

FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING BOARD

Minutes of a Meeting of the Board held on Monday 7 November 2016 at 6.30pm in "The Barn", 2 Chapel Lane, King's Lynn

PRESENT:

Ray Johnson (Chairman)
Steve Clark
Tony Hall (Chief Executive)
Marie Connell
Ian Pinches
Pauleen Pratt
Jasmine Rigg
Colin Sampson
Simon Smith
Andy Walder

IN ATTENDANCE:

Colin Davison	-	Director of Property
Robert Clarke	-	Director of Housing
David Marshall	-	Director of Finance and Resources
Angus MacQueen	-	Company Secretary
Judith Carter	-	Executive Assistant

OBSERVER:

Kay Vowles	-	Campbell Tickell
Aylsha Pirmo	-	Trainee Solicitor

198/16 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

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

An apology for absence was received from Tina Smiddy.

[Subsequent to the meeting, an apology for absence was received from Brian Long.]

199/16 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendment:

Minute number 191/16 last paragraph:

"In response to questions, the Chief Executive said that *Freebridge was compliant with the there was* a duty to take into account any child

protection implications when granting a new tenancy. Incidents of anti-social behaviour were managed as necessary.” (*amendment in italics*)

200/16 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

201/16 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

202/16 CHAIRMAN’S UPDATE

The Chairman said that he had attended his usual weekly meetings with the Chief Executive. In addition, he advised of the following:

- He had attended a Governors' Council meeting at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital on 10 October.
- He had attended a meeting of the Chief Executive's Appraisal Panel on 18 October.
- He had given Pauleen Pratt a tour of Hillington Square on 27 October.

203/16 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:

- Providence Street Community Centre
- Employee Conference
- Out and About Programme 2016/17
- Hillington Square Update
- Launch of “Change to Save” Energy Campaign
- Freebridge Community Fund
- Community Café
- Developments in Progress
- Norfolk Community Safety Awards

The Chief Executive highlighted the launch of the “Change to Save” energy campaign; some excellent work was being done by the Energy Advisor giving help and advice to residents to enable them to make significant savings on their energy bills.

It was noted that the increase in income from the Providence Street Community Centre was encouraging.

204/16 **PLAXTOLE HOUSE, KING'S LYNN OPTIONS APPRAISAL**

Confidential item

205/16 **BUSINESS PLANNING CYCLE 2016/17**

The Chief Executive presented a report which proposed a Business Planning Cycle for 2016/17 to provide the Board with key input into the development of the new Business Plan.

The Chief Executive highlighted the need to step back and reflect on Government policy changes. The purpose of the report was to decide how best to use the time up to March when the draft Business Plan 2016/17 would be presented to the Board.

The Chief Executive referred to questions that had been received from Board Members in advance of the meeting regarding data and information to inform the Plan. He explained that there would be plenty of opportunity for the Board to discuss this, in particular at the Board away day in December. A Board Member stressed the need for the Board to take a broad strategic view when it came to prepare the Plan.

RESOLVED: That the revised business planning cycle be approved.

206/16 **GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Board received a report which introduced the recommendations of the meeting of the Governance Committee held on 10 October 2016.

Marie Connell, Chairman of the Governance Committee, explained that the recommendations were around the selection of a new Board Chairman. The intention would be to identify a Chairman-elect by March 2017 who could then shadow the existing Chairman until taking over the role in October 2017.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the process for appointing the new Board Chairman, as set out in the report, be approved.
- 2) That the person specification for the role of Board Chairman be approved, as presented.

207/16 **MERGERS, GROUP STRUCTURES AND PARTNERSHIPS: A VOLUNTARY CODE FOR HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS**

The Chief Executive presented a report which considered the National Housing Federation's Mergers, Group Structures and Partnerships Voluntary Code.

The Chief Executive explained that the National Housing Federation had invited its members to sign up to the Voluntary Code. However, a group of

associations, including Freebridge, had felt that further work was necessary to provide a toolkit to help shape and develop the Code. The Housing Quality Network and the Tenant Participation and Advisory Service had been commissioned to do this work, and it was almost completed. The Chief Executive suggested that it would be sensible to consider the Code alongside the toolkit, and that the Governance Committee would be a suitable group to take a detailed view of this. The outcome of the Governance Committee's deliberations would then be reported to the Board, which would make the final decision around adoption of the Code.

The Board agreed that it would be wise to consider the Code carefully before adopting it, and that it would be helpful also to make use of the toolkit. Concern was expressed that the Code paid very little attention to culture and values. It was stressed that the most important thing was for the Board to be clear about its mission, vision and values; mergers, group structures or partnerships should only be pursued if they were believed to be the best way to achieve these.

RESOLVED: That the Governance Committee be asked to review the relevant documentation around the National Housing Association's Mergers, Group Structures and Partnerships Voluntary Code and report back to the Board.

208/16 PROCUREMENT APPROVALS

Confidential item

209/16 TREASURY MANAGEMENT AND STRATEGY UPDATE AND POLICY REVIEW

Confidential item

210/16 REVIEW OF VARIOUS HOUSING POLICIES

The Director of Housing presented a report which reviewed the Leasehold Management Policy, the Under Occupation Policy, the Income Management and Maximisation Policy, and the Rent Setting and Service Charges Policy.

The Director of Housing highlighted that a key change to the Under Occupation Policy was that the under occupation incentive budget had now been withdrawn. Instead, the Policy focused on the practical support and assistance that could be provided to customers to downsize.

In relation to the Income Management and Maximisation Policy, concern was expressed that the Policy now had more emphasis on direct support and advice being given by other agencies rather than by Freebridge, in particular at this time when many agencies were struggling financially. The Board asked that this be kept under review and, if necessary, Freebridge consider investing in in-house resources for this service. Supporting tenants in time of need would often result in longer-term savings.

With regard to the Rent Setting and Service Charges Policy, it was highlighted that a reduction in supported housing (including sheltered) rents by 1% would take effect in April 2017. In answer to a question, the Chief Executive said that this reduction would not affect the provision of the sheltered housing service as this was funded through the Supporting People Grant. The Director of Housing advised that a review of the sheltered housing service was currently being carried out, the results of which would be reported to the Board early in 2017.

RESOLVED: That the revised Leasehold Management Policy, Under Occupation Policy, Income Management and Maximisation Policy, and Rent Setting and Service Charges Policy be approved.

211/16 POLICY DELETIONS

The Company Secretary presented a report seeking to gain approval for the deletion of the Development Policy and the Charitable Support Policy, as these had now been subsumed into other policies.

RESOLVED: That the Development Policy and the Charitable Support Policy be deleted.

212/16 REQUEST TO WRITE OFF DEBTS OVER £2,000

The Director of Housing presented a report which sought approval to write off debts that were each in excess of £2,000.

The Director of Housing assured the Board that all reasonable measures were taken to recover debts. Should it not prove possible to recover the amounts owing, it was better to write off the debts than leave them on the accounts. If a person resurfaced, their debt could be added back on. The Board acknowledged Freebridge's strong performance around arrears and that the level of write-offs was relatively low. The fact that most of the write-offs requested were for similar amounts provided assurance that the process was working.

[Confidential wording]

In response to a question, the Director of Housing confirmed that, where a person with rent arrears was evicted from one housing association, a system was in place to enable other housing associations to be aware of this, should the individual apply to them for accommodation.

RESOLVED: That the debt write-offs listed in section 2 of the report be approved.

**213/16 REQUEST TO PROVIDE A LEASE OF A WORKSHOP UNIT
AT PROVIDENCE STREET COMMUNITY CENTRE TO THE
HUSBAND OF A MEMBER OF THE TENANT PANEL**

Confidential item

214/16 BOARD START TIME

The Company Secretary presented a report which asked the Board to consider an earlier start-time for Board meetings.

The report suggested that, from January 2017, the start-time for Board meetings move from 6.30pm to 5.00pm. The Board acknowledged that the rationale behind the proposal was that it would be in the interests of the well-being of employees, and also of those Board Members who worked full-time, not to have to stay late into the evening after a full day at work. Furthermore, it reduced the risks associated with decisions being made when people were tired. However, as a Board Member had indicated that this change of time would make it difficult for her to attend meetings, and she was not present at the meeting, the item was deferred until the Board meeting in January 2017, in the hope that all members would be present.

RESOLVED: That this matter be deferred to the Board meeting in January 2017 for discussion with all Board Members present.

215/16 OPERATIONS PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW

The Director of Property presented the Operations Performance Overview report for the quarter ending 30 September 2016.

In answer to a question raised by a Board Member in advance of the meeting, the Director of Property acknowledged that the customer satisfaction figure was somewhat lower than the figures for repairs performance. This was because the repairs performance figures were a measure of response times, whilst the customer satisfaction figure took a much broader view. His team was considering how repairs performance could contribute to improvement in tenant satisfaction, for instance a pre-arranged appointments process would soon be introduced. On a wider point, a review was being undertaken of performance information across the organisation, to assess how this could be improved to benefit the business.

The Board asked that the actions column be completed on future trend reports, including timescales. The Board also requested that the names of those making compliments be omitted from future reports. It was highlighted that Property Services operatives Alastair Roberts and Adam Dufeu had once again received a significant number of compliments.

The Board welcomed the inclusion of "Garage Lets" within the performance information. Ian Pinches, Chairman of the Audit Committee, said that the Committee was currently monitoring the letting of garages closely.

It was noted that there had been an increase in the number of tenancy terminations during August and September, as compared to previous months. The Director of Housing explained that this had been partly because of a higher than usual number of deaths and also because of an increased number of evictions for rent arrears. He assured the Board that a firm but fair approach was taken to people with arrears.

The Board noted the report.

216/16 **FINANCE AND HUMAN RESOURCES QUARTERLY
MANAGEMENT REPORT**

Confidential item

217/16 **RISK MANAGEMENT AND FRAUD AWARENESS UPDATE**

The Director of Finance and Resources presented a report which detailed risk management activity during the quarter ending 30 September 2016.

In answer to a question raised by a Board Member in advance of the meeting, the Director of Finance and Resources said that a residual risk rating, taking into account control and mitigation, was being produced for each risk and would be included in the next risk management update (at the Board meeting in February 2017).

It was highlighted that the action around environmental stewardship, to develop a fully evidenced and “signposted” approach to demonstrate compliance with identified sustainability standards and best practice, had not been achieved within the target timescale, and a new target timescale had not been given. The Director of Property undertook to check on the progress of this action and to provide a clear date for completion in the next risk management update.

The Board observed that the report included a summary of the Homes and Communities Agency's "Sector Risk Profile 2016", which had recently been issued. This was an important document, and demonstrated that risk was a key theme for the Regulator.

The Board noted the report.

218/16 **BUSINESS PLAN SECOND QUARTER UPDATE 2016/17**

The Chief Executive presented a report which set out progress against the 2016/17 Business Plan for the second quarter.

The Chief Executive made the following points about the Plan:

Section 3.2: More work was required to prepare the Board report on the disposal plan, and so the action “Board Approval for Disposal Plan” would be moved from Q3 to Q4 2016/17.

Section 3.3: The Chief Executive clarified that preparations for Phase 4 of the Hillington Square project would be made in Q4 2016/17, and Phase 4 would start in Q1 2017/18.

Section 4.6: Further preparations were required to develop the risk management workshop, which would be run by

PricewaterhouseCoopers, and so the workshop would now be held in February 2017, rather than November 2016 as originally intended.

In answer to questions, the Chief Executive said that activities would not be removed from the Plan until they had been completed. Reporting against performance indicators and the Business Plan would be reviewed; this would be a key element of the Business Improvement Strategy. Board Members suggested that there should be more linkage between performance information and the Business Plan, and that the reporting could be streamlined.

In response to a question enquiring if employees would be involved in sifting the ideas for business and service improvement generated at the recent employee conference, the Chief Executive said that Management Team was evaluating the ideas and would be considering how best to engage with employees.

The Board noted the report.

219/16 TENANT PANEL QUARTERLY UPDATE

The Director of Property presented a report which provided a quarterly update on the work of the Tenant Panel.

In answer to questions, officers made the following points:

- Work had been done to support tenants who felt the need to use portable heaters as an alternative to storage heaters.
- The booklet issued to sheltered scheme tenants contained information on well-being and signposting to relevant agencies.
- Following a review of the brief for the Tenant Panel Facilitator, quotations and proposals had been invited; these were currently being assessed.

A Board Member who had recently observed a Panel meeting said that he had been very impressed by the Panel.

The Board noted the report.

220/16 TENANT PROFILING

The Director of Housing presented a report which described how Freebridge was now profiling its tenants in order to identify any significant trends in how and to whom Freebridge properties were let.

The Board welcomed the revised profiling, as it would provide good quality data which would enable a clear insight. It was stressed, however, that this

data should be used in conjunction with other information, so as to avoid the risk of stereotyping.

In response to a question, the Director of Housing assured the Board that the profiling data was for internal use only and would not be made public.

The Board noted the report.

221/16 OPERATING MODEL REVIEW

Confidential item

222/16 APPOINTMENT OF SHAREHOLDERS

The Company Secretary presented a report which described an application to become a shareholder that had been approved.

The Board noted the report.

223/16 COMMITTEE MINUTES

The Chairman of the Governance Committee presented the minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2016.

It was highlighted that the Governance Committee had agreed that advanced notice should be given of any questions that Board Members wished to raise at meetings, which may require more background information. The Board supported this, and acknowledged that there may be other occasions when it would be appropriate to give advanced notice of a question, for instance if a significant challenge was to be made to a recommendation. The Board agreed that in no way was it intended to stifle debate, nor should members feel unable to raise a question that occurred to them during the meeting.

The Board noted the report.

224/16 WORK UPDATE

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

- Action Sheet
- Future Work Programme of the Board.

The Board noted the update.

225/16 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

226/16 NEXT MEETING

The Board noted that its next meeting was scheduled for Monday 9 January 2017 at 6.30pm.

The meeting closed at 8.25pm

CHAIRMAN