

FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING BOARD

Minutes of a Meeting of the Board held on
Monday 11 May 2020 at 4.30pm
“Virtual” Meeting by Video Link

PRESENT:

Andy Walder (Chair)
Joanna Barrett
Marie Connell
Tony Hall (Chief Executive)
Marcus Hopkins
Brian Long
Ian Pinches
Pauleen Pratt
Jasmine Rigg
Simon Smith
Richard Spilsbury (Co-opted Member)

OBSERVER (permitted to speak at the Chair’s discretion):

Mike Britch - Board Chair,
Bridgegate Homes

IN ATTENDANCE:

Sophie Bates - Director of Housing
Birgit Lenton - Director of Corporate Services and
Culture
Dave Marshall - Director of Finance and Resources
Angus MacQueen - Company Secretary

22/20 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Shelley Lamprell-Josephs.

23/20 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2020 were confirmed as a correct record. They would be signed by the Chair once the office had reopened following the current coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak.

24/20 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

25/20 ACTION SHEET

The Board noted the action sheet.

26/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following Board Members declared interests in various aspects of the item at minute number 32/20 – Governance and Remuneration Committee recommendations: Marcus Hopkins, Brian Long, Jasmine Rigg, Richard Spilsbury and Tony Hall. As there was no discussion on this item, the Board was content that they should remain present for its duration.

27/20 CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair said that he was delighted with the response to the coronavirus crisis by the Management Team and the Freebridge staff. He was extremely grateful for the positive attitude and hard work which had enabled Freebridge to continue to provide a service; very good feedback had been received from tenants. The Board asked that its thanks be passed on to all employees.

The Chair also thanked the Board and Management Team for their support and invaluable input with regard to the recruitment process for the new Chief Executive. The successful candidate, Anita Jones, would be joining Freebridge in early August 2020.

28/20 MANAGEMENT TEAM UPDATE

A written update from the Management Team had been previously circulated and was noted by the Board.

The written update covered the following issues

- Customer Service Committee
- Complaints Process Pilot
- Tenant Panel
- Fraud Register Update
- Risk Management – Role of the Audit and Risk Committee
- Support to Customers During the Pandemic
- Empty Property Performance
- Community Café
- Independent East
- Head of Asset Management

The Board considered the recommendation in the Management Team Update that it ask the Governance and Remuneration Committee to discuss the six months pilot evaluation of the new complaints process. It had originally been intended that this would be referred to the Customer Service Committee, but that Committee's trial introduction had been delayed by the coronavirus outbreak. In answer to a question, the Director of Corporate Services and Culture confirmed that the evaluation would be presented to the Tenant Panel in advance of the Governance and Remuneration Committee. It was acknowledged that this item would sit with the Governance and Remuneration Committee on a temporary basis, with effect from its next meeting on 29 June 2020, and would be referred to the Customer Service Committee as soon as this Committee was in place.

It was stressed that, in the absence of the Customer Service Committee, the Board should continue to consider customer service issues in the same way as it always had done.

RESOLVED: That the six months pilot evaluation of the new complaints process be referred to the Governance and Remuneration Committee, until such time as the Customer Service Committee is operational.

29/20 **PERFORMANCE PACK**

Confidential item

30/20 **COVID-19 IMPLICATIONS**

The Chair introduced this item by stating that the Freebridge response to the coronavirus crisis had been appropriate and well-led by the Management Team. The stress testing carried out on any potential income loss so far was appropriate, reasonable and proportionate.

It was acknowledged that Board Members had submitted questions on this update in advance of the meeting, and these had been answered in writing by the Management Team.

The Chief Executive presented the report and paid tribute to the Freebridge workforce for its fantastic response to the crisis. Where possible, employees were now working from home; for those who needed to come into the office on occasions, appropriate hygiene and social distancing measures were in place. It had been more of a challenge to protect the safety of employees who worked in the community or in people's homes. Appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) had been provided to these employees. Repairs had been limited to emergency and urgent only. Work on empty properties had continued, subject to social distancing being respected. Suitable action had been taken for employees in higher risk categories; following a suggestion from a Board Member, employees from black/minority ethnic backgrounds would be included in this. In answer to a question, the Chief Executive said that tenants were being consulted on an individual basis when works were required.

Pauleen Pratt offered to assist with advice to the Management Team on PPE and infection control, in view of her clinical background.

In response to a question, the Chief Executive advised that the Management Team had identified £10,000 to assist local charities and communities, and was discussing how best to distribute this. In addition, a separate £5,000 had been gifted to the Purfleet Trust. While the Board supported the allocation of some of this money to local charities, it was stressed that some should be set aside to assist tenants in hardship. The Director of Housing suggested that the existing scheme to help tenants with large one-off expenses, for example the purchase of floor coverings and white goods, could be extended. The Board asked the Management Team to keep it informed as to how this money was allocated.

The Board noted the report.

31/20 **FINANCIAL PLAN 2020**

Confidential item

32/20 **GOVERNANCE AND REMUNERATION COMMITTEE
RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Board considered the recommendations of the Governance and Remuneration Committee meeting held on 16 March 2020.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the appointment of Marcus Hopkins and Brian Long as Board Members until the Annual General Meeting in September 2021 be proposed at the Annual General Meeting in September 2020.
- 2) That the appointment of Jasmine Rigg as a Board Member until the Annual General Meeting in September 2022 be proposed at the Annual General Meeting in September 2020.
- 3) That the skills matrix and related approach set out in the Governance and Remuneration Committee report be approved.
- 4) That the appointment of Richard Spilsbury as a Board Member until the Annual General Meeting in September 2023 be proposed at the Annual General Meeting in September 2020.
- 5) That no other Board Member recruitment take place in 2020, subject to review following the 2020 Board skills assessment.
- 6) [Confidential wording]

33/20 **HILLINGTON SQUARE PROJECT UPDATE**

The Board noted a report which provided an update on the progress being made on the delivery of the Hillington Square Regeneration Project, including the commencement of communications.

34/20 **WRITTEN RESOLUTIONS**

The Board noted the following written resolutions:

- Employment of a Close Relative of an Existing Employee
- Appointment of the Independent Member of the Audit and Risk Committee
- Temporary Appointment of the Legal Services Manager as an Authorised Signatory for the Execution of Deeds
- Procedure for Dealing with Employee Interests
- Appointment of New Chief Executive.

35/20 COMMITTEE MINUTES/OUTCOME REPORT

The Board received the minutes of the Governance and Remuneration Committee meeting held on 16 March 2020 and the outcome report from the Audit and Risk Committee dated April 2020.

36/20 FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME OF THE BOARD

The Board noted its work programme for the ensuing year.

The Board requested that a further Covid-19 update be added to the agenda for its meeting on 27 July 2020, and asked that it include more information on efforts to support vulnerable tenants.

37/20 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(a) Shelley Lamprell-Josephs

The Board noted that Shelley Lamprell-Josephs would be leaving the Board on 31 May 2020, in view of a move to another part of the country. Board Members asked that their thanks be passed on to her for her contribution to Freebridge, in particular her insights as a service-user. They wished her every success with her move.

(b) Webinars

The Chair encouraged Board Members to take advantage of webinars; they were a useful way of gaining information.

38/20 NEXT MEETING

The Board noted that its next meeting was scheduled for Monday 27 July 2020 at 4.30pm. The Board's next strategy afternoon would be held on Monday 8 June 2020 at 12noon. Topics would include business planning and Covid-19. The items that had been planned on education attainment and Freebridge academy might be deferred.

The meeting closed at 6.05pm.

CHAIR