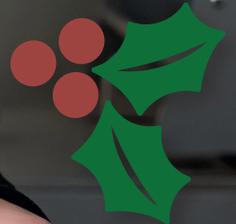


STREETS AHEAD

THE MAGAZINE FOR FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING TENANTS



**FREEBRIDGE AND COVID-19
KEEPING YOU SAFE AT HOME &
THE COMMUNITY CATERER**

HAPPY CHRISTMAS FROM FREEBRIDGE!

WINTER 2020

DEVELOPING HOMES AND CREATING OPPORTUNITIES
FOR PEOPLE WITHIN WEST NORFOLK

Freebridge
COMMUNITY HOUSING

WELCOME TO STREETS AHEAD

As we come to the end of a very unusual year it seems that Christmas is going to be the next thing that we end up doing differently in order to help keep healthy and safe. Hopefully that means that despite whatever restrictions may be in place, we can all celebrate in some way.

In this issue we have an update on what Freebridge have been doing to support our tenants through the last few months, some details about how to keep safe in your homes, an introduction to Sarah our Community Caterer, and our regular catch up with the Tenant Panel.

Thank you for taking the time to read this issue of Streets Ahead. Please do take good care of yourselves, keep checking the latest guidance from the government, and have a very happy Christmas.



FREEBRIDGE AND COVID-19

It would have been nice not to have to write another article in Streets Ahead about the Covid-19 pandemic, but sadly that's what we're doing.

Following the first lockdown back in March, restrictions had eased a little as we moved into the summer, but due to increasing numbers of people being infected we entered into a second lockdown as we started to put this issue together at the beginning of November. Where we'll be by Christmas is almost impossible to say, however, one thing you can be sure of is that Freebridge are here to help wherever and whenever we can.

We know it's been a very difficult year for so many people, particularly those directly affected by the virus, so we've planned some additional activities over and above what we would normally be doing, to provide additional support to our tenants and the wider community in West Norfolk over the winter months. Some of the activities planned (and already happening by the time you read this) include:

- making regular welfare telephone calls to tenants over the age of 60, including daily calls, and some home visits, to our more vulnerable tenants,
- providing additional financial and welfare support,
- providing additional advice and guidance to people who

have become unemployed as a result of the knock-on effects of coronavirus - we have taken on a number of additional employees to help do this,

- helping out with urgent temporary accommodation requests from partner organisations,
- identifying suitable empty properties for use as isolation units,
- providing support to partner organisations in respect of the supply of food parcels for those in need, *and*
- a programme of activities for young people to keep them active and entertained.

We'll achieve some of these activities through the work of our teams here at Freebridge, however some of them will be achieved through working in partnership with other organisations across West Norfolk including the Purfleet Trust, the Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk, the Princes Trust, St Edmunds Academy, Lily, West Norfolk Mind, and the College of West Anglia.

Hopefully by working together with others we can help make the next few months a little easier for all.

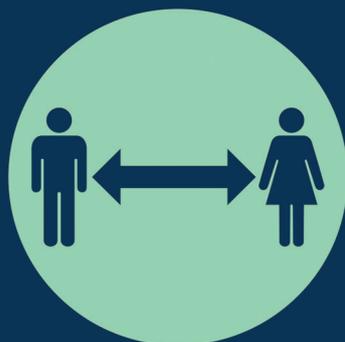
We must keep on protecting each other.



HANDS



FACE



SPACE



The Tenant Panel often discuss serious issues, but sometimes they have fun too! (Back in the days before Zoom.)

THE FREEBRIDGE TENANT PANEL

As we've said in previous issues of Streets Ahead, Tenant Panel members will now provide you with an update on what they've been working on over the last few months.

This issue's overview comes from **David Wheeler**.

Despite things having been a little more normal in September we continued to meet as a group via Zoom, but we're all becoming more and more used to connecting virtually so all was not lost!

After our break in August we met once again in early September, and our first guest attending the meeting was the new Chief Executive Anita Jones.

It was good to meet Anita, to hear about her background, the exciting plans she has for the organisation as a whole, and her desire to communicate with tenants to understand where Freebridge needs to make improvements to the services on offer.

Simon Smith, Vice Chair of the Board followed Anita, arriving along with fellow Board member Pauleen Pratt. He provided an update on the current topics being discussed by the Board, reflected on Anita's arrival at Freebridge, and talked about the efforts being made to plan the direction of the organisation over the next five years.

The Company Secretary then gave an update on the Customer Service Committee

Pilot which was due to meet for the first time at the beginning of November, and the Communications Business Partner provided some feedback to the Panel following their discussions at the July meeting about performance data.

At the following meeting in October, the Company Secretary attended again, this time to talk to us about how Freebridge assesses itself against the regulatory standards laid down by The Regulator of Social Housing.

The new Head of Asset Management, Nick Thacker, then joined us. Nick joined Freebridge in the summer so he was another new face for us.

He talked about the work he's been doing since arriving

making sure that Freebridge had a programmed approach to maintaining properties, to avoid the organisation having to respond to quite so much.

He told the Panel that while his team was only a small one he was determined to make it a success and make lives of tenants better by helping improve the service on offer.

Next up was a session with Freebridge's Health & Safety Manager, Dave Clack, which saw him give an overview of the work that he and his team oversee, which includes both tenant and employee safety.

And finally the Director of Housing, Sophie Bates joined us to introduce us to the new Placeshaping Manager, Hannah Hooks, and to talk about the plans Freebridge were putting together in order to support tenants during the winter months, given the added pressure of the coronavirus.

The Director of Housing said that the feedback provided on these plans would really help to shape what services Freebridge looked to offer over the next six months.

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Before I go, as this is the last Streets Ahead magazine of the year, on behalf of the rest of the Panel I'd like to wish you all a very happy, safe and healthy Christmas!

David Wheeler

More detailed notes of Tenant Panel meetings are held on Freebridge's website at www.freebridge.org.uk

JOIN US ON THE FREEBRIDGE TENANT PANEL

In the last few months we've recruited three new members to the Tenant Panel - Sarah, Jo and Roger, hopefully we'll introduce you to them further in future issues of Streets Ahead.

That said we're always on the lookout for people who might be interested in joining the Freebridge Tenant Panel at some point in the future. Maybe you're interested in learning new skills or playing a real role in helping improve the services that Freebridge provide? If so the Panel might be the thing for you.

The Freebridge Tenant Panel was set up some time ago to look at key areas of

Freebridge's work and meets on a monthly basis to discuss a variety of different projects and consider ways of helping the organisation be the best housing provider it can be.

The panel is made up of tenants who come from a variety of backgrounds, and from the many different communities that Freebridge serves.

If this sounds like it might be of interest to you, please give the Governance Team a call on 03332 404 444, email them at enquiries@freebridge.org.uk or complete the form below and send it to us at the address on the back of the magazine.

Name:
Address:
Telephone:
Email:

ARE YOU FACING REDUNDANCY?

As we head into winter we want to help you if you're in a position where you may lose your job. Our dedicated team of Universal Credit specialists have put together a simple guide to the first steps you should take if you are worried about redundancy.

This guide is available on our website and we have some handy videos on our facebook pages too. If you'd prefer a paper copy of the guide please get in touch with our Customer Services team.

The guide covers a few basic areas such as how to update your CV, retrain in essential skills, the best place to find a new job, and which groups can help you with applications.

There is also information on what financial support you may be entitled to, as well as how to claim things like Universal Credit or the new style JSA.

The advice isn't just for those living in Freebridge homes so if someone you know is facing

redundancy then they may find it useful too.

There's a list of charities and other people we work with in the guide who can help you through every step of the process.

If you are struggling financially, whether you're having trouble paying rent, bills or buying food then please do get in touch with us as soon as possible - we are here to help.

If you are worried about paying your rent please get in touch with an Income Advisor on 03332 404 444

To find out what benefits you can claim, visit www.entitledto.co.uk

For information on your rights when made redundant visit www.gov.uk/redundancy-your-rights

If you are affected by redundancy and need help with benefits entitlement and managing your finances call the Money Advice Hub on 0333 305 7648 or visit www.moneyadvicehub.org.uk

For help with applying for Universal Credit contact our Income Team on 03332 404 444 or speak to Help to Claim on 0800 144 8 444

For employment support contact Seetec Pluss on 01553 774619



FREEBRIDGE PUTS FOOD AT THE HEART OF THE COMMUNITY

Freebridge are delighted to introduce their new Community Caterer, Sarah Cummins!

Working as part of Freebridge's Placeshaping Team, Sarah will be out and about across West Norfolk supporting community initiatives that promote social inclusion, inspire healthy eating and reduce isolation.

She is a one-stop shop for supporting anyone wanting to set up new groups and events such as lunch clubs, kids food groups, healthy eating workshops or community coffee mornings.

Sarah can support charities and community groups with logistics, suppliers, recipes, regulations, and even hands-on catering support.

Sarah said: "I'm really looking forward to getting out and about across West Norfolk

and working with people in the community. Food is such a great way to get people talking – whether it's catching up with old friends or making new ones."

Healthy eating workshops for families, youth groups and community organisations are available. Maybe you're a cub or brownie group looking for a creative weekly meeting, perhaps a youth club wanting to teach some life skills, or maybe a charity working with disadvantaged families wanting to host workshops focussed on family food on a budget. Whatever your requirements are, Sarah is here to help.

Strict food hygiene regulations are in place and items will be adapted to meet Covid-19 safety restrictions.

If you're a community group, charity or business that needs Sarah's help, or want to find

out more about what she can offer then get in touch on 07464 498632 / 01553 666677, or by email at communitycaterer@freebridge.org.uk

Sarah at work in the kitchens at the Discovery Centre.





KEEPING YOU SAFE IN YOUR HOME

Freebridge Community Housing takes the health and safety of its tenants very seriously.

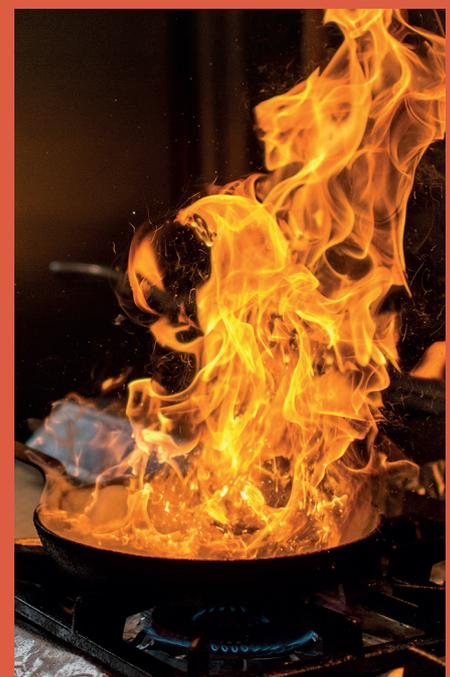
The rules and regulations around keeping you safe in your home are regularly updated, and as a housing provider we work hard to make sure that we are completing all the checks we need to do as a responsible landlord.

In this article we are focussing on three key areas – fire, gas and electrical safety – so you can understand what to expect from us.

The main thing you should expect is that we'll come to visit and carry out at least one check every year. However if you do

have any concerns around the safety of your home please don't wait for us to visit, just pick up the phone and call as so we can decide what, if any, action we need to take.

Government guidance advises that these checks are critically important and as a result should continue even during lockdowns. Anyone carrying out work in your home will be provided with the appropriate PPE (personal protection equipment) and will be following the social distancing guidelines. If you have specific health concerns around any visits please do contact our Customer Services team on 03332 404 444.



FIRE

The rules around fire safety for landlords have changed over recent years.

And as a result of these changes we have now carried out fire safety risk assessments on all the blocks of flats we own, including those in our sheltered schemes.

All of this is done for our communal areas, not in individual homes, so it's unlikely that anyone will need to enter your home at this stage. However, the front door is classed as communal so you may have had a visit to check that your door closes properly. If you have had a postcard instead please respond as soon as you can.

If we have any concerns about the safety of the doors then we will replace them.



GAS

We also have our yearly gas compliance safety checks which are often called gas safety checks but will cover a variety of things, and will happen even if you don't have gas!

If you have gas installed in your home we'll check that to make sure all is safe.

If you aren't registered as having gas we'll do a 'non-gas' check which makes sure that nothing has been added since we last visited.

If you have more unconventional heating like electric, ground source and so on, we will also visit. This will allow us to check that carbon monoxide detectors and smoke alarms are in place and working correctly.



ELECTRIC

As well as our fire and gas safety checks we also regularly carry out electrical checks. We are now required to complete these every five years, so you may get a visit sooner than you expected.

In order to make completing these checks as efficient as possible we are trying to plan them so we complete as many checks in one area at a time. So this means that in the future you and all of your neighbours will have your checks done at around the same time rather than visiting you when each of your individual checks are due.

This again may mean you have a visit sooner than normal.

We will also use the opportunity of being in your home to do an asbestos check of your property.

MACMILLAN COFFEE MORNING

Last year's coffee morning



The amazing people living at Windsor Park, one of our sheltered schemes in King's Lynn, have raised thousands of pounds at their Macmillan Coffee Mornings over the years.

For obvious reasons this year's couldn't be held in person but June, who organises it each year, was determined not to let this year go by without them raising anything so she rallied her fellow residents by writing to each of them. And between them they've raised £270 for this very important charity!

Well done all!



A STAKE IN FREEBRIDGE: HOW TO BECOME A SHAREHOLDER

Freebridge Community Housing is inviting its tenants to become shareholders. Shareholders have the right to attend the Annual General Meeting and vote on major issues in the running of the organisation.

Shareholding is designed to increase tenants' stakeholding in their housing provider and is a way to become involved in what Freebridge does.

If you need more information about how to become a Freebridge shareholder or just want to know more contact the Governance Team on 03332 404 444 or email enquiries@freebridge.org.uk

YOUR RIGHT TO BUY OR ACQUIRE

If you feel you may be in a position to purchase your property there are two schemes available – the right to buy, and the right to acquire.

Freebridge have updated the terms under which both of these schemes work and the full details are available either on our website or via a leaflet you can request by calling our Customer Services team.

There are quite a few boxes that you need to tick, but generally the right to buy applies if you have been a tenant since Freebridge transferred homes from the council in 2006. And the right to acquire applies if you have been a tenant with us for more than three years.

The right to acquire will only apply in urban areas and doesn't apply to rural villages.

For full details on exactly who is eligible to apply and how you can start the process either download the leaflet from www.freebridge.org.uk/owning-your-own-home.html or call us on 03332 404444 to request a paper copy.

DO YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO BUY OR THE RIGHT TO ACQUIRE YOUR PROPERTY?



DEVELOPING HOMES AND CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE WITHIN WEST NORFOLK





DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Everyone has the right to live without fear and abuse.

If you are in a controlling relationship the abuse is unlikely to stop and may even get worse. The only way to stay safe is to end the relationship. Leaving can increase the risk of abuse but people like the Pandora Project in King's Lynn can help.

The Pandora Project provides free support, advice, information and support to women and children suffering domestic abuse in West & North Norfolk.

With specialist support, you will regain your confidence, self-esteem and self-worth. We will support you to take back control of your own life.

Most importantly, you can live safely and look forward to a positive future free from fear.

If you are worried about contacting a specialist service help is always available through Freebridge. Either call or visit our offices and we will make sure you get the support you need.

You are not alone, it is not your fault, help is available.

If you are in immediate danger call 999.

National domestic violence helpline 0808 2000 247 (24hrs)

Men's advice line 0808 801 0327 info@mensadvice.org.uk

info@pandoraproject.org.uk

www.pandoraproject.org.uk

It doesn't have to be physical abuse. Does your partner:

- Check your phone and facebook account.
- Stop you leaving the house.
- Threaten you in any way.
- Stop you seeing friends and family.
- Control your money.
- Shout at you, push you, ignore you.
- Blame you for their bad behaviours.
- Accuse you of having affairs.
- Put you down in front of other people.
- Make you have sex when you don't want to.
- Tell you what to wear.
- Say you're a bad mother/father.
- Tell you that you're worthless.
- Make you do things you don't want to.
- Follow you when you go out.

If you said yes to any of these you may be in an abusive relationship.

RENT AND SERVICE CHARGES IN 2021



RENTS

Your rent in 2021 will be calculated in the same way as it was in 2020, using something called the Consumer Price Index* (plus 1%).

This means that from April 2021 your rent will be increasing by 1.5%

In February of next year, we'll write to each of you telling you exactly what your new weekly rent and service charges will be, which will be charged from 5 April 2021.

We do understand that an increase in your rent will be a real concern for many of you so if you do have worries about paying your rent, or managing your finances in general, please do not hesitate to contact us.

**The Consumer Price Index is a way that governments and others calculate how the costs of various things have increased and the impact that has on people's finances.*

SERVICE CHARGES

Last year we wrote to some of you who live in a home with a shared communal area about the roll-out of service charges made to your property.

Following your feedback we decided to introduce the charges over a period of time rather than all at once, with 25% of the cost of cleaning and grounds maintenance being service charged from April 2020.

The next phase of this roll-out will see 50% of the cost of cleaning and grounds maintenance being service charged from April 2021. We will also introduce charges relating to communal smoke detection equipment maintenance and communal window cleaning, where this is applicable.



WHAT DO I NEED TO DO?

IF YOU RECEIVE HOUSING BENEFIT:

We will notify the Borough Council of the change, so you don't have to. Your Housing Benefit will automatically be recalculated and the Borough Council will notify you of any changes to your payments.

IF YOU RECEIVE UNIVERSAL CREDIT:

You will need to update your Universal Credit online account on 5 April (do not do this before this date) with details of the changes to your rent and service charges.

IF YOU PAY YOUR RENT BY DIRECT DEBIT:

We will change your payments automatically to your new rent.

IF YOU PAY YOUR RENT BY STANDING ORDER:

You will need to contact your bank immediately to change the payment amount once we've confirmed your new rent.

IF YOU DO NOT RECEIVE HOUSING BENEFIT:

You will need to continue to pay your rent and any relevant service charges.

Freebridge is a non-profit organisation - all the money we receive through rents and service charges is invested back into much needed housing and the many services we provide our tenants.

DEVELOPING HOMES IN WEST NORFOLK

In October earlier this year Freebridge were delighted to announce that Paul Newbold had joined the organisation as Director of Development.



Paul Newbold

Paul has a very strong background in management and development and joins Freebridge having worked at a senior level for a number of housing associations over the last 30 years. One of the associations that Paul has been involved with in the past being Freebridge, having worked with the organisation on a project back in 2016.

Paul Newbold, said: "I am very pleased to join Freebridge and looking forward to helping them develop an increasing number of new homes to provide much needed

good quality housing for the people of West Norfolk."

Paul is now leading the team responsible for developing new homes for Freebridge, and although it's been a year where work has been hampered by the problems associated with coronavirus, we've been able to carry on despite it.

For instance, if you can remember back to the summer issue of Streets Ahead we talked about starting work on site at the development of 14 new homes in Walsoken, and as you can see from the pictures on the right our contractors are making good progress.

As well as this development we have also started work on nine homes in Terrington St Clement, and a number of individual properties scattered across the area in West Winch, Walpole St Andrew, West Walton and Brancaster which are also being built.

Hopefully 2021 will see us complete more new homes for the people of West Norfolk, and it should also see us start work on the final phases of our Hillington Square project - watch this space!



The progress at our homes in Walsoken.

HOW WE PERFORMED

SATISFACTION SURVEY

Every month our First Contact Centre calls 100 of our tenants to ask them how they think we are performing.



82%

of our customers are satisfied with the overall service we provide



64%

of our customers are satisfied with our repairs service



83%

of our customers are satisfied with rent and service charges



74%

of our customers are satisfied with their home



72%

of our customers are satisfied with their neighbourhood



79%

of our customers are satisfied with how they are kept informed

COMPLAINTS & COMPLIMENTS

We hope that the services you receive from us are of the quality you would expect. We realise there will be times when you may want to complain, tell us how we can improve our services, or perhaps compliment us on something we have done well.

Your complaints, comments and compliments are important to us as they help us improve our services.

In the last quarter we took action in a number of areas as a result of complaints we received. This included ensuring that:

- work should be raised promptly to avoid causing undue frustration. In this instance, the investigation found that there had not been a significant delay however, due to the nature of the work needed; there was still a negative impact on the tenant.
- operatives should ensure that all precautionary measures are taken to avoid damaging tenants belongings.

Further details on complaints and compliments, and the learning from them, can be found on our website at: www.freebridge.org.uk/complaint.html

	2020/21 Target	Year to date
Overall satisfaction	88%	83%
Satisfaction with repairs service	80%	64%
Satisfaction with rent and service charges	85%	83%
Satisfaction with home	80%	74%
Satisfaction with neighbourhood	85%	72%
Satisfaction with being kept informed	88%	79%

OPTING OUT OF STREETS AHEAD

COMPLIMENTS

56

Number of compliments received in this quarter

Reasons for compliments:

- 24 Staff attitude
- 00 State of property
- 32 Customer service
- 00 Policies

COMPLAINTS

11

Number of complaints received in this quarter

Reasons for complaints:

- 00 Staff attitude
- 03 State of property
- 07 Customer service
- 01 Policies

EARLY STAGE RESOLUTIONS

43

Number of cases dealt with through early resolution in this quarter

Reasons for cases:

- 07 Staff attitude
- 14 State of property
- 19 Customer service
- 03 Policies

Streets Ahead is sent to you every few months because you are a tenant of Freebridge Community Housing.

We send the magazine to all our tenants every few months so we can tell you about the services we provide and the work we're doing as a registered provider of social housing.

If you no longer want to have a copy of Streets Ahead delivered to you just let us know, and we will arrange for you to be removed from our mailing list.

In order to opt out of Streets Ahead, you can either call us on 03332 404 444, email your name and address to enquiries@freebridge.org.uk or complete the form below and send it to us at Freebridge Community Housing, Juniper House, Austin Street, King's Lynn, PE30 1DZ.



please sign in this box

Name:

Address:

.....

.....

.....

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HOW TO CONTACT US

VISIT or WRITE TO US at:

Juniper House, Austin Street,
King's Lynn, Norfolk PE30 1DZ

We're open between
8:45am - 5.15pm (Monday-Thursday),
8:45am - 4.45pm (Friday).

And closed on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank
Holidays.

**Please note that dependent on what covid-19
government guidelines are in place at any
time our office opening hours may not be
the same as noted above - please check our
website or call us for up to date details..**

TELEPHONE: 03332 404 444

We've recently been made aware that some
mobile phone providers now charge for calling
numbers beginning with 0333, if your provider
is one of these you can also contact us on 0800
1691694 - which is free from all numbers.

Out of office hours our main number diverts to
our 24 hour emergency service.

EMAIL: enquiries@freebridge.org.uk

WEBSITE: www.freebridge.org.uk

FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com/freebridge

TWITTER: @freebridge



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DEVELOPING HOMES AND CREATING OPPORTUNITIES
FOR PEOPLE WITHIN WEST NORFOLK

Freebridge
COMMUNITY HOUSING