

STREETS AHEAD

THE MAGAZINE FOR FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING TENANTS



MAKING EVERY TENANCY COUNT
FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY FUND
FUN AT THE DISCOVERY CENTRE

AUTUMN 2021

DEVELOPING HOMES AND CREATING OPPORTUNITIES
FOR PEOPLE WITHIN WEST NORFOLK

Freebridge
COMMUNITY HOUSING

WELCOME TO STREETS AHEAD

In this issue of Streets Ahead we've got details of which local community groups and charities have been successful in their applications to the Freebridge Community Fund, we've got some great photos of some art classes for children that took place at one of our community centres - one of the first events we've had in quite a while! And as ever we've got information from the Tenant Panel about what they've been up to, and details on how we've performed in the first three months of the 2020/2021 year.

Hopefully when this issue arrives with you the situation with Covid-19 will have continued to improve, however we're keeping ourselves fully up to date with the latest guidance from the Government and will be continuing to do everything possible we can to keep our customers and colleagues safe.

Finally, at this time of the year we produce our **Annual Report to Tenants** to give you an overview of the work that we've done over the last twelve months. This year we're trying something a little different and have filmed a video version which should be on our website by the time you read this.

Please do take the time to have a look at:

www.freebridge.org.uk

See you next issue!

LOG BURNERS

Freebridge is no longer able to provide permission to customers wanting to install log burners in their homes, in line with our work to support the Government's net zero carbon agenda.

If you have previously been given permission by Freebridge to install a log burner, we would like to remind you that these appliances can produce carbon monoxide if they have been poorly installed, have been poorly maintained or are used incorrectly.

You are responsible for both the annual maintenance, which must be completed by a qualified person, and the safety of the equipment. Once the annual service has been completed you must provide Freebridge with details confirming it has been done.

If you fail to do this Freebridge retain the right to remove the appliance at your expense.

If you have a log burner installed without Freebridge's permission, you must contact us immediately to request retrospective permission with a copy of the latest test certificate.

If a log burner is found to be in your home without our permission, we will ask for you to remove it at your own expense.

Finally, if you live in a home that has a log burner fitted and are intending to move through a mutual exchange, you will need to arrange for it to be removed by a qualified person (at your own expense) and provide appropriate certification to us.

MAKING EVERY TENANCY COUNT



At Freebridge we are committed to taking an active role in preventing homelessness in West Norfolk, by providing quality homes. We do understand though that this isn't enough on its own, and that sometimes it can be difficult to make a success of turning a house into a home, where you feel settled and safe.

Some of our customers may need additional help from time to time to make their tenancies work, and to do this we can help practically with a range of things including:

- Advice on moving home
- Benefit advice
- Money management and budgeting
- Aids and adaptations for the home
- Domestic abuse, hate crime or other forms of abuse or neglect
- Hoarding and home safety
- Personal support plans
- Anti-social behaviour

So if you have just moved in and feel you would like further advice or support, or even if you have lived in your home for a number of years but are worried about your tenancy, contact us on **03332 404 444** or at **enquiries@freebridge.org.uk** to talk more about how we can help.

And if you are interested in reading more about our wider plans for sustaining tenancies you can find our **Tenancy Sustainment Plan** at www.freebridge.org.uk/tenancy-sustainment-plan.html

Preventing Homelessness

While the work we do at Freebridge acts to reduce the threat of homelessness within our communities, we understand that for a variety of reasons our customers, their family members and others in the community may at some point be faced with the prospect of becoming homeless.

Reasons for this can include:

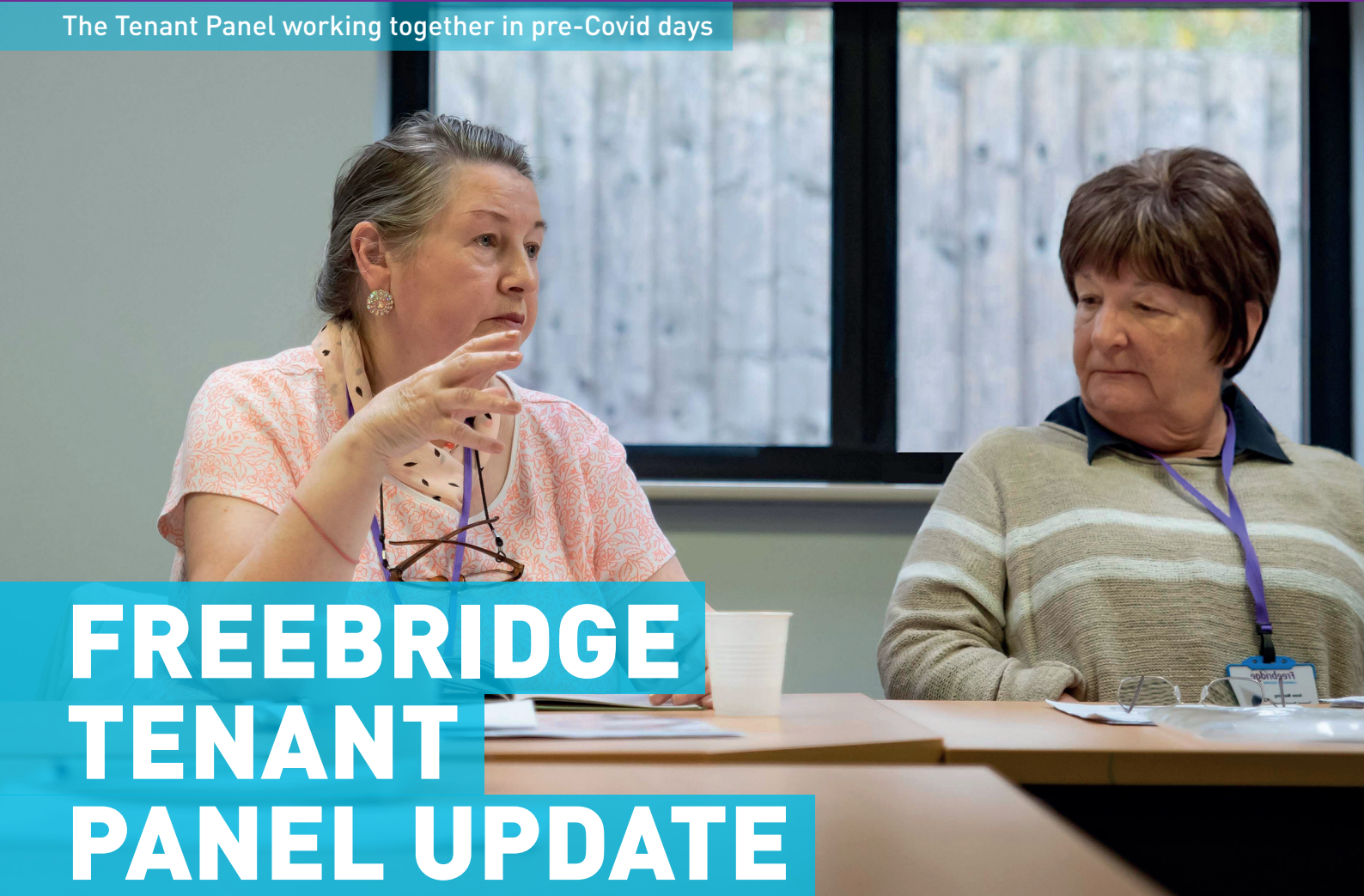
- relationship breakdowns – resulting in someone having to leave their home, this could be between partners or other family members (parents/children etc.)
- a lodger being asked to leave the property they are staying at, or
- those sleeping on friends or families sofas being asked to move on.

To avoid anyone becoming homeless it's important the relevant agencies are aware of what's going as soon as possible, so they can help out with alternative housing options.

If you know anyone who is threatened with homelessness in the next couple of months contact the **Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk** on **01553 616200** and they will be able to help.

You can also get housing advice from **Shelter** by calling **0808 800 4444**.

The Tenant Panel working together in pre-Covid days



FREEBRIDGE TENANT PANEL UPDATE

In each issue of Streets Ahead a member of the Tenant Panel will provide you with an update on what they've been working on over the last few months.

This issue's update comes from Frances Fox.

Since our last update, Tenant Panel members have continued to meet regularly over the summer months. While we all very much appreciate the easing of restrictions, meeting virtually is working well for all and we have agreed to continue in this way until the autumn.

In June we were pleased to welcome two new members; Charmaine and Charlie joined us following a successful recruitment campaign and have been busy getting up to speed since their first meeting.

Over the summer our work programme has continued to be packed with a variety of different topics. In June we took some time out to meet with Freebridge employees to talk in more detail about two areas of great importance to us as tenants – the repairs service and communications with customers. We learnt more about plans to improve the repairs service and agreed to focus again on the important issue of damp and mould in September, to understand what progress has been made at that time. We were especially pleased to learn about the Property Health Check project that began in August, where Freebridge employees are contacting all customers individually to understand more about what

outstanding repairs everyone has in their homes following lockdown, so that a plan can be put in place to carry these out. This is an important piece of work, which will benefit us all so do listen out for your call.

We also shared examples where we had problems around communications with customers. Following the first discussion in June, the Director of Customer and Communities came back to our July meeting, and after considering the feedback, shared with us several examples of processes that will be changed to tackle the problem. We have raised our concerns about communications on a number of occasions so we're very pleased to see some planned improvements.

In July we spent time considering the new Tenancy Sustainment Plan, which demonstrates all of the positive work planned over the next few years to help customers make a success of their tenancy. It was great to see all of the support available.

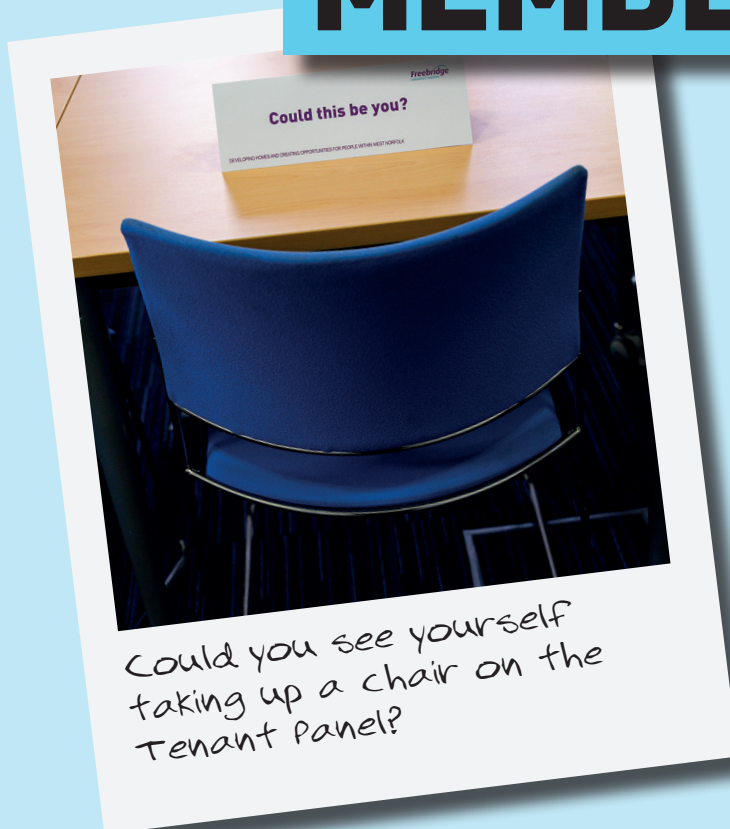
Finally, at every meeting we continue to monitor how Freebridge perform against the things that matter the most to us all, such as repairs, anti-social behaviour and complaints; we also had a lot of input over the summer into the new design for presenting this information – see pages 14/15 – which we hope others will agree is now far clearer and easier to understand.

We will be meeting again from the middle of September when we look forward to sharing our next update in the Winter edition.

With very best wishes from the Tenant Panel.

Frances Fox

COULD YOU BE OUR NEXT TENANT PANEL MEMBER?



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 provides? 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 our Governance Team a call on **03332 404 444**, or email them at **governance@freebridge.org.uk**

The Family Action team out in the Discovery Centre garden



SUPPORTING A BETTER WEST NORFOLK

£6,000 has been provided to ten community groups in West Norfolk through Freebridge's Community Fund, all of who make a positive difference to people living in the area.

The annually awarded funding supports community groups and charities who promote health and wellbeing, the environment, support residents, or brings communities together, through applications of up to £1,000 for projects that have a positive impact within West Norfolk.

Sophie Bates, Freebridge's Director of Customer & Communities said "The

Freebridge Community Fund is a fantastic opportunity for us to help support some of the brilliant charities and community groups that work in the area, who in turn support our customers and the wider West Norfolk.

"Our vision at Freebridge is to support a better West Norfolk and it's clear to see that the various projects that the Fund will be helping this year do just that.

"Freebridge has always been a community minded landlord aspiring to do more than just provide homes, and one of the key objectives in our new five-year strategy is to create



Norfolk
Community
Foundation

Together, Norfolk shines brighter

"homes, communities and local spaces to be proud of".

"The Community Fund plays an important part in helping us work towards this objective and we're delighted to be supporting the various projects and activities being run across the borough."

This year the recipients of funding were:

The Big Heart & Soul Choir, who use singing as a way of enhancing wellbeing and nurturing more vibrant and connected communities. They'll be using their grant to re-start their singing groups having closed down some time ago because of the pandemic.

The Downham Dementia Support Association, who help those diagnosed with the condition and their care givers to ensure that they can live well with the condition in the community - will be using their money to re-open their Dementia Cafe later this year.

Family Action, who provide practical, emotional and financial support for people experiencing poverty, disadvantage and social isolation, will continue providing their therapeutic gardening and horticultural sessions.

4th All Saints King's Lynn Brownies, who are all about learning and developing through fun, friendship, challenge and adventure. Are going to be using their money towards new equipment to support some of their activities.

The Pandora Project, who provide domestic abuse support to women and children in West Norfolk and coastal North Norfolk, will be using their grant to support some activities within their 'Open The Box' recovery programme.

West Norfolk Riding for the Disabled Association, who provide equine therapy for people of all ages with disabilities will be diversifying the services they offer by adding further activities to those they already provide.

Steel Bones, who help amputee families live life to the full by building a peer community to provide support in moments of stress and crisis. They'll be using their grant to boost their support in West Norfolk by recruiting and training new volunteers in the area.

West Norfolk Carers, who provide a range of support and services for carers for all ages in and around West Norfolk, including support groups and drop-in sessions, for youth and adult carers. They'll be putting on some extra sports sessions for some of the young carers they work with who have faced additional pressure and extra responsibilities caring for family members during the pandemic.

Castle Acre Coronation Bowls Club, a community bowls club that's been running since the 1950s will be upgrading their toilet facilities, including a new disabled WC.

West Walton Village Hall, a village hall that runs a number of activities and group sessions for the community is going to be setting up a computer club for older people.

Well done to all the successful groups, we look forward to hearing more from you!





Are you struggling to get into work?

The Chances team is here to help with 1 to 1 support to:

- Improve or refresh your skills
- Help you with job search and prep
- Boost your confidence and help you get more active



European Union

European
Social Fund

If you

- Are currently out of work
- Live in Norfolk
- Want to make life changes

Find out more

www.norfolk.gov.uk/Chances

SUMMER OF FUN AT THE DISCOVERY CENTRE

The Placeshaping Team have been busy over the summer months running a number of activities at our community centres in King's Lynn. These are some of the first events they've been able to run for a while so it was good to see to children back in the centres having fun!

The first couple of events included a cake and cookie decorating class, and an art camp ran by artist Tim Mann (pictured below).

The team are hoping to run further events soon, including an Open Day at the Discovery Centre at the end of October, so make sure you're following their facebook page for up to date information: www.facebook.com/discoverycentre



APPLY TO THE EU SETTLEMENT SCHEME TODAY



HM Government



The deadline for European Economic Area (EEA) and Swiss Nationals (and certain 'Family Members') to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) was 30th June 2021. Anyone who failed to apply by the deadline is now, legally, without immigration status.

No new claims for any benefit can be made by an EEA / Swiss National who has not applied to the EUSS (or who has not had a late application accepted).

However, the government has allowed an easement for EEA / Swiss Nationals who are already claiming DWP benefits; benefits for

those who have not yet applied to the EUSS will continue temporarily in the form of new extra statutory payments.

Claimants should be advised to apply to the EUSS as soon as possible. The Home Office will need to consider whether to allow their late application - so the sooner the application is made, the better!

The Home Office will write again on the 21st September, giving a month before benefits are suspended, then a further month to apply before payments are terminated.



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 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



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

please sign in this box

Name:

Address:

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.....

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COMPLAINTS & COMPLIMENTS AT FREEBRIDGE

We want the services our customers receive from us to be of the highest standard, however we realise there will be times when people may want to complain, tell us how we can improve our services, or perhaps compliment us on something we have done well.

The complaints, comments and compliments we receive are important to us as they help us improve and shape the services we provide.

In the first three months of the 2020/21 we've received more complaints than we did during

the same time last year, and while delays caused by the effects of Covid-19 have been a factor in this, we know that our level of service in some areas also needs to improve.

While the highest proportion of compliments came from work in relation to our repairs service so did the highest proportion of issues dealt with through our early stage resolution and formal complaints processes. In particular complaints around the time repairs took to be completed and our communication around getting repairs done.

Early stage resolutions

76

Number of cases dealt with through early resolution in this quarter

Reasons for complaint:

- 39** Responsive repairs
- 17** Property condition
- 10** Freebridge employees
- 03** Estate maintenance
- 03** Health & Safety
- 02** Moving home
- 01** Freebridge employees
- 01** Governance

Formal complaints

12

Number of cases dealt with as a formal complaint in this quarter

Reasons for complaint:

- 08** Responsive repairs
- 02** Governance
- 01** Freebridge employees
- 01** Moving home
- 00** Charges
- 00** Estate maintenance
- 00** Health & Safety
- 00** Property Condition

Compliments

38

Number of compliments we received in this quarter

Reasons for compliment:

- 17** Customer service
- 12** Freebridge employees
- 08** Contractor
- 01** Policy & procedure

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

As a result of this, we are planning on making some big changes to how our repairs service is structured to help improve the communication involved in the process, which we think will improve the overall repairs service we provide.

Finally, as we've said your feedback is important to us and when you contact us about a problem we always look to try and learn from what you say. Examples of this include:

- A customer told us about how the guidance we provide in respect of owning a pet as a Freebridge tenant was unclear - **and as a result, we have subsequently reviewed and updated our approach.**
- A customer told us about the problems they had experienced due to the time it took to process a shared ownership purchase - **and as a result of this our Housing Operations Manager changed the process involved to reduce any unnecessary delays to the process, including fortnightly meetings with all the teams involved so problems can be picked up and resolved as quickly as possible.**
- A customer shared their concerns about being contacted through Facebook - **and as result, we've now changed our process to ensure we only use this method as a last resort.**



HELP US OUT AND YOU COULD WIN A PRIZE!







Freebridge are creating a new Customer Charter to support how we deliver our services to you - and we need your help!

Our Customer Charter will be something that tells you what you can expect from us as a landlord - and we want your ideas, feedback and suggestions about what you think should be in it.

To tell us what you think should be in our new Charter follow this link: www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/FreebridgeCustomerCharter and complete the short survey - and if you do tell us what you think you could win a prize!



HOW WE PERFORMED

		April	May
	% of our emergency repairs that were completed within four hours our target for this year is to achieve above 90%	92%	94%
	% of our urgent repairs that were completed within 24 hours our target for this year is to achieve above 90%	93%	94%
	Average number of days to re-let a home once it becomes empty our target for this year is to achieve below 20 days	56	31
	% of the complaints we received that were dealt with within the time set out in our policy our target for this year is to achieve above 100%	100%	98%
	% of our tenants that were satisfied with how we have handled cases of anti-social behaviour our target for this year is to achieve above 90%	n/a%	100%
	Number of live complaints at the end of the month	04	19

DURING APRIL, MAY & JUNE 2021

June

94%

94%

23

95%

100%

35

Number of complaints
so far this year at the
end of this quarter

85

The statistics shown in the coloured bars on the left detail how we performed in the first quarter of the 2020/2021 year.

This new way of displaying information about our performance was endorsed by the Tenant Panel following discussions with them, as we wanted to make the data as clear and easy to understand as possible.

We get the data from telephone surveys conducted by our Customer Service Team, so if you do get a call from them we'd really appreciate it if you could spare the time to answer their questions because it helps us know how well we're performing.

While we at Freebridge understand that we still need to make some significant improvements to our repairs and maintenance service and are working on plans for this, we are pleased that our performance in respect of Emergency and Urgent repairs remains consistently above the set target - to complete Emergency repairs within four hours, and Urgent repairs within 24 hours. This means that the most serious faults

reported to us are being resolved quickly.

The number of complaints we are receiving is still far higher than we would like and we need to work harder at avoiding situations getting to a point where people feel the need to complain, however during this first quarter of the year we have performed well in responding in a timely way.

Customer satisfaction with the handling of anti-social behaviour cases has remained consistently high throughout quarter one, which reflects the positive ways in which the team have adapted their processes to enable contact and casework to continue throughout any imposed Covid-19 restrictions.

Finally, while our performance remained below target at the end of the quarter in respect of the time it takes us to re-let empty properties there has been a month on month improvement. Progress in this area has been driven through changes to our processes for dealing with certain works in empty homes which had impacted heavily earlier in the year.

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.

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.

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FOR PEOPLE WITHIN WEST NORFOLK

Freebridge
COMMUNITY HOUSING