet.
	Staff handbook	Ongoing	Given to all staff at induction, the handbook contains useful information about the Freebridge way of working as well as key policies.	HR	

	Team meetings	Ongoing	Meetings looking at issues/activity pertinent to specific teams.	Management group	
	Email, memos, briefing papers	Ongoing	Communicating key information to staff.	All	
	1-2-1s/ Appraisals	Ongoing/ twice-yearly	Evaluation of current activity, targets and performance.	All	
<b>BOARD</b>	Chairman weekly meeting	Weekly	Meeting between the Chief Executive and the Chair.	Chief Executive	
	TOWN/Board Chairs meetings	Regular	Meetings between the Chief Executive and the Chairs of the Board and TOWN.	Chief Executive	
	Sector updates	Regular	Updates on what's happening in the sector.	Governance Officer	
<b>PARTNERS<sup>3</sup></b>	e <sup>2</sup>	Regular	Meetings with e <sup>2</sup> partners to discuss and agree joint working opportunities.	Executive	
	Social networking	Twitter	Regular updates to the Freebridge Twitter account and personal accounts which link into partners.	CCE/SK/Others	
	Attendance at events	Ongoing and regular	Attendance at key events – including conferences – provide an opportunity to engage with partners.	All but led by Executive	
	Formal networks	Regular	Attendance at formal meetings with our partners e.g. the LSP,	All but led by Management	

<sup>3</sup> 'Partners' includes peer RPs, contractors and other voluntary and charitable organisations with which Freebridge works.

			the NHF communications network. An opportunity to engage with partners to consider joint working opportunities and share best practice.	Team.	
	Informal networking	Regular and ongoing	Informal contact with partners and peers e.g. email contact, telephone conversations etc. An opportunity to build strong working relationships with key partners, and share best practice.	All	Difficult to measure.
<b>INFLUENCERS</b> <sup>4</sup>	Networks	Regular	Working with our partners – through the NHF and with other local housing associations – to promote the work of the sector generally.	Executive and Management Team.	
	Regular meetings	Regular	Diarised meetings on specific areas of our work with representatives from the council.	Executive	
	Informal meetings	Sporadic and ongoing	Informal contact with key influencers e.g. attendance by councillors at events.	All	Difficult to plan for and measure.

<sup>4</sup> 'Influencers' refers to local and national politicians, as well as representatives of key government agencies such as the HCA and TSA.

## Stage two: analysing existing communication and engagement methods

### 1. Feedback from the Status Survey/Focus Groups

The main message taken from the qualitative information supplied in the STATUS survey is that customers sometimes feel that their **opinions are not taken into account**, which is particularly frustrating for them given that we do often ask for their opinions. If views and comments are given, there is a sense that these are not always followed up. And if Freebridge cannot do something which a customer wants, there is no explanation as to why this is. Customers feel that they are not being listened to. There is also a strong sense that Freebridge is '**King's Lynn-centric**', with the resulting feeling that some customers in the outlying areas feel overlooked.

Messages from the Focus Groups raised similar points to those above however also included a desire to be told '**what's going to happen in your area and when it's going to happen (and) why it's going to happen**' but without the "propaganda". Tenants want to be **kept informed even when things are going wrong**.

### 2. Feedback from staff satisfaction survey

Generally, staff are happy with communication. There was some feedback **from staff without access to ICT** focused around communication, which indicates that staff working in this service area do not feel that they are being kept informed and engaged.

### 3. Feedback from staff conference

A number of suggestions from the staff conference focused around more **face-to-face communication** with customers. There were also several comments generally about improving Freebridge's publicity and **wider perceptions**. And a number of staff mentioned internal communication, including a suggestion that senior management have **more interaction** with staff.

#### 4. Feedback from informal discussions

The main message generated from these discussions centres around the need for a **more coherent approach** to the corporate identity and a need for a more uniform use of the brand to ensure a professional image is generated. The other key finding was that there is a **plethora of 'good news'** being generated which is currently not being captured and promoted.

#### 5. Feedback from media engagement

The message conveyed from local media contacts is that they would actively **welcome more news** from Freebridge. This does not, however, remove the fact that they will still cover negative stories about Freebridge but the opportunity to comment will be offered. To date, media coverage has been predominantly positive or neutral but sporadic.

#### 6. The local area

The area in which Freebridge is operating is vast and covers **both rural and urban** conurbations. This results in rural isolation for some. A demographic profile of the area also shows a predominantly **ageing population** and verbal anecdotes point to difficulties in **engaging younger people**. In the King's Lynn area, there is a considerable non-English population, including **new migrants** who have moved into the area for work. This can lead to community cohesion issues, and problems in delivering accessible communications. Other social issues include worklessness and anti-social behaviour in particular neighbourhoods, but these issues are not unique to King's Lynn and West Norfolk and are indeed national problems. It is also worth noting that the local borough council is no longer going to be providing a resident newsletter which means that Streets Ahead has a genuine information role for our customers, without concern for delivering contradictory or repetitive measures.

#### 7. Regulatory requirements

The regulatory requirements on Freebridge are somewhat in a **state of flux** with the announcement of the abolition of the Audit Commission and questions over the future of the Tenant Services Authority and the future role of the Homes & Communities

Agency. At present, Freebridge is continuing to respond to the regulatory framework set out by the TSA and the Audit Commission but the organisation **will evolve and respond to the changing set-up**.

### 8. The national and political agenda

Again the political agenda is changing but evidence shows that RPs will have to **demonstrate their worth** to the new government. There is an **increased focus on worklessness**, and an onus on organisations such as Freebridge to demonstrate how they can support customers into work. This, coupled with an increase focus on the benefits system, means that Freebridge must demonstrate how it is supporting customers through more than just housing provision. The planned cuts also indicate that Freebridge must demonstrate **Value for Money** in all of its activities. Finally, the government’s **localism** agenda points to a need for Freebridge to demonstrate genuine customer engagement at strategic, operational and local levels.

### 9. SWOT analysis of communications and customer engagement activity

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<p>Streets Ahead: regular, planned communication which customers expect</p> <p>The intranet provides an easily accessible information portal for staff</p> <p>New technology and social media have been embraced by Freebridge which enables the organisation to overcome barriers of age and location</p> <p>Work to engage non-English speakers – particularly the ESOL course – have been praised by others.</p>	<p>Streets Ahead: Lack of knowledge regarding its success / readership.</p> <p>A perception that customer views are not always taken into account, and that feedback isn’t given following surveys</p> <p>A perception that the organisation is King’s Lynn-centric</p> <p>Lack of cohesion in the delivery of the brand and in the use of language</p> <p>There is no central database of influencers and influencer activity which makes it difficult to engage with this key audience.</p>

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<p>Media relations: there is a plethora of good news stories and an appetite for Freebridge news from the press</p> <p>There is an appetite for reviewing the TOWN function as well as establishing a new formal structure for customer engagement</p> <p>The continued commitment of Freebridge to excellence in ICT means more opportunities to explore new media/technology channels</p> <p>There is a genuine commitment and interest from staff for improved, regular communication as demonstrated by staff enthusiasm for providing news and updates.</p>	<p>The changes to the regulatory framework and the changing political agenda can impact on how the organisation is perceived</p> <p>Changes in local politics can impact on how Freebridge is perceived locally.</p>

## 10. Summary of key findings

- Customers need to feel their feedback has been taken into consideration, and feedback should be provided by Freebridge on where customer views have been actioned;
- Communications for those staff without IT access need to be considered;
- Some degree of face-to-face engagement is important;
- Freebridge needs to take a joined-up approach;
- The communication needs of different audiences – particularly beyond the urban centre – need to be met;
- There is a plethora of ‘good news’ being generated which is currently not being captured and promoted;
- Freebridge needs to be able to respond to political and policy changes.

## Stage three: Recommendations: where we want to be

### 1. Why communications and customer engagement matter

Communications and customer engagement have an impact on how an organisation is perceived and can result in a negative or positive reputation. The quality of this reputation will have a direct impact on who wants to 'do business' with Freebridge – be them a customer, partner or influencer.

A regular flow of communications and engagement activity will:

- **Create awareness and understanding of who we are.** Myths surrounding us – for example 'Freebridge is part of the Council' – will be dispelled.
- **Generate a positive perception of Freebridge.** This will ensure that people want to live in our houses, work for us, and do business with us.
- **Facilitate two-way communication.** This will enable us to find out people's concerns and needs and respond to them.
- **Deliver effective, mutually-rewarding relationships.** Good communication will create trust around Freebridge which means that organisations will want to work in partnership with us. This will enable us to maximise opportunities and meet our business objective of 'growth.'
- **Help to deliver inclusive communities.** Through promoting diversity and ensuring Freebridge is perceived as an inclusive organisation, we can help to overcome barriers and encourage inclusivity within the communities in which we are working.

Conversely, an organisation which delivers no or poor communications and engagement will struggle to thrive as stakeholders will not want to 'do business' with an organisation perceived as having a negative reception. Such an organisation would be viewed as being secretive, and having no impact, or a negative impact, on the communities, and people, with which it works.

Communications and customer engagement must therefore be at the very heart of Freebridge so that these activities can support business success.

2. The **communication policy objectives** – as outlined in Freebridge’s policy on communications in May 2010 – are:

Freebridge Community Housing will aim to:

- Support the creation of a Customer Service culture
- Positively engage all stakeholders and encourage feedback
- Motivate staff to contribute to Freebridge’s success
- Effectively promote Freebridge’s services and branding
- Celebrate Freebridge’s achievements and convey key news items to a range of audiences
- Minimise Freebridge from the impact of bad news stories
- Position Freebridge to exert maximum influence on local and national policy makers.
- Comply with our regulatory and legal responsibilities as a minimum.

These policy objectives will be met by our communication and engagement activity plan.

3. In addition, brand workshops in 2010 led to the following brand values. These must be used as **key messages** in communication and community engagement activity:

- **INDEPENDENT, LOCAL AND ACCOUNTABLE**
- **A LEADER IN THE COMMUNITY**
- **KEEPING PROMISES**
- **CONSISTENTLY AND EFFECTIVELY MEETING NEEDS**
- **SUPPORTIVE**

3. The following are the **key principles** – based on the research and feedback given and translated from the key findings - which will guide Freebridge communications:

- All communication and engagement activity should be joined-up and presented under a coherent identity;
- All communication and engagement activity should be accessible to all, reaching all audiences in the most appropriate manner;
- There should be a 360° approach to communication and engagement activity, meaning feedback should be sought and given continuously;
- Communications and engagement activity should be flexible and responsive to operational, geographical and political changes;
- Systems should be put into place to ensure communication and engagement opportunities and needs are captured and met regularly;
- Measurement and evaluation of the communications and engagement activity should be carried out on an ongoing basis;
- Everybody has a role to play in delivering excellent communication and engagement with our stakeholders.

#### 4. New and reviewed methods

The following table contains recommendations for improving existing methods, and the introduction of new methods, to meet the principles outlined above. **The existing methods – outlined in the table on page one but not in this table of new and improved methods – remain unchanged and will continue as before.**

**These methods comply with the principles outlined above.**

Stakeholder	Value	Activity	Outcome	Review or New? / costs and resources*
ALL	<b>Working Together</b>  <b>Customer Focus</b>	<b>Development of a coherent visual identity and brand guidelines</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing a ‘visual identity’ for Freebridge which is instantly recognisable to our stakeholders. This will be moving on from the existing brand.</li> <li>• New templates will be produced for all communication materials (leaflets, advertising, posters, display panels etc) to be revamped.</li> <li>• Brand guidelines will be developed.</li> <li>• Information sessions will take place to engage with staff and engender their buy-in to rolling out the updated identity.</li> <li>• All the templates will be downloadable from the intranet</li> <li>• The Mary Gober principles to be incorporated into this review.</li> </ul>	Freebridge is perceived as a professional, joined-up organisation. The messages conveyed will be the same by all service areas. Key messages will be conveyed through visuals, overcoming barriers around language and literacy.	New  One-off cost from CCE budget
ALL	<b>Customer Focus</b>	<b>Promotional materials</b> Based on the work around the visual identity, carry out an audit of existing materials and develop new merchandise, as appropriate.	The Freebridge brand will be promoted across a range of relevant materials.	Review  Internal production will reduce cost implications

ALL	<b>Empowerment</b>  <b>Customer Focus</b>	<b>Delivering accessible communications</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signing up to the Plain English campaign</li> <li>• Providing staff training in Plain English</li> <li>• Promoting Plain English and simple, straightforward, short copy as the Freebridge style</li> <li>• Production of a usable, Plain English dictionary and style guide, available on the Intranet</li> <li>• In addition, following the Mary Gober training, the guide should also request that staff 'Goberise' copy, through the 'can-do' language of service.</li> </ul>	Communications are accessible and inclusive to all.	New  One-off cost
ALL	<b>Empowerment</b>  <b>Customer Focus</b>	<b>Delivering accessible communications</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewing and updating the video versions of Streets Ahead</li> <li>• Continuous improvement through delivery of communication methods to meet the needs of non-English speakers</li> <li>• Working with partners to support community cohesion through accessible methods</li> <li>• Ensuring that communications are compliant with the DDA</li> <li>• Production of guidelines and templates for accessible communication methods.</li> </ul>	Communications are accessible and inclusive to all.	Review  Ongoing; cost will vary but working in partnership will reduce costs
ALL	<b>Customer Focus</b>	<b>Establishment of a press office service</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proactive and reactive media relations as a result of newsgathering and early</li> </ul>	Freebridge has a positive, regular presence in the media which helps to position the	New  No cost

	<b>Working Together</b>	<p>alerts on potential issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish regular journalist meetings and maintain regular contact</li> <li>• Delivering newsgathering training, coupled with a newsgathering pro forma for staff</li> <li>• Media training for spokespeople</li> <li>• Review of media protocol</li> <li>• Identify opportunities for coverage in trade and local press through features, profiles etc.</li> <li>• Maintain press cuttings service to identify opportunities/issues.</li> </ul>	organisation as a leading Registered Provider and local company. A 'bank' of news coverage is built up to counter any negative coverage.	
<b>ALL</b>	<b>Working Together</b> <b>Customer Focus</b> <b>Empowerment</b>	<p><b>Website review</b> Review and update the content and design of the website in partnership with ICT Consultation with customers, staff and partners to be conducted throughout the process.</p>	The website will be more accessible and appealing to a wide range of stakeholders.	Review  One-off cost as ICT will maintain this
<b>ALL</b>	<b>Customer Focus</b>	<p><b>Awards</b> Identifying, and entering, awards which celebrate achievements and successes.</p>	Freebridge will be positioned as a leading Registered Provider and local employer.	New  Limited costs depending on size of award
<b>ALL</b>	<b>Working Together</b> <b>Customer Focus</b>	<p><b>Individual campaign and place-marketing plans</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivery of individual, targeted, proactive campaign and place-marketing plans for large-scale projects and development</li> </ul>	Targeted activity for specific activities will mean more focused coverage of key messages.	New  Cost only incurred if outside support

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tactics could include place-branding, media relations, events etc.</li> <li>These will be delivered as a corporate need arises.</li> </ul>		sought
<b>ALL</b>	<b>Customer Focus</b>	<b>Development of photography library</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a portfolio of Freebridge images which can be used in corporate and customer communication materials to represent the values of Freebridge.</li> <li>This will take place as part of the visual identity development.</li> </ul>	Freebridge will have access to a well-stocked photographic library, enabling key messages to be conveyed through imagery.	New  Cost built into CCE budget
<b>ALL</b>	<b>Empowerment</b>  <b>Customer Focus</b>  <b>Working Together</b>	<b>Sponsorship</b> Look into scope for sponsorship of local, community based activities such as a football team. Activities should be chosen which allow Freebridge branding to be used.	Freebridge will be positioned as a leading supporter of local community activities.	New  Cost will be determined by what is available in CCE budget but likely to be around £5k
<b>CUSTOMER</b>	<b>Empowerment</b>  <b>Working Together</b>  <b>Customer Focus</b>	<b>Review and redesign of Streets Ahead to ensure it becomes a channel for 360° communication</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consultation with customers to gauge what they want to see from their magazine. This will enable them to take ownership of it.</li> <li>Content review internally and to include more 'lifestyle' features to underline Freebridge's commitment to supporting</li> </ul>	Readers take ownership of Streets Ahead and engage with Freebridge through it. Readership increases, enabling Freebridge to reach more customers.	Review  One-off cost for new design and ongoing production costs met by CCE budget

		<p>communities and not just housing provision. This will also ensure that the magazine remains interesting and relevant to the readers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback mechanism included – both for readers to comment on issues and for Freebridge to feed back on actions on the back of resident comment.</li> <li>• New design chosen by a panel which includes staff and customers.</li> </ul>		
<b>CUSTOMER</b>	<b>Empowerment</b>  <b>Working Together</b>  <b>Customer Focus</b>	<b>Redesign information leaflets/tenants handbook/leaseholders handbook</b> <p>The information leaflets we provide to customers will be redesigned – in keeping with the new visual identity – and rewritten in plain English to ensure they are accessible. The customers and leaseholders handbooks will also be reviewed as appropriate.</p>	Customers can easily access information about Freebridge, and instantly recognise it as coming from Freebridge.	Review  Internal production will reduce costs
<b>CUSTOMER</b>	<b>Empowerment</b>  <b>Working Together</b>	<b>Review of TOWN</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitating a workshop with TOWN members to determine their objectives/constitution going forward.</li> <li>• To provide support with subsequent capacity-building.</li> </ul>	TOWN members are empowered to lead a deliverable work plan which provides constructive input into Freebridge.	Review  One-off cost for external support
<b>CUSTOMER</b>	<b>Empowerment</b>  <b>Working Together</b>	<b>Sheltered United</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with members of Sheltered United to support them to determine their objectives going forward.</li> <li>• To provide support with subsequent capacity-building.</li> </ul>	Sheltered United is empowered to lead a deliverable work plan which provides constructive input into Freebridge.	Review
<b>CUSTOMER</b>	<b>Empowerment</b>	<b>Scrutiny/Continuous Improvement Panel</b>	Customers will feel	New

	<b>Working Together</b>	Supporting the setting-up and running of a customer panel which will provide input into the operating of Freebridge.	empowered and Freebridge will benefit from feedback and input into key organisational matters.	Running costs to be determined
<b>CUSTOMER</b>	<b>Empowerment</b> <b>Working Together</b>	<b>Scoping into the establishment of a youth panel</b> Investigate the potential for, and logistics of, a youth panel, working with local education providers and community groups.	Young people – tomorrow’s customers – will feel engaged with Freebridge and within their communities. This will help to engender respect for their own places to live.	New No cost incurred
<b>CUSTOMER</b>	<b>Empowerment</b> <b>Working Together</b> <b>Customer Focus</b>	<b>Annual Tenants’ Event</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with the Management Team – in consultation with customers – to develop a targeted engagement event which provides information and an opportunity for feedback.</li> <li>• Format to be reviewed at Management Team’s away days.</li> </ul>	The Tenants’ Event is an interactive forum for information and engagement which appeals to a wide range of customers.	Review Cost to be determined
<b>CUSTOMER</b>	<b>Working Together</b> <b>Empowerment</b> <b>Customer Focus</b>	<b>Review of the Tenants’ Awards to ensure the process and ceremony is inclusive and accessible to all</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review previous events and make recommendations for future events</li> <li>• Liaise with customers to gauge their feedback</li> <li>• Identify a media or business partner.</li> </ul>	The Tenant Awards are an opportunity for engagement and customers feel empowered to continue to support their communities.	Review Cost met from CCE budget
<b>CUSTOMER</b>	<b>Empowerment</b> <b>Customer Focus</b>	<b>Audit of existing customer engagement activity and production of deliverable programme of customer engagement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mapping what customer engagement activity is currently being delivered by</li> </ul>	Regular, measurable, planned engagement is delivered which enables customers to feel engaged and empowered.	New Costs will be incurred in the delivery of

		<p>CCE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis against operational, demographic and geographical factors</li> <li>• Production of a workable programme of customer engagement</li> <li>• Delivered as part of the customer empowerment service review</li> <li>• Activity to include tenant surveying, training review, Tenant Incentive Scheme and redevelopment of TOG.</li> </ul>		the plan, and these will be met by the CCE budget
<b>CUSTOMERS</b>	<b>Customer Focus</b>	<p><b>Audit of existing local news channels</b></p> <p>A review of local parish and community newsletters and tapping into opportunities to provide local, targeted news.</p>	Tenants are receiving targeted news in existing channels which they are already accessing.	<p>New</p> <p>No cost incurred</p>
<b>CUSTOMERS</b>	<b>Empowerment Customer Focus</b>	<p><b>Tenant Incentive Scheme</b></p> <p>The development, and rolling out, of a Tenant Incentive Scheme which allows tenants to gain points for good tenancy behaviour. The points can then be converted into rewards.</p>	Good tenants are rewarded and feel empowered to maintain good tenancies. Tenants are inspired to adopt good behaviour.	<p>New</p> <p>Costs incurred in establishing scheme</p>
<b>STAFF</b>	<b>Working Together</b>	<p><b>Redesign of the staff bulletin</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Redesign the staff bulletin as part of the development of the visual identity</li> <li>• Liaise with HR to determine what support is needed from CCE.</li> </ul>	The staff bulletin is instantly recognisable as being from the Freebridge family of publications. HR and CCE join up on stories so that information is shared and resources maximised.	<p>Review</p> <p>Cost met during brand development</p>
<b>STAFF</b>	<b>Working Together</b>	<p><b>Intranet</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of the existing intranet with ICT</li> <li>• Consultation with staff on their information needs</li> </ul>	Staff have access to the information they need in a format they want, enabling them to feel engaged with the	<p>Review</p> <p>No cost incurred as</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Subsequent changes made to the site.</li> </ul>	organisation.	it's managed by ICT
<b>STAFF</b>	<b>Working Together</b>	<b>Staff handbook</b> To be redesigned as part of the visual identity review, including the application of Plain English.	The staff handbook becomes even more accessible to staff.	Review  Cost met during brand development
<b>STAFF</b>	<b>Working Together</b>	<b>Staff learning sessions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lunchtime learning sessions which enable staff to learn more about a particular subject.</li> <li>The sessions will include opportunity for question and answer.</li> <li>They will be programmed in throughout the year.</li> </ul>	Staff have access to subjects which they may not fully understand.	New  Minimal organisational costs
<b>STAFF</b>	<b>Working Together</b>	<b>Chief Executive video blog</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A short, monthly video blog by Tony on a subject pertinent to Freebridge and the sector</li> <li>Can be given by another member of the Executive at intervals</li> <li>Will be produced internally and made available on the intranet.</li> </ul>	Staff have access to the Chief Executive, and are updated on key issues. Staff feel engaged within the organisation and a part of the 'bigger picture.'	New  No cost if delivered internally
<b>STAFF</b>	<b>Empowerment</b>	<b>Training</b> Training in design and media relations to capacity-build the team.	The CCE team is fully skilled.	New  Cost met through training budget
<b>STAFF</b>	<b>Working Together</b>	<b>Accessibility of communications for Property Services</b>	Property Services staff feel fully engaged within the	Review

		Working with HR, looking at options for any potential changes to communication methods for Property Services.	organisation.	No cost incurred initially; possible costs in delivery of options
<b>STAFF</b>	<b>Working Together</b> <b>Empowerment</b>	<b>Staff feedback mechanisms</b> Working with HR, look at existing staff feedback/suggestion mechanisms to determine if these can be promoted by CCE.	Staff will be aware of the mechanisms available for them to give feedback.	Review No cost incurred
<b>STAFF</b>	<b>Working Together</b>	<b>Work shadowing</b> Staff spend time shadowing colleagues in different departments to learn from each other's experiences.	Staff have an improved understanding of colleagues' roles engendering a mutual respect.	No cost incurred Led by HR
<b>STAFF</b>	<b>Working Together</b> <b>Empowerment</b>	<b>Staff Charter</b> Developing a charter which outlines Freebridge's commitment to its staff.	Staff are aware of the expectations of them, and what they can expect from Freebridge. A mutual commitment will be the outcome.	No cost incurred Led by HR
<b>STAFF</b>	<b>Working Together</b>	<b>External peer learning visits</b> With HR, scope the feasibility of 'learning visits' to similar organisations/RPs to share best practice and inspire learning.	Staff will be inspired to think differently in how they approach issues.	New Minimal organisational costs
<b>PARTNERS</b>	<b>Working Together</b>	<b>Audit of partner engagement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a vast amount of partner engagement – such as through e<sup>2</sup>, the NHF communications network.</li> <li>• The audit will be carried out amongst</li> </ul>	Freebridge is fully engaged with partners, is at the forefront of networks and is positioned as a leading Registered Provider.	New No costs incurred

		<p>the management group to capture what is happening.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This will enable the identification of any gaps or opportunities to engage further with our partners.</li> <li>• Actions coming out of the engagement might include a partner e-bulletin.</li> </ul>		
<b>PARTNERS/ INFLUENCERS</b>	<b>Working Together</b>	<p><b>Freebridge Learning Seminars</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning seminars for peers and influencers which focus on key themes where Freebridge has had particular success</li> <li>• The seminars will be interactive, and there will be four seminars a year</li> <li>• The seminars will be hosted by Freebridge, and free to attend.</li> </ul>	Freebridge will be able to share best practice and learning with peers, and will be positioned as a leading Registered Provider.	New  Minimal organisational costs
<b>PARTNERS/ INFLUENCERS</b>	<b>Customer Focus</b>  <b>Working Together</b>	<p><b>Partner and influencer database</b></p> <p>Following the partner and influencers audits, a dynamic database to be produced containing contact details for key stakeholders This will be updated on a regular basis as roles change.</p>	Freebridge will be able to deliver targeted engagement with partners and influencers.	New  No costs incurred
<b>PARTNERS/ INFLUENCERS</b>	<b>Working Together</b>	<p><b>Speaking opportunities</b></p> <p>Seek and fulfil speaking opportunities at local, regional and national events.</p>	Freebridge will be able to engage with key partners and influencers and promote its strengths and achievements.	New  No costs incurred
<b>INFLUENCERS</b>	<b>Customer Focus</b>  <b>Working Together</b>	<p><b>Influencer audit and engagement plan/Network Register</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An audit of current influencer relations, carried out amongst the management group</li> </ul>	Freebridge will be engaged with the key decision-makers and will have early warning of any issues or concerns amongst policy-makers.	New  No costs incurred

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Once this activity has been mapped, gaps and opportunities to be identified</li> <li>• A dynamic, deliverable influencer communications plan to be produced and delivered</li> <li>• Likely activities to include briefing sessions and targeted letters.</li> </ul>		
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\* Capacity-building of the CCE team will enable more activity to be delivered internally without input from external consultants.

### 3. Systems for capturing communication needs and opportunities

- Monthly, half-hour meetings with Assistant Directors and representative of CCE team
- AD of Communications & Engagement attendance at Management Team
- The Communications Group which meets bi-monthly
- News gathering pro forma and training to be established.

### 4. Measurement and evaluation

The communications and customer engagement activity will be measured and evaluated through a number of different methods:

- Feedback from the regular, ongoing surveys about Freebridge;
- Press cutting service, including quarterly analysis of coverage;
- Evaluation of feedback and attendance at events;
- Evaluation of feedback received via social networking sites;
- Analysis of website usage;
- Feedback from partners via surveys and informal mechanisms;
- Feedback via established mechanisms such as pre-pay reply cards etc;
- Informal, anecdotal feedback.

## **5. Communications and customer engagement plan**

The methods outlined in this document – current, reviewed and new – will be captured in a dynamic, comprehensive, timetable. This will guide the priorities and activities for the Communication and Customer Engagement Team. The plan will also incorporate planned measurement and evaluation methods. This will be updated on a regular basis following meetings with ADs and the CCE team meeting. This plan will enable the team to proactively prepare for key milestones and prioritise, without removing the flexible nature of the team.

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