

FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING BOARD

**Minutes of an Informal Meeting of the Board held on
Monday 9 February 2015 at 6.30pm in
“The Barn”, 2 Chapel Lane, King’s Lynn**

PRESENT:

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

IN ATTENDANCE:

Robert Clarke - Director of Housing
Colin Davison - Director of Property
Angus MacQueen - Company Secretary

Note: This meeting was not quorate, as there was no Tenant Board Member was present. All of the decisions agreed at the meeting were, therefore, presented to each Board Member (including those not present) for signature to indicate approval. Each of the decisions listed in these minutes received the required number of Board Member signatures to enable them to be considered as written resolutions, as valid and effective as if they had been passed at a properly called and constituted meeting of the Board (in accordance with Rule D32). The written resolutions have been placed in the Minute Book alongside these minutes.

18/15 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Marie Connell and Jasmine Rigg.

19/15 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2015 were agreed as a correct record.

[This was confirmed by written resolution.]

20/15 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

21/15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Executive Board Members, and the other staff present, declared interests in the item at minute number 41/15 – 2014/15 Business Plan Third Quarter

Update, regarding consideration of the Business Plan Bond. They remained in the room during the discussion.

22/15 CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

The Chairman said that, since the last Board meeting, he had continued to attend his weekly meetings with the Chief Executive. He had also attended two meetings as Freebridge's representative on the Queen Elizabeth Hospital's Governor's Council.

23/15 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE

A written update from the Chief Executive had been previously circulated and was noted by the meeting.

The written update covered the following issues:

- "Iron Grip" training for the Board – being organised for summer 2015
- Special General Meeting – provisional date 28 April 2015
- Development updates
- Hillington Square update
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) History Month event hosted by Freebridge
- Cost Driver training held for senior managers
- Visit from the funders
- Plaxtole House
- Executive Remuneration – there had not been enough change in the market to warrant a market review this year
- Best Companies Celebration Event
- Customer Surveying

[Confidential wording]

24/15 THE TRAINING HOUSES: THE OAKS AND PHOENIX HOUSE

The Director of Housing presented a report which sought approval to enter into a revised service level agreement with the Purfleet Trust, and a new service level agreement between Freebridge, the Borough Council and the Purfleet Trust, with regard to the management of The Oaks and Phoenix House training houses.

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

- The length of stay of the residents would not impact on the receipt of the Temporary Accommodation Subsidy.
- The Purfleet Trust would be required by the service level agreement to manage the training houses. Exactly how they spent the money received from Freebridge would be a matter for them.

- The maintenance of the properties would be Freebridge's responsibility.
- The properties were fully occupied most of the time.
- The tenants tended to be aged in their 20s, although there had been some older ones.

Board Members welcomed the significant impact on people's lives that was being achieved by the training houses project.

AGREED:

- 1) That both existing (and any newly established) Training Houses be officially designated as Temporary Accommodation, and the rents increased in accordance with Temporary Accommodation Subsidy Rates.
- 2) That an amendment be made to the existing service level agreement between Freebridge and the Purfleet Trust to reflect the payment of a management fee to the Purfleet Trust, and that the Director of Housing be given delegated authority to finalise and enter into the amended service level agreement on behalf of Freebridge.
- 3) That a new service level agreement be entered into between Freebridge, the Purfleet Trust and the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk, and that the Director of Housing be given delegated authority to finalise and enter into the service level agreement on behalf of Freebridge.

[These were confirmed by written resolution.]

25/15 ALTERNATIVE HOUSING POLICY

The Chief Executive presented a report which introduced the new Alternative Housing Policy. He highlighted that it was ultimately intended to incorporate this new Policy into the Asset Management Policy.

The Chief Executive said that the Board had had input into the development of the Policy, through a "Thinking Session" in May 2014. The Policy focused on shared housing and "Nano" housing. In answer to a question, the Chief Executive stated that, following a pilot scheme, Freebridge would discuss the "Nano" house concept with the Borough Council's Planning Department.

The Board was pleased to note that the Policy included a requirement for schemes to have exit strategies.

AGREED: That the Alternative Housing Policy, Strategy and Action Plan be approved.

[This was confirmed by written resolution.]

26/15 **SOCIAL AND COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISE POLICY**

The Director of Housing presented a report which introduced the new Social and Commercial Enterprise Policy.

The Board noted that it had had input into the development of the Policy, through a “Thinking Session” in December 2014.

In answer to questions, the Director of Housing said that a methodology to measure social value was being developed. Care would be taken to ensure that this was not too complicated or technical.

AGREED: That the Social and Commercial Enterprise Policy be approved.
[This was confirmed by written resolution.]

27/15 **REVIEW OF THE ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR, HARASSMENT AND HATE CRIMES POLICY**

The Director of Housing presented a report which reviewed the Anti-Social Behaviour, Harassment and Hate Crimes Policy.

The Board welcomed the revised Policy, as it showed a continued commitment and a real desire by Freebridge to support victims.

It was commented that radicalisation was a growing issue nationally which may need to be considered by the housing sector.

AGREED: That the suggested amendments to the Anti-Social Behaviour, Harassment and Hate Crimes Policy, as highlighted in the report, be approved.
[This was confirmed by written resolution.]

28/15 **AMENDMENTS TO THE APPEALS POLICY**

The Director of Housing presented a report which proposed amendments to the Appeals Policy outside of the scheduled review.

AGREED: That the suggested amendments to the Appeals Policy, as highlighted in the report, be approved.
[This was confirmed by written resolution.]

29/15 **REVIEW OF THE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT POLICY**

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report which reviewed the Performance Management Policy.

The Board was pleased to note the improvements against key performance indicators from 2006 to 2014, as attached to the report.

AGREED:

- 1) That the revised Performance Management Policy, Strategy and Action Plan be approved.
- 2) That the next scheduled review of this Policy be in three years' time.
[These were confirmed by written resolution.]

30/15 AUDIT COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

Ian Pinches, Chairman of the Audit Committee, presented a report setting out the recommendation of the Committee's meeting held on 26 January 2015.

AGREED: That the Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy be approved.
[This was confirmed by written resolution.]

31/15 PROPOSED RULE CHANGES

The Company Secretary presented a report which introduced a complete amendment to the Freebridge Rules. The complete amendment sought to provide Rule changes previously agreed in principle by the Board.

The Company Secretary stressed that the purpose of this item was to establish the Board's position on the complete amendment. Consultation with key stakeholders was ongoing, and the Borough Council's support would be required at a General Meeting for the complete amendment to be passed. Consultation with all tenants on changes to the Board structure would be undertaken through Streets Ahead, which was likely to be published in mid-April 2015.

The meeting acknowledged that it was appropriate to change Rule C12, so as to qualify occasions when the Board might reject an application for shareholding. However, the meeting was of the view that the amendment, as drafted, would only give it the authority to reject a shareholding application in cases of material breach of tenancy agreement or lease. The Board was concerned that this could fetter its discretion to reject applications for other reasons, and therefore requested a wider drafting of this amendment.

The meeting questioned whether it would be appropriate to allow a non-resident leaseholder [name removed] to remain on the Tenant Panel until the end of her term of office in May 2017, following removal of non-resident leaseholders from the definition of "tenant". It was determined that, in view of this individual's contribution to the Panel to date and the role that she could play in helping the development of new members to establish themselves, it would be acceptable to make a special exception on this occasion.

AGREED:

- 1) That the complete Rule amendment attached to the report be approved as the Board's preferred position, subject to a wider redrafting of Rule

C12 so as not to fetter the Board's discretion to refuse shareholding applications.

- 2) That, subject to the necessary consultation being completed, and the Borough Council indicating that it would support the complete Rule amendment, a Special General Meeting be called for the second half of April 2015 and be requested to approve the complete Rule amendment.
- 3) That the Chairman be given delegated authority, in consultation with the Company Secretary, to approve any minor amendments to the Rules resulting from the Homes and Communities Agency consent process, subject to a report back to the Board.
- 4) That, should the Rules be changed to remove non-resident leaseholders from the definition of "tenant", a special exception be made to allow [name removed] to continue as a member of the Tenant Panel until the end of her term of office in May 2017.

[These were confirmed by written resolution.]

32/15 GOVERNANCE IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN

The Company Secretary presented a report which introduced the Governance Improvement Action Plan now revised to incorporate actions arising from the Campbell Tickell Board appraisal and review 2014 outcome report.

AGREED: That the Governance Improvement Action Plan, as attached to the report, be approved.

[This was confirmed by written resolution.]

33/15 PROCUREMENT APPROVALS

Confidential item

34/15 PRINTED SIGNATORY BANK INDEMNITY

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report which requested the Board to agree a resolution to ratify current processes and approve a Printed Signatory Bank Indemnity for National Westminster Bank Plc, the Association's bankers.

AGREED: That the Association's bankers be provided with an Indemnity, as attached to the report, and that the said Indemnity Form should be entered into so as to bind the Association to the Bank upon the terms of the said Indemnity and that Mr Ray Johnson, Chairman of the Association, be authorised to sign said form.

[This was confirmed by written resolution.]

[A copy of the resolution form as required by the Bank has been placed in the Minute Book alongside these minutes.]

35/15 **AMENDMENT TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME EMPLOYERS' POLICY STATEMENT**

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report which set out an amendment to the Local Government Pension Scheme Employers' Policy Statement.

AGREED:

- 1) That the amendment to the Local Government Pension Scheme Employers' Policy Statement be approved.
- 2) That the Board Chairman sign the revised document on the Board's behalf.

[These were confirmed by written resolution.]

36/15 **APPOINTMENT OF SHAREHOLDERS**

The Company Secretary presented a report which listed applications for tenant shareholding.

AGREED: That the applications for tenant shareholding set out in Appendix 1 to the report be approved.

[This was confirmed by written resolution.]

37/15 **OPERATIONS PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW**

The Director of Housing presented the Operations Performance Overview report for the quarter ending 31 December 2014.

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

- The Director of Housing highlighted that relet times were now back on target. An external piece of work to review the lettings process was being carried out, and would influence the setting of targets for 2015/16.
- In answer to a question, the Director of Property said that the performance around service charges and other arrears appeared to have fallen; however, this was only due to a timing issue with the payment of two large invoices and was not a cause for concern.
- In answer to a question, the Director of Property explained that the figures appeared to show that many complaints were not being responded to within the required 14 days; in fact often a verbal response was given, but the system only allowed written responses to be recorded. Changes needed to be made to the computer system to enable verbal responses to be recorded, whilst staff needed to ensure that they closed down complaints formally.

- In answer to a question, the Director of Property stated that it was usual during the winter months for complaints around mould and damp to increase, but these were normally the result of lifestyle issues.
- The Chief Executive referred to a query previously raised by the Board that there had appeared to be a trend in complaints around staff attitude and communication. He had looked into this and had ascertained that the complaints had been about different people working in different parts of the organisation. He had, therefore, been able to conclude that there was not one individual or team issue. He confirmed that the Management Team was focusing on ways to improve responses.
- It was highlighted that the number of complaints received was very low when considering the number of properties owned by Freebridge. The meeting thanked the Management Team for preparing a report which clearly set out the situation around complaints. The meeting was also very pleased to note the large number of compliments that had been received, and asked that its thanks be passed on to staff.

The meeting noted the report.

38/15 FINANCE AND HUMAN RESOURCES QUARTERLY MANAGEMENT REPORT

Confidential item

39/15 TREASURY MANGEMENT AND STRATEGY UPDATE

Confidential item

40/15 RISK MANAGEMENT AND FRAUD AWARENESS UPDATE

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report which detailed risk management activity during the quarter ending 31 December 2014 and provided an update to the Risk Map.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that consideration was being given to revising the Risk Map, so that it was split between operational risks, to be monitored by the Management Team, and strategic risks, to be monitored by the Board.

In answer to a question, the Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the PricewaterhouseCoopers report on Freebridge's cyber security had now been received.

The meeting noted the report.

41/15 2014/15 BUSINESS PLAN – THIRD QUARTER UPDATE

The Chief Executive presented a report which set out the third quarter update to the 2014/15 Business Plan.

The Chief Executive pointed out that the Board would need to decide how to allocate the discretionary element of the Business Plan Bond. The meeting was of the view that there had been good performance across the organisation, and so the discretionary payment should reflect this rather than performance in any particular area. A final decision on how this should be allocated would be made when the Business Plan outturn report was produced.

The Board noted the report.

42/15 BENCHMARKING REPORT 2013/14

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report which set out the annual Housemark benchmarking results for 2013/14.

The meeting noted that Freebridge had dropped in rank for the cost per property of responsive repairs. It was not necessarily a bad thing to increase resources for repairs; however, it would be worth reviewing the allocation of staff time.

The meeting was particularly pleased to note the positive outcomes for Freebridge in relation to IT & communications, tenancy turnover rate, and customer services.

The Deputy Chief Executive said that some associations no longer took part in the annual benchmarking exercise, and so it was becoming less useful than in the past. It may be worth considering whether to continue Freebridge's involvement at some point in the future, although it still had some value at present. In response to a request, the Deputy Chief Executive said that he would provide Board Members with the annual cost of Freebridge's involvement in Housemark.

The meeting noted the report.

43/15 SWARM APPRENTICESHIPS – CONCLUDING REPORT

The Director of Housing presented a report which described the progress made on the SWARM apprenticeships programme.

It was highlighted that the full payment originally agreed by Freebridge would not now be made to SWARM. This was because targets for arranging apprenticeships, required by the Freebridge Board, had not been met. The meeting was disappointed to note this situation, which was not because of a lack of young people wishing to become apprentices, but because there was a lack of firms willing to employ them. The meeting was pleased to note that

Freebridge would be assisting in the promotion of the programme to local businesses.

The meeting noted the report.

44/15 PROVIDENCE STREET CENTRE UPDATE

The Director of Housing presented a report which described the development of the Providence Street Centre to date and the plans for the future.

The meeting was delighted to note the significant increase in usage of the Centre since Freebridge had taken ownership of it in January 2014, and asked that its thanks be passed on to the staff involved. It was also highlighted that an exit strategy was in place, should this be required.

In answer to a question, the Director of Housing said that there would be a report to a future Board meeting on the social impact of the Hillington Square refurbishment. This would include consideration of a methodology for measuring social value. The meeting acknowledged that it would be useful to adopt a standard methodology as and when one emerged.

It was commented that the wider role of housing associations in terms of social impact was being increasingly recognised nationally by the Government and health organisations.

The meeting noted the report.

45/15 UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENT OF THE FINANCIAL PLAN

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report which provided an update on the development of the Financial Plan and associated activities for 2014/15.

It was noted that some Board Members had previously requested training on the BRIXX financial planning system. It was possible that this would be covered sufficiently in the “iron grip” training to be held in summer 2015.

The meeting noted the report.

46/15 URGENT ACTION TAKEN – PROVISION OF A TENANCY TO A CLOSE RELATIVE OF A RECENT EMPLOYEE

The meeting noted a request for urgent action that had been approved, to enable the Association to provide a tenancy to a close relative of a recent employee.

The meeting noted the report.

47/15 **URGENT ACTION TAKEN – EASTERN PROCUREMENT PROJECT PARTNERING CONTRACT**

The meeting noted a request for urgent action that had been approved, to enable the Association to enter into a project partnering contract with Eastern Procurement.

The meeting noted the report.

48/15 **WORK UPDATE**

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

- Action Sheet
- Future Work Programme of the Board.

It was highlighted that there was an outstanding entry on the action sheet to consider the use the volunteers by Freebridge to give debt advice. It was explained that Freebridge was not in a position to host the volunteers, as it would have a vested interest in any advice given. However, the Director of Housing would contact West Norfolk Community and Voluntary Action to ask whether they could host or support such a scheme. The action would then be closed, as Freebridge would not be able to take this further. Tenants in need of debt advice would always be “signposted” to the appropriate agencies.

The Board noted the update.

49/15 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

(a) Tenant Panel Observers at Board Meetings

The Company Secretary reminded the meeting that the Board had previously invited Tenant Panel Members to observe Board meetings as part of their development. Some relatively new recruits to the Panel had expressed an interest in observing a Board meeting, and this was currently being arranged.

(b) Attempted Fraud

The Chairman advised that Freebridge’s Finance team had recently foiled an attempted fraud. The team had been informed of a change of bank details for a major contractor. On following the correct procedures, the team had established that this was fraudulent, thereby potentially saving both Freebridge and the contractor a large amount of money. The meeting requested that its thanks be passed on to the Finance team for their vigilance and diligence in following the procedures.

50/15 NEXT MEETING

The Board noted that its next meeting was scheduled for Monday 9 March 2015 at 6.30pm.

The meeting closed at 8.10pm.

CHAIRMAN