

COMING OUT OF LOCKDOWN A NEW FREEBRIDGE CHARTER YOUR FEEDBACK

SUMMER 2021

DEVELOPING HOMES AND CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE WITHIN WEST NORFOLK



WELCOME TO STREETS AHEAD

What a difference a few months can make!

As we head in to what looks to be a sunny summer 2021 we can hopefully look forward to a more normal time for us all. It's been a difficult year for so many and we'll continue to be here to support you if you have any worries or concerns about your finances. Just get in touch with our team and we will do what we can to help.

In this issue find out how we're getting back on track with repairs (safely!), the return of more Placeshaping activities and the results of what you told us we needed to work on.

<image>

THE REPAIRS SERVICE AT FREEBRIDGE

GETTING BACK TO NORMAL AFTER LOCKDOWN

Keeping our customers and employees safe as we return to some sort of post-Covid normality is our top priority. Now that we are back working inside your homes on non-urgent repairs, we want to explain a few of the things that we have in place to make sure that you, our operatives and the wider community stay as safe as possible.





As we go to print things are still a little uncertain as to exactly what restrictions will still be in place this summer. We'll keep a close eye on the latest advice and do everything possible to make sure everyone is kept safe, however if you do have any questions about how we're working do give us a call.

To begin with we are continuing to ask our operatives to wear all the right kit to keep both you and them safe, including the wearing of face masks until the guidance advises otherwise.

Every operative has access to (and is expected to use) the appropriate PPE, including masks, hand sanitizer, and gloves where necessary.

And while many of our employees have received their Covid-19 vaccinations we will continue to ask them to socially distance and wear protective equipment where appropriate. We will still rely on you to let us know if you, or anyone in your household, has any Covid-19 symptoms, has tested positive or is self-isolating so that we can rearrange your appointment.

As we're sure you'll understand, the situation with the pandemic has meant that we haven't been able to complete all the repairs we would in normal times but the good news is that we are working hard to get back on track as soon as possible. If you have concerns about how long it's taking to sort a repair please do get in touch with us so we can let you know when you can expect us to come out to you.

We had a quick word with the Director of Asset Management, Graham Wilson, about the way forward for the repairs service and this is what he told us:

"Now that we can really start getting on with safely completing routine repairs and catching up with outstanding jobs, it's important to us that you are happy with the service we provide. Customer feedback is key for us and we want to make sure that you let us know when things go well or not.

"Our figures show that customer satisfaction is increasing but if you ever have any suggestions for improvements or have feedback for our teams that you want to share then do get in touch."

So thank you for your patience and understanding over the last year! We really do appreciate the fact that you have been flexible, accommodating, and considerate when we've had to change or delay appointments.

The Tenant Panel at work before the pandemic

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 Sandy Peckover.

The Tenant Panel hopes that everyone is keeping well and that more and more of you will have received dates for your first (and maybe your second) doses of the Covid-19 vaccine by now.

In the last couple of months, the Tenant Panel have continued with a busy agenda with lots to discuss while there are many positive changes taking place across Freebridge. We are continuing to meet virtually via Zoom while the country opens up and we get back to some normality in our own lives, this flexibility makes it much easier to continue to contribute, but we hope to catch up together face to face at some point soon.

We have had quite a few different teams from Freebridge come and talk to us recently, and together with the support of the Director of Customer and Communities we have had more opportunities to get involved with customer centred services.

In March we received a quarterly update from the Board through the Vice-Chair Simon Smith, he provides an overview of what is happening on a strategic level with much

change having taken place on the Leadership Team in the last few months. The Board receive a quarterly written report from the Tenant Panel where we update them on what we have been discussing, and Simon attends the Tenant Panel meeting immediately after each Board meeting to speak on behalf of them and feedback on comments and queries raised by the Panel. Our comments in the last report centred around the Board's influence in improving performance, the importance of fencing of properties to tenants, and to note the appreciation of the Placeshaping team who have supported tenants over the winter months when the second lockdown further compounded the needs of some of our tenants.

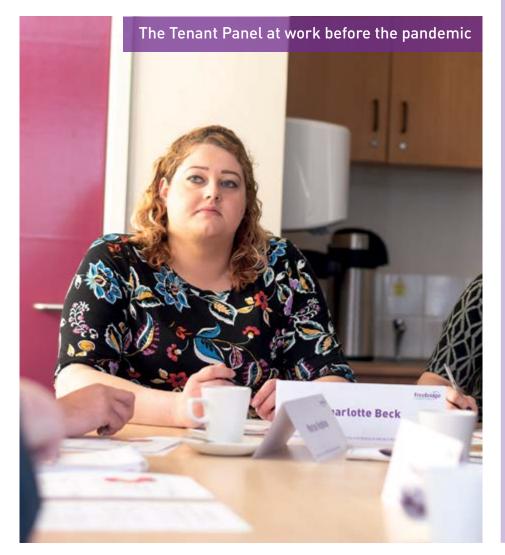
The Panel received an update from the Housing Operations Manager on the work of the Income Team, and we were pleased to hear about the efforts of the team to help tenants who would have experienced difficulties over the past few months to help them manage their finances and maximise their income.

The Tenant Panel have been meeting with the new members of Leadership Team when possible, and they met with the new Director of Asset Management Graham Wilson who shared information on the focus and priorities for his team over the coming months. The Panel felt the ideas that he had to improve the repairs and asset management services were good and it was hoped that it would help to improve satisfaction.

In April the Panel congratulated Anne Manning in her successful application to join the Housing Ombudsman Residents Panel (which you can read more about on page 16).

The Panel also had the opportunity to discuss Health and Safety Compliance and make comments regarding Freebridge's selfassessment against the Government's Charter for Social Housing Residents'.

If any of this sounds interesting to you, if you want to get involved to improve services for the benefit of all,



and you would like to know more about becoming a Tenant Panel member please call us on 03332 404 444.





On a final note the Tenant Panel were very sad to hear that fellow Panel member David Wheeler had passed away after a short illness at the end of April.

David had served as a tenant Board Member with a previous landlord for nine years and on the Freebridge tenant Panel for two. He understood the importance of speaking up for others, and for tenants having the opportunity to share their voice with their landlords for the benefit of all. He often provided practical suggestions and comments based on his experiences. and the Panel will miss his input amongst the group.

We wish his family all the very best at this difficult time.



EASTERN SAVINGS & LOANS

If you need some extra financial support then a Credit Union is a safe and secure way to save and will give you access to responsible and affordable credit.

We work with Eastern Savings and Loans who are a Credit Union exclusively available to people in Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire.

They offer similar products to what you would find at a bank, but their ethos is very different because they are owned by their members. This means that any cash that is generated is given back to the members as a dividend or savings or a rebate on loan interest.



Credit union members' savings provide a large pool of funds to lend to those members who wish to borrow. Interest on the members' loans (which – unlike many other lenders – is capped at an affordable rate, by law) pays the credit union's running costs and allows funds to be re-invested in further development. Surplus funds are then paid back to the members as a dividend on their savings.



In a credit union, lending decisions are normally made by people, not computers. By carefully assessing each applicant's personal circumstances they focus on affordability and tailor the repayments to each member's situation.

As an ethical lender they assess each loan application on individual circumstances thereby enabling them to consider everyone, irrespective of their credit status or personal circumstances.



We'll let you know when your Covid-19 vaccine is ready for you.

> EVERY VACCINATION GIVES US



TELL US WHAT YOU THINK! YOUR FEEDBACK

Earlier this year we ran a survey to help us understand what areas of work we should be prioritising over the next few years - this was to help with Freebridge's new five year plan.

We asked you to tell us five things that we should put at the top of our to-do list.

Thank you to everyone who completed the survey.

Almost 500 of you responded to the survey

And this is what you told us.

We collected all the responses we received into six main themes, they were:

External repairs and maintenance issues Internal repairs and maintenance issues General repairs issues Neighbourhood issues Customers views, and Our services.



25% of survey responses were about

External repairs and maintenance issues

Your top five concerns about external repairs were (in order of importance):

General external maintenance
 Doors and windows
 Security and fire safety
 4 Car parking
 5 Fencing / gates / boundaries

24% of survey responses were about

Internal repairs and maintenance issues

Your top five concerns about internal repairs were (in order of importance):

1 Heating 2 Kitchens and bathrooms 3 Damp and mould 4 General internal maintenance 5 Communication / timescales

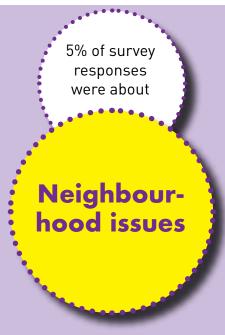


4 Property modernisations 5 Getting it right first time



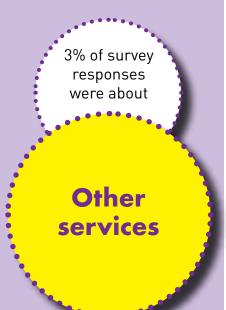
tenants' views (in order of importance) were:

1 Asking tenants what they want 2 Delivering what we promise 3 Prioritising people 4 Customer service **5** Consultations



Your top five concerns about neighbourhood issues (in order of importance) were:

1 Anti-social behaviour 2 Property appearance 3 Communal area cleaning 4 Schemes for young people 5 Neighbourhood security



Your top five concerns about the other services we offer (in order of importance) were:

1 Help for the elderly 2 The range of homes available 3 The care of properties 4 Support workers 5 Mental health issues

WHAT NEXT?

We've sat down and read through all the feedback you provided to us as part of the Tell Us What You Think! survey and we've used it to help us with our plan for Freebridge over the next five years.

The plan which is called **Building Better Futures** 2021/26 will be published in full in the next few weeks and will be available to read on our website at: www.freebridge.org.uk/whatmatters-to-us.html





Further details on how your feedback has helped shape our strategy can be found on our website.

Sophie Bates, Director of Customer and Communities

THE FREEBRIDGE CUSTOMER CHARTER

We are creating a new Customer Charter to support how we deliver our services to you. Sophie Bates, Director of Customer and Communities will be leading on this and so we have asked Sophie to share more about why we are doing this.

Why create a new charter?

We currently have various standards set out in lots of different documents, so we want to take the opportunity to bring these all together in one place, making sure these meet the needs of customers now and in the future.

What will the charter look like?

The charter will end up as a written down commitment which will be available to everyone and will apply to new and existing customers. Once it's ready to go we want to share it with all our customers and anyone who wants to find out more about us, and see what customers can expect from us.

How much involvement will customers have in it?

Work is just beginning on this and we want as many of our customers to get involved as possible by giving us their ideas, feedback and suggestions. We want to explore a combination of how we expect to deliver services and what you as a customer can expect from us. The finalised charter will reflect customer expectations as far as this is possible.

We are going to make it as easy as we can for you to tell us what you think through online surveys, and drop in sessions, and while we do this we'll continue to keep you up to date on how the charter is progressing through a series of articles in Streets Ahead.

What kind of 'services' do we mean?

This will depend on what you tell us, but we will consider the themes from the Government's charter for social housing residents such as:

- traditional service standards
 how we respond to your enquiries,
- commitments around your home - repairs, maintenance, and improvements,
- information around our commitment in the wider community - community engagement, estates and ground maintenance,
- and our commitment to customer engagement - how we get feedback from you and what we do with it when we get it.

What does a charter mean in practice?

Accountability is key to this. There should be clear and simple ways to measure it and we will regularly publish in Streets Ahead and on our website how we are doing.

It will link to our complaints, compliments and feedback procedure so if there are specific cases where we aren't getting it right or if we do something really well then we want to hear about this so we can continue to learn from the range of your experiences.

When will all this happen?

We are hoping to do the first surveys and consultation with you this summer, and plan to have everything finalised and published during 2022.

As promised we've already set up the first survey for you to give us your ideas, feedback and suggestions. So if you've got five minutes to spare visit www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/ <u>Freebridge CustomerCharter</u> and let us know what you think!



OUR COMMUNITY FUND OPENS FOR 2021!

For the eleventh year running Freebridge are welcoming grant applications to our Community Fund from Tuesday 1st June.

The annual fund provides a total of £5000 each year which gives local groups the opportunity to apply for grants of up to £1000 each to support community and voluntary activities.

Applications are welcome from groups whose aims include:

- Promoting health and wellbeing;
- Tackling disadvantage;
- Supporting local solutions to local needs;
- Promoting community cohesion;
- Developing sustainable and supportive communities, and
- Improving the environment.

Freebridge Chief Executive Anita Jones said: "This past year has been a tough one for so many and we know that charities and community groups have really struggled with fundraising. These groups are needed more than ever before, and we want to make sure that the amazing people who support our tenants and the wider community in all sorts of different ways can continue making a massive difference in and around west Norfolk."

The allocation of the money available is decided by a panel made up of Freebridge employees and members from the Tenant Panel.

Norfolk Community Foundation manages the fund on Freebridge's behalf. Any community or voluntary group wishing to apply or wanting to find out more about the Freebridge Community Fund can visit <u>https://www. norfolkfoundation.com/</u> <u>funding-support/grants/</u> <u>groups/freebridge-community-</u> <u>housing-fund/, telephone 01603</u> 623958 or email jennybevan@ <u>norfolkfoundation.com</u>.

The closing date for applications is 16th July 2021

KEEPING YOUR HOME WARMAND DRY

Now that we are getting some warmer weather it's the perfect time to start some new routines and habits that will help keep your home warm and dry when we hit the colder months. Preventing condensation building up now will help keep damp and mould at bay. Lots of these tips will also help you save money and keep your energy bills down too!

Everyday activities produce extra moisture in the air inside our homes. We may not see this excess moisture until it has condensed on our walls and mould begins to grow.

There is always some moisture in the air that you may not be able to see. Cold air cannot hold as much moisture, and this is why tiny drops of water appear on cold surfaces such as windows and any cold space within your home.

SOME SIMPLE TIPS TO HELP

- Hang washing outside to dry and if using a tumble dryer ensure this is vented to the outside.
- Never dry washing on your radiators. If you are unable to hang your washing outside and do not have a tumble dryer.
- Always cook with lids on pans.
- When filling a bath, run the cold water first, then add hot water (this will reduce the steam by up to 90%).
- Heat your home between 18 and 21 degrees centigrade. This constant temperature will help to keep your home warm enough to help manage condensation.
- Always keep all trickle vents open at all times.
- Keep internal doors open to allow the air to circulate around your whole home.
- If condensation appears on your windows, doors or any other surfaces please wipe off with a cloth or paper towel and wring out or dispose of it to take the moisture out of that room.
- We recommend that you dry your washing in the bathroom with the extractor fan on and the window open. This way you are containing the nine pints of water held in your clothes to one room which is much easier to manage than a whole house/flat.
- Extractor fans should be in good working order. If you have any problems with your extractor fans please let us know as soon as possible.
- Do not put furniture too close to the walls as this stops the air being able to circulate behind and can cause mould growth.
- Where possible, place wardrobes and furniture against internal walls (walls which have a room on both sides rather than external walls) as these walls will be warmer and will reduce the risk of condensation turning into mould.

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THE PLACESHAPERS ARE BACK IN ACTION!

Like everyone else, our Placeshaping team have adapted over the past 18 months to continue to help promote community spirit and support the most vulnerable in our areas.

While the centres at Providence Street and the Discovery Centre were shut, the team worked closely with our colleagues in our Support, Income, and Tenancy teams to make sure that those who needed a little bit of extra help could get it. This included providing food parcels, hot meal projects, wellness packs and wellbeing calls.

There were also online games, bingo, activities, and social sessions to help keep families busy during the long months of home schooling!

Now that things are starting to return to some sort of normal our Placeshapers are really excited to be hosting events that will start bringing people together again and maybe teach everyone some new skills along the way.

They've put together a programme of events for the summer holiday and you can find out more about them on the Discovery Centre and Providence Street Facebook pages.

Please note: Each event will be pre-booked to make sure that they are held safely and in line with the latest Covid-19 guidelines.

SUMMER FUN IN THE SUN

THE PLACESHAPERS HAVE LOTS OF EXCITING ACTIVITIES PLANNED THIS SUMMER, INCLUDING:

> PICNICS • YOUTH CLUB COFFEE & CAKE MORNINGS CUPCAKE AND COOKIE CLASSES BINGO • SPORTS DAYS

> > AND MORE!

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO BOOK GO TO THEIR FACEBOOK PAGE: <u>www.facebook.com/discovery</u> communitycentre



are you covered?

My Home Contents Insurance

Designed for tenants in social housing

Your Landlord does not insure your furniture and belongings and personal possessions. However we are able to offer all our tenants the chance to insure their home contents and belongings.

Some of the benefits are:

- There are no minimum home security requirements (just a lockable front door)
- Covers replacement and installation of locks for outside doors or windows and alarms, if keys are lost or stolen
- → Flexible regular Pay-As-You-Go payment options (fortnightly and monthly premiums include a transaction charge)
- → Storm and flood damage is covered (excludes damage caused by frost or anything that happens gradually)
- → Damage to fixed glass in doors and windows which you are responsible for is also covered
- → Covers theft or attempted theft of contents in sheds, outbuildings and garages (up to £3,000)

Terms & conditions, limits and exclusions apply, a copy of the policy wording is available upon request.

For more information contact My Home on 0345 450 7288 or email: myhome@thistleinsurance.co.uk visit: www.thistlemyhome.co.uk

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Over the last few months, we've been finishing work on a number of new homes across west Norfolk.

Tenants in their new home in Hunstanton

In April we took ownership of 13 newly built homes on Sandpiper Street in Hunstanton and met Acacia Peebles and Stephen English who had just moved in with their family (pictured above).

And at the end of May we finished work on a development of 14 new homes that were built in Walsoken, near Wisbech, following the demolition of a number of out-dated nontraditional properties last year.

Simon Smith, Board Vice-Chair who came along to Walsoken

[:] to see the finished work, said: "It's been a challenging year to be building new properties but one that has shown more than ever how important a safe, warm place to live is. In the next few years Freebridge will be investing millions of pounds in our existing tenants' homes as well as providing more new properties to meet the growing local need. We are pleased that these homes in Walsoken have been delivered on time despite the underlying situation and are very happy to welcome those who are moving in."

Paul Newbold, Development Director with Board Vice Chair Simon Smith at our new homes in Walsoken

New homes in Walsoken



FREEBRIDGE TENANT JOINS HOUSING OMBUDSMAN'S PANEL



Freebridge are delighted to announce that Anne Manning, a Freebridge tenant, has been successful in gaining a place on the Housing Ombudsman's new national Resident Panel.

The Resident Panel, which had its first meeting in April, is a new initiative by the Housing Ombudsman to provide an opportunity to residents to help develop the service they provide.

The panel, which is made up of residents from a wide cross-section of landlords who are members of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, will meet online to discuss key areas of the Ombudsman's work including: the development of their three-year corporate plan, helping the service get a better understanding of residents' experiences of making complaints, and investigating the themes that arise through complaints they receive.

Anne Manning, who is also a member of Freebridge's Tenant Panel, said: "Having been on Freebridge's Tenant Panel for a number of years I have always been interested in the how complaints are dealt with and have been actively involved in looking at complaints cases received by Freebridge. I am very happy to be part of the Ombudsman's new Residents Panel, which will ensure that the voice of tenants will be clearly heard in discussions the Ombudsman has about complaints which have been made to housing associations across the country."

Sophie Bates, Director of Housing at Freebridge said "Over the last couple of years Freebridge have completed a great deal of work improving the process we follow in respect of any complaints that are made to us. That said we are always looking to make further improvements to what we do so it's great that Anne has gained a place on this new Resident Panel as it should help us to gain a greater understanding about some of the wider thinking being had about complaints, including best practices that may be happening elsewhere."

Richard Blakeway, the Housing Ombudsman, said "I'm absolutely delighted to appoint our first Resident Panel after an overwhelming response from residents. The panel will provide valuable insight and feedback on our plans to grow and develop the Ombudsman, alongside our extensive engagement with landlords.

"This a crucial year as we will be publishing our next threeyear plan in the summer. By increasing the scale of the Resident Panel we will be able to hear a much stronger resident voice within these plans, together with developing our approach to promoting awareness and learning from complaints."

More information on the Housing Ombudsman and the work they do, including their Residents Panel, can be found on their website at <u>www.</u> <u>housing-ombudsman.org.uk</u>



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

OPTING OUT OF STREETS AHEAD

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 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.

To opt out of Streets Ahead, you can either call us on 03332 404 444, email your name and address to <u>enquiries@</u> <u>freebridge.org.uk</u> 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	:

HOW WE PERFORMED

SATISFACTION SURVEY

Every month our Customer Service Team calls 100 of our tenants to ask them how they think we are performing.

> of our customers are 81% satisfied with the overall service we provide of our customers are 67% satisfied with our repairs service 87% of our customers are satisfied with rent and service charges 71% of our customers are satisfied with their home of our customers are 85% satisfied with their neighbourhood 80%

of our customers are satisfied with how they are kept informed

	2020/21 Target	Year to date
Overall satisfaction	88%	82%
Satisfaction with repairs service	80%	67 %
Satisfaction with rent and service charges	85%	85%
Satisfaction with home	80%	73%
Satisfaction with neighbourhood	85%	79 %
Satisfaction with being kept informed	88%	80%

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:

- Contractors adhere to the same standards of customer service as we expect our own operatives to.
- It is important that we correctly manage our tenant's expectations by offering appropriate timeframes for works to be completed in.
- Responsibility for nonstandard repairs should be agreed and documented prior to completing a mutual exchange.

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

DURING JANUARY, FEBRUARY & MARCH 2021

COMPLIMENTS

36	Number of compliments received in this quarter			
Reasons for compliments:				
18	Staff attitude			
00	State of property			
18	Customer service			
00	Policies			
COMPLAINTS				
16	Number of complaints received in this			

Reasons for complaints:

quarter

00	Staff attitude
09	State of property
06	Customer service
01	Policies

EARLY STAGE RESOLUTIONS



Number of cases dealt with through early resolution in this quarter

Reasons for cases:

01	Staff attitude
22	State of property
24	Customer service
05	Policies

IMPROVING THE INFORMATION WE PROVIDE YOU



The information on how we perform (on the page to the left of this) is data that we've been providing to you for the last couple of years - we do this so you can see how well we're providing certain services to you.

We're now changing the way we gather this information and at the same time we're having a good look at how we present the results to you so it's easy for everyone to understand.

We'll still be contacting you to ask about whether you're happy with the services we're providing but instead of calling customers at random we'll be contacting you after we've done something specific for you. So, if you've had a repair completed, started a new tenancy with us, reported an anti-social behaviour incident, or made a complaint, we may call and ask you about how we did.

In the next issue we'll publish the first set of results on how we're doing in these new categories, however if there are things that you think you and other tenants might find useful knowing, or you think we could show the results in a certain way please do get in touch.

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 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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TREATING EVERYONE FAIRLY

Freebridge treat everyone fairly. We promote equality of opportunity and value the differences between our customers and everyone who works for Freebridge Community Housing. All our employees, contractors and consultants must treat colleagues and customers with politeness, tolerance, and respect, regardless of their age, colour, disability, ethnicity, sex or gender identity, marital status, nationality or national origin, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, caring responsibilities or any other unjustifiable reasons.

We will not tolerate unfair discriminatory behaviour of any kind and we encourage the reporting of any such behaviour. We will act upon all complaints appropriately.

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IF YOU NEED ANY HELP TO UNDERSTAND THIS NEWSLETTER PLEASE GET IN TOUCH.

