

**FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING BOARD**

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Board held on  
Monday 14 November 2022 at 5.10pm in the  
Conference Room, Juniper House  
Austin Street, King's Lynn**

**PRESENT:**

Andy Walder (Chair)  
Jo Barrett  
Gil Fernandes  
Andrew Hill  
Anita Jones (Chief Executive)  
Donald McKenzie (minute numbers 96/22 - 110/22)  
Gill Rejzl  
Vicky Savage  
Simon Smith

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Anna Simpson	-	Director of Resources & Deputy Chief Executive
Sophie Bates	-	Director of Customer & Communities
Paul Newbold	-	Director of New Homes & Commercial (via video link)
Dave Seaton	-	Director of Homes & Community Maintenance
Angus MacQueen	-	Governance Manager

**96/22      APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was received from Jasmine Rigg.

**97/22      DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Gill Rejzl declared an interest in the item at minute number 100/22 – Dealing with the Rent Cap – as she was the Chair of the College of West Anglia, [confidential wording] The Board was content that she remain in the room for the item.

[confidential wording]

**98/22      CHAIR'S UPDATE**

The Chair made the following points:

- The Board was facing difficult decisions in view of external economic factors. It was important that the Board remained focused on its

strategic intent and, in particular, on the needs of tenants. The Board must also keep under review its appetite for risk.

- Overall, Freebridge was in a stronger position than many housing associations. It was financially sustainable and would be able to manage the impact of a rent cap.

## **99/22            OPERATING CONTEXT**

The Chief Executive presented a report which sought to support the Board's understanding of the Freebridge operating context at the current time and factors that could impact on that in the short/medium/long term.

The Chief Executive made the following points:

- Despite the anticipated rent freeze, the Government expected the delivery of new homes.
- With the rise in no fault evictions, the shrinking of the private sector and the difficulty for many people in affording mortgages, the demand for social housing was likely to increase.
- Supportive feedback to Freebridge's proposed approach to the rent cap had been received from the Customer Voice Panel and Service Champions, as set out in the video circulated to the Board in advance of the meeting.
- The Chief Executive, Director of Customer & Communities and Director of Homes & Community Maintenance would be meeting with most of the West Norfolk borough councillors later that week.

[confidential wording]

- A number of organisations were being downgraded to V2; this was indicative of the current economic circumstances.
- The Regulator was also expecting boards to display understanding of Decent Homes and stock condition, sometimes with little notice.
- Freebridge's view of key risks was largely in line with the Sector Risk Profile, recently published by the Regulator, as set out in the Risk Management report later on the agenda.
- The recent colleague survey had produced very encouraging results, with 89.2% overall colleague satisfaction.

[confidential wording]

The Board congratulated the Leadership Team on the pleasing outcomes of the colleague survey.

(Note: The report requested that, at the end of the meeting, the Board consider whether any of the information in this or any of the subsequent papers warranted a change in strategy or risk appetite. The Board did not feel that any such changes were necessary.)

The Board noted the report.

**100/22      DEALING WITH THE RENT CAP**

Confidential item

**101/22      VALUE FOR MONEY STRATEGY**

The Director of Resources & Deputy Chief Executive presented a report which introduced the revised Value for Money Strategy.

Key points of the discussion were as follows:

- A Board Member welcomed the revised Strategy as setting out a balanced approach to value for money, in particular with the inclusion of equity as an aspect.

[confidential wording]

- The Chair welcomed that the Target Operating Model was a key focus of the Strategy. He was also pleased that Freebridge would pursue efficiencies regardless of the level of rent cap.

[confidential wording]

**RESOLVED: That the Value for Money Strategy be approved, subject to minor amendments to the wording as described above.**

**102/22      HOMES AND COMMUNITY MAINTENANCE STRATEGY UPDATE**

The Director of Homes & Community Maintenance presented a report which provided an update on Year 1 of the Homes and Community Maintenance Strategy.

Key points of the discussion were as follows:

- A Board Member asked that the action plan provide further clarity on progress, for instance through the inclusion of measurable metrics. *The Director of Homes & Community Maintenance undertook to incorporate this.*

- The Chair pointed out that there were some discrepancies in the reporting of energy efficiency. The Corporate Strategy expectation was that all properties should be at least EPC “D” by 2026 and “C” by 2030; any reporting should be against these aims.
- A Board Member highlighted that the report stated that the new Diagnostic and Scheduling Service had resulted in an improved efficiency in the level of repairs being carried out, as well as seeing overall wait times reduce for many customers reporting repairs. [confidential wording]
- A Board Member asked for an update on outsourcing/insourcing and in-house skills. The Director of Homes & Community Maintenance responded that he was reviewing outsourced work and looking to put in place more beneficial contracts, and to work more with local contractors. He was also considering the skills of the in-house workforce and looking to insource where possible. The Target Operating Model process was enabling a better understanding of the back office.
- A Board Member stressed the importance of strong contract management.

The Board noted the report.

**103/22      PERFORMANCE UPDATE**

Confidential item

**104/22      CUSTOMER VOICE PANEL AND SERVICE CHAMPION FORUM UPDATE**

Jo Barrett, Chair of the Customer Voice Panel, presented a report which provided an update on the recruitment to the Customer Voice Panel and the Service Champion Forum, and which reported on the first, joint, meeting of the two groups, held on 20 October 2022.

Jo Barrett paid tribute to the work of the Director of Customer & Communities and the Customer Voice Lead to develop and bring to fruition the new customer voice arrangements. The number of tenants recruited and their skillsets were impressive.

Gil Fernandes, one of the Board Members appointed to the Customer Voice Panel, commented on the effectiveness of the meeting and the positive opportunity for tenants to work together.

Key points of the discussion were as follows:

- The Director of Customer & Communities said that feedback from the meeting on Freebridge’s winter plans had been acted upon.

- The Director of Customer & Communities advised that the Customer Voice Panel would receive data on complaints and the Tenant Satisfaction Measures at its next meeting, and its comments would be reported to the Board meeting in February 2023.
- The Chair said that it would be for the Director of Customer & Communities to triangulate tenant views from various sources and report these to the Board. Board Members requested that tenant views be included in the appropriate reports, as well as in the customer voice report. There would also be a role for the Board Members who sat on the Customer Voice Panel to ensure that the Panel's views were considered by the Board.

The Board noted the report.

**105/22      REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE REPAIRS TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

Gill Rejzl, Chair of the Repairs Task and Finish Group, presented the Chair's report of the Task and Finish Group's meeting held on 13 October 2022.

It was acknowledged that there had been significant discussion on repairs earlier in the meeting (minute numbers 102/22 and 103/22 refer).

The Board noted the report.

**106/22      REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE TREASURY TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

Andrew Hill, Chair of the Treasury Task and Finish Group, presented the Chair's report of the Task and Finish Group's meeting held on 10 November 2022.

It was noted that the Task and Finish Group's recommendations on Refinancing [confidential wording] would be considered under distinct items later in the meeting (minute numbers 108/22 and 109/22 refer).

The Board noted the report.

**Note: Immediately before the meeting, the Board received training from Savills Financial Consultants on the topics covered in minute numbers 107/22 and 108/22 below. The training included the opportunity for discussion and questions.**

**107/22**      **TREASURY MANAGEMENT POLICY AND TREASURY  
MANAGEMENT STRATEGY**

The Director of Resources & Deputy Chief Executive presented a report which set out the new Treasury Management Policy and Treasury Management Strategy.

Andrew Hill and Donald McKenzie, as members of the Treasury Task and Finish Group, confirmed that the Task and Finish Group had reviewed the documents and was comfortable with them.

[confidential wording]

***RESOLVED: That the Treasury Management Policy and Treasury Management Strategy be approved.***

**108/22**      **REFINANCING BUSINESS PLAN**

Confidential item

**109/22**      Confidential item

**110/22**      **REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE AUDIT AND RISK  
COMMITTEE**

Donald McKenzie, Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee, presented the Chair's report of the Committee's meeting held on 17 October 2022.

The Board noted the report.

**111/22**      **REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE DEVELOPMENT  
COMMITTEE**

Vicky Savage, Chair of the Development Committee, presented the Chair's report of the Committee's meeting held on 10 October 2022.

[confidential wording]

The Board noted the report.

**112/22**      **REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE GOVERNANCE AND  
REMUNERATION COMMITTEE**

Simon Smith, Chair of the Governance and Remuneration Committee, presented the Chair's report of the Committee's meeting held on 3 October 2022.

Simon Smith highlighted that the report included recommendations around the adoption of the new National Housing Federation Code of Conduct. A Board

Member asked whether the Code should be applied to all contractors; Simon Smith responded that the Committee had considered this not to be necessary.

The Chair asked for timescales, as set out in the resolutions below.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) **That the NHF Code of Conduct 2022 be adopted with effect from 1 April 2023, to apply to all staff, Board and Committee Members, Customer Ambassadors and Service Champions.**
- 2) ***That, in advance of adoption, training be provided to all those individuals to whom the code will apply (the training to be provided in the first quarter of 2023).***
- 3) ***That a Probity Policy be developed in support of aspects of the Code (the draft Policy to be produced by 31 December 2022).***
- 4) ***That a matrix be developed showing which Freebridge polices are relevant to each part of the Code (the draft matrix to be produced by 31 December 2022).***

**113/22      RISK MANAGEMENT**

Confidential item

**114/22      ANNUAL REPORT OF PLACESHAPING ACTIVITIES**

The Board noted the annual report of Placeshaping activities.

**115/22      MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**116/22      MATTERS ARISING/ACTION SHEET**

There were no matters arising.

The Board noted the action sheet.

**117/22      WORK PROGRAMME**

The Board noted its work programme to 31 March 2023. It was acknowledged that consideration of dealing with the rent cap and refinancing would be included at the Board's strategy session on 12-13 December 2022, as agreed earlier in the meeting (see minute numbers 100/22 and 108/22 above).

The Chair said that the main focus of the strategy session on 12-13 December 2022 would be looking beyond the current five-year Corporate Strategy. The session would be externally facilitated.

**118/22      ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- **Effectiveness of the Meeting**

Board Members commented on the healthy and robust level of debate that had taken place at the meeting. The way that the debate had been conducted had appropriately reflected Freebridge's culture and values.

**119/22      NEXT MEETING**

The Board noted that its next ordinary meeting would be held on Monday 20 February 2023 at 4.30pm.

**The meeting closed at 7.35pm.**

**CHAIR**