

# ANNUAL REPORT



Anita Jones, Freebridge's Chief Executive.

Hello and welcome to Freebridge Community Housing's Annual Report, that covers the period between April 2019 and April 2020, which I'm delighted to present to you as Freebridge's new Chief Executive.

Obviously the year ended very differently to the way it began, as the situation with the coronavirus pandemic quickly became something that dominated all our daily lives. That said, with your support and understanding, the dedicated team here at Freebridge found creative ways to carry on providing the services we know are most important to you.

Focusing our efforts on keeping vital services going, and doing the right thing for our most vulnerable customers, undoubtedly affected our performance in some areas towards the end of the year, but as this report highlights there is still much to be proud of.

The aim of our annual report is to provide you with a quick overview of some facts and figures in respect of the work we have done, helping to improve our accountability and transparency – it's also an opportunity to highlight just a few of the many examples we have of how our employees strive to make a difference, making a real improvement to people's lives.

A huge thank you to all of you who have provided time and feedback in helping us shape and improve our services over the last year, we are enormously grateful. You have told us that

improving our repairs and maintenance service needs to remain a priority, and while improvements are being made, we absolutely recognise that there is more to do and are committed to getting this right.

The coming year promises to be an exciting one at Freebridge as we consider our next five year plan, looking forward to 2026. We'll be considering how we can improve the impact we have on the lives of our customers while continuing to support a better West Norfolk.

What do you think should be priorities for Freebridge? If you have a view please do get in touch to let us know, we would love to hear from you.

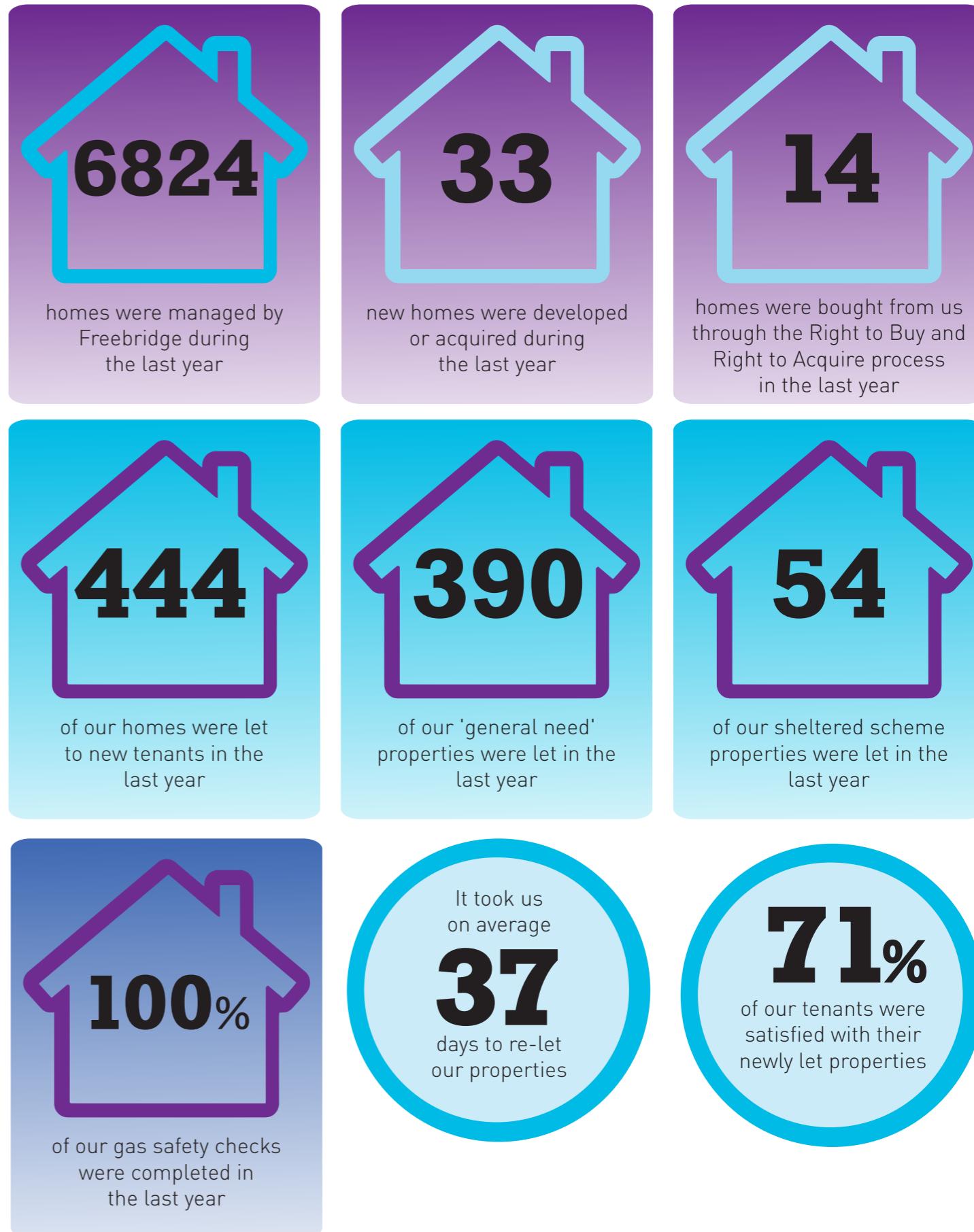
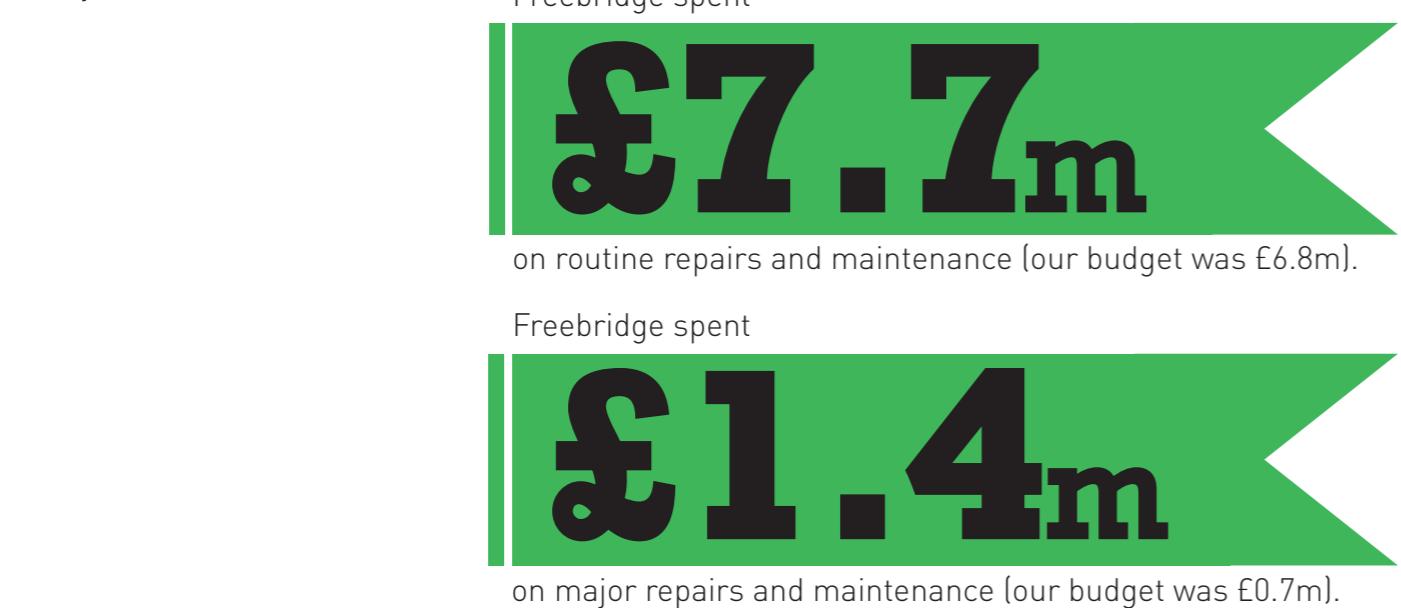
**Anita Jones  
Chief Executive**  
Freebridge Community Housing

# YOUR HOMES

As our mission statement makes clear Freebridge is committed to 'Developing homes and creating opportunities for people within West Norfolk'.

While developing and acquiring new homes remains an essential part of what we do at Freebridge, we also know that maintaining the quality of the homes we already own is a priority, and as a result of this, we spent over £10 million on repairs and maintenance in the last year.

As you can see in the last twelve months the level of satisfaction in respect of our repairs and maintenance service was much lower than we would like so we're working hard to put this right. We know that this area is something that many of our customers consider the most important service we provide, and we know we need to improve the way we carry it out.



# YOUR COMMUNITY

Although Freebridge is primarily a provider of housing, we have always understood that as an organisation we need to be a supporter of the wider community as well.

We do this by providing help to a number of projects and activities that have a positive impact on the people and places in our community. Projects that we think will continue to provide wide-ranging benefits for the area over the coming years.

Some of the activities we've been involved with in the 2019/2020 year included:



## WEST NORFOLK

Freebridge's vision is to "support a better West Norfolk" so with this in mind we have continued to work with the Love West Norfolk campaign which promotes the joys of living, working and visiting our area.

As a partner of the campaign Freebridge has joined in with a variety of events and promotions throughout the year, showcasing the work we do with our customers and the wider community.

In the last year Freebridge awarded grants of

# £5000

from the Freebridge Community Fund to seven community groups - 4 Transform, Age UK Norfolk, the Hanseatic Union, the King's Lynn Men's Shed, Sing Your Heart Out, South West Norfolk Youth Opportunities Project and The Garage Trust Ltd - who all are making a real difference to the people of West Norfolk.

In the addition to the support provided by the Community Fund Freebridge employees also got involved by raising money and helping out at our chosen charity the King's Lynn Foodbank, including some time at Christmas where we helped collect

# 400+

boxes of much needed food donations.

## PLACESHAPING

Freebridge's two Placeshaping community centres - the Providence Street Community Centre and the Discovery Centre - have once again been the base of many successful community events and projects over the year.

They've held Easter, Halloween and Christmas parties, and of course the annual Hillington Square fun day during the summer.

The centres are also home to a variety of long and short

term users – including home schooling support groups, exercise classes, wellbeing and youth groups.

We've also got the garden at the Discovery Centre which is taking shape as the team work with various local charities to revitalise the outside space. Family Action are now continuing the green fingered work with local volunteers – including those with mental health concerns and learning difficulties.

# ENGAGEMENT

At Freebridge we understand that getting better at the things we do and the services we provide is important to our customers.

One of the ways to do this is by engaging with them to get their feedback.

We engage with customers in a variety of ways each and every day. Whether it be through our Tenant Panel, via our social media accounts, by visiting people in their own homes on our Out & Abouts or just through the day to day contact our employees have with customers - all these activities help us to understand what we're doing well and what we need to do better.

## OUT & ABOUT

During our Out & About visits employees met customers all across West Norfolk, starting in North Lynn in April and finishing in Terrington in October.

During the year we knocked on over **1500** front doors

### NORTH LYNN

### TERRINGTON ST. CLEMENT

## TENANT PANEL

A key component of the engagement work we do at Freebridge is the Tenant Panel.

The Panel is a group made of up to 12 members who meet on a regular basis to look at Freebridge's performance and the services we provide.

Over the year they meet and speak with Freebridge employees about the work we do in order to consider ways of making improvements.

## CUSTOMER SERVICE COMMITTEE

They also got involved with our Out & About visits, sat on our Community Fund judging panel, took part in Complaints Panels – alongside members of the Board, presented to those attending our AGM, and most recently were involved in the recruitment process taking place to find Freebridge a new Chief Executive.

As well as Freebridge's Tenant Panel, last year we also set up a new Customer Service Committee – which will work alongside the Tenant Panel – to look into how we can give customers a greater say in how we work. The Committee's work was delayed by the arrival of Covid-19, but we're hoping that in the next year it will meet to review the work that we do at Freebridge.

# FEEDBACK

**At Freebridge we understand from the feedback that we receive from our customers, that we do a lot of things really well, however we also understand that there are services that we provide that we could do better.**

It is extremely important to us that Freebridge provides the very best level of service we can and one way of ensuring that we do this is through the feedback we receive - whether that's:

- through the satisfaction surveys we regularly complete,
- the compliments, comments and complaints we receive,
- during the Out & About events we run, or
- through our day to day contact with our customers.

So if you're a Freebridge customer and have got something to say about the work we do, please do take the opportunity to let us know how we're doing.

Throughout the year our Customer Services team spoke to our customers about the services we provide, and out of every 100 customers we surveyed over the last year:

**83**

were satisfied with the overall service we provide. Our target was to achieve a figure of 88.

**69**

were satisfied with our repairs and maintenance service. Our target was to achieve a figure of 80.

**85**

were satisfied with their rent and service charges. Our target was to achieve a figure of 85.

**72**

were satisfied with their home. Our target was to achieve a figure of 80.

**83**

were satisfied with their neighbourhood. Our target was to achieve a figure of 85.

**84**

were satisfied with being kept informed. Our target was to achieve a figure of 88.

We understand that there will be times when we haven't provided our customers with the level of service that they should expect from us, and when this happens, we have a complaints process where we try our very best to resolve the problems that sometimes do happen.

In the last year we have introduced some changes to this process to make it as easy to understand as possible, and also to ensure that complaints that are made to us get investigated and resolved as quickly as we can.

To help us with this we have introduced a new early resolution stage. We understand that this new procedure won't always help, so our normal two stage formal complaints process remains available. The good news though, is that in our first year of using the early stage resolution we resolved 77 issues without the need for any formal action.

As well as the changes we have made to the complaints process, we also try to learn what we can from the complaints we receive to improve the way we carry out the work we do. Some examples of the learning we've noted from last year include:

- if timescales of required works change ensure the tenants are contacted and given the relevant information and timeframes to correctly manage their expectations,
- during development work, suitable suppliers should be identified so that any repairs or replacements needed can be obtained without complication,
- any property causing a genuine health and safety



## COMPLIMENTS

| Key themes from the compliments we received |            |
|---------------------------------------------|------------|
| Staff attitude                              | 36         |
| State of property                           | 01         |
| Customer service                            | 84         |
| Policy                                      | 00         |
| <b>Totals</b>                               | <b>121</b> |



## COMPLAINTS

| Key themes from the complaints we received |            |
|--------------------------------------------|------------|
| Staff attitude                             | 11         |
| State of property                          | 11         |
| Customer service                           | 94         |
| Policy                                     | 06         |
| <b>Totals</b>                              | <b>122</b> |

| Stage which complaints were resolved at |    |
|-----------------------------------------|----|
| Early stage resolution                  | 77 |
| Resolved at Stage 1                     | 92 |
| Resolved at Stage 2                     | 19 |

concern should be attended to as a matter of urgency,

- if timescales of required works change ensure the tenants are contacted and given the relevant information and timeframes to correctly manage their expectations,
- all required works should be completed prior to a tenancy beginning. If this is not possible, it should be communicated to the tenant so that they are aware of the situation before they move in, and

• emergency moves should be initiated with a face to face meeting with a Lettings Advisor and the surveyor/Technical Officer recommending the move, at the current property.

Quarterly reports on the compliments and complaints we receive, including any learning that we make as a result, are available on our website at [www.freebridge.org.uk](http://www.freebridge.org.uk)

# FINANCES

At Freebridge we understand that as an organisation it is vital that we manage the resources that are available to us in a manner that is consistent with our vision, mission and values.

At the same time we aim to ensure that we achieve the very best we can for our customers and the communities that they live in, while taking a broad view of value for money on the understanding that as a community housing provider we have social and environmental responsibilities as well as financial ones.

If you want to find out more about Freebridge's finances, our Statutory Accounts are available in full on our website at: [www.freebridge.org.uk](http://www.freebridge.org.uk)

Freebridge spent

**£5.0m**

on management costs

(we spent £5.0m in 18/19)

Freebridge spent

**£10.5m**

on repairs and maintenance

(we spent £12.9m in 18/19)

Freebridge spent

**£4.8m**

on depreciation of  
housing properties

(we spent £4.8m in 18/19)

Freebridge spent

**£4.1m**

on service costs

(we spent £2.4m in 18/19)

Freebridge spent

**£0.09m**

on bad debts

(we spent £0.04m in 18/19)

Freebridge spent

**£0.2m**

on depreciation of  
other fixed assets

(we spent £0.2m in 18/19)

In 19/20 we spent  
the following amount  
on major repairs  
per property

**£762**

**£974**  
in 18/19

In 19/20 we spent  
the following amount  
on maintenance  
per property

**£1080**

**£952**  
in 18/19

In 19/20 we spent  
the following amount  
on management costs  
per property

**£1256**

**£1008**  
in 18/19

In 19/20 we spent  
the following amount  
on service charge costs  
per property

**£121**

**£107**  
in 18/19