

Notes of the Tenant Panel Meeting

Held on 16 July 2021 at 9.45 am held virtually

Attendance – Tenant Panel Facilitator, Governance Coordinator, Director of Customer and Communities, Anne, Frances, Sandy, Charlotte, Charmaine, Charlie, David and Roger.

Apologies – Annette

The Tenant Panel and Tenant Panel Facilitator welcomed Charlie to his first meeting.

Declarations of Interest – There were none. Following queries it was confirmed that examples that Tenant Panel Members raise in the process of looking at ways of improving customer service of their own experiences gave a Director an insight into issues but they were issues that equally needed to be resolved and it was hoped that it would help with learning outcomes as an aside when this is something that occurs.

Work Programme and Review of Group Contract – This was noted

	Item
1	To Approve June Minutes, to note the Matters Arising Report
	There was only one matters arising in regard to Damp and Mould that would be added to the agenda September, information would be shared in advance.
2	Any Other Business
	<p>A Panel Member had queries in relation to the Board in terms of the type of Board they were, how they evaluated their performance and what kind of levels of responsibility they had. The Vice Chair of the Board was due to attend the Tenant Panel meeting in September and it was agreed to ask him to address this query and if there were any evaluation information regarding the Board that could be shared with the Panel it might be helpful. The Panel Member added that they believed the Board should raise their profile with tenants so that they understand more about the role of the CEO and the Board. The Governance Coordinator agreed to liaise with the Vice Chair of the Board in advance of the meeting in order to cover this topic.</p> <p>Following a query in regard to permissions for tenants to carry out their own work to properties such as driveways, the Director of Customer and Communities shared that requests received by the Customer Services Team are logged and a surveyor would attend to review any request if necessary and then again after it was completed.</p> <p>Following a query about Placeshaping activities outside of Kings Lynn, the Director of Customer and Communities shared that the programme for the summer had been set and the team were starting to work on creating opportunities in the rural areas going forward. Further updates from the team were programmed later in the year.</p> <p>Anita Jones, Chief Executive provided a corporate update to the Panel and there was an opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback and left the meeting. The Panel thanked her for her briefing.</p>
3	Shared Ownership Sales
	A Lettings Manager and the Director of Customer and Communities attended to present item to present the topic for discussion and comments. The Lettings Manager provided the Tenant Panel

with an overview of performance regarding units that Freebridge currently had for resale and that were 'stair-casing' (which was a way of moving to full ownership in some cases).

Responses to the Panel's queries:

- Applicants have to register on the Help to Buy Scheme, though there is no restriction on any requirement to live in the Borough, Freebridge undertakes in-depth assessment and will consider more local people by preference.
- The properties restricted to 80% in rural areas was a planning tool to ensure that shared ownership properties can always be available rurally where the prices are higher and therefore available for future generations, and purchasers would be aware of this restriction.

How many properties and type available to housing associations depended on planning permission criteria set by the Local Authority. The Tenant Panel thanked the Lettings Manager for their presentation and insight into the topic of shared ownership sales and they left the meeting.

4 Communications with Customers

The Director of Customer and Communities provided an update to the Panel following discussions at the previous meeting in regard to communications with customers. She shared that there had been really useful customer service examples provided at the last meeting that she had agreed to consider and feedback next steps at this meeting.

Following numerous examples of customers not receiving call backs from employees when requested to do so, a new procedure will mean that the Customer Service team will seek answers to queries raised on the phone and relay directly back to the customer rather than just pass a message on. It was hoped that communications would be improved as a result with a dedicated point of contact. The Panel felt that this change in procedure was a step in the right direction to resolve the issues with call backs.

Another issue raised by the Panel was with Damp and Mould, the Director of Customer and Communities advised that she and someone from the Assets Team would attend the Panel meeting in September to provide the draft protocol. She added that this fed into the larger piece of work to contact every customer in the next 6 or 7 weeks to update data for this issue and other issues, in order to identify gaps in the repairs data and understanding of repairs volumes overall. They added that it would be made clear to customers through phone calls of the next steps and purpose of the calls so that expectations are managed in the best way possible.

Responses to queries by the Panel were as follows:

- The calls to all tenants over the next few weeks would gather more information than the Out and Abouts, which will see issues logged onto the system straight away.
- Following a query about inconsistency in repairs advice or updates provided, the Director of Customer and Communities shared that Freebridge needed to be careful to manage expectations and those responding to queries will be trying to make a judgement .
- A Panel Member commented that this was an amazing ideal and was glad that the team were being so proactive on taking on board the Tenant Panel comments. and contacting all tenants was great and well done.
- The software needed to log the data was already in place.
- Next year the digital offer such as the website was on the corporate plan. There were just over 1000 signed up to the portal but they were not active users and only 88 had signed in, in the last month. Considering most things were now online it was not a very representative way that we want customers to access services.
- A Tenant Panel member commented that they would hope the wider tenant population would understand that those who work in the Customer Service Team do not have the ability to resolve repairs and to be respectful of the job that they perform.

	<p>The Director of Customer and Communities summarised that it was hoped the contact with tenants over the coming weeks will help to shape exactly what there is out there to be repaired and to gather gaps in data such as damp and mould. The Governance Coordinator agreed to make a note to include an update in September of how the calls had progressed within the matters arising report</p>
5	<p>Tenancy Sustainment Plan</p>
	<p>The Director of Customer and Communities presented the draft Tenancy Sustainment Plan as an opportunity for Panel Members to comment. She added that a key objective in the strategy was about supporting tenants to sustain their tenancy and the plan pulls together the different ways that Freebridge aim to help customers to do that.</p> <p>Panel members commented that Freebridge did already do most of the things that were within the plan but it felt that the creation of the plan took it one step further and it was hoped that as time goes by the work of the plan will become clearer and it will be achieved.</p> <p>The Panel received the following responses to queries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That Freebridge do consider compounding issues that might cause ASB resulting in a tenant being unable to sustain their tenancy and explore all the options for resolution, such as consideration of the type of housing someone is living in and also the impact on the neighbourhood. • There would need to be additional leaflets for tenants to understand the support Freebridge were looking to provide to accompany the plan. The Plan would be available on the website. • Because of the Government restrictions on evictions in the past year due to Covid, Freebridge has had no evictions, and going forward we wish to maintain this. The vast majority of tenants only don't pay because they are struggling so eviction is not an appropriate tool anyway. Freebridge will try to do as much as it can, where as private landlords are likely to be more of a business transaction than a social one, so a fear there will be evictions in the private sector and which will increase over time. Freebridge will continue to discuss this issue with the Council. <p>The Director of Customer and Communities shared there will be an annual report written on the achievements of the plan where it will be able to see progress made and if change is needed as a result. She added that the Tenant Panel will be able to review the plan. The Governance Coordinator agreed to note on the Tenant Panel Work Programme.</p>
6	<p>Covid Arrangements</p>
	<p>The Director of Customer and Communities had asked the Tenant Panel to feedback on arrangements for when after 19th July when covid restrictions were to be legally lifted such as wearing of masks, they provided the following responses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone needs to do as they feel necessary as far as masks and other measures. • A Panel member shared that whether you go into a Freebridge office or have a home visit if expected to wear a mask then it should be the same for staff. If the rules are that you have to wear a mask then you should, and if not then so be it. • Tenants should know if you want an appointment and that is the rules you should abide what is set • A Panel Member shared that mask wearing can bring on asthma attacks particularly through the heat, if the room is ventilated and screens are up then that should help. • A Panel Member shared that if they are distanced even with the tenant wearing a mask they would be happy, but if too close may would feel uncomfortable.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Panel Member shared that there should be a sign up to say that masks if are not compulsory but if you are asked to wear a mask to do so. • And if you are not then served as a result it would be the customers fault. <p>The Director of Customer and Communities thanked the Panel for their feedback.</p>
7	Key Performance Indicators (KPI)
	<p>The Tenant Panel reviewed the final design for KPIs and approved the redesign, which had been amended from Tenant Panel feedback. A Panel Member suggested adding a key to what is classed for instance as an asb, urgent or responsible repair detailed in the data. The performance KPIs were the corporate ones and the Panel agreed to endorse the information. The Director of Customer and Communities shared that the process had worked well and would apply it to other work going forward. The Director of Customer and Communities left the meeting at this point but thanked the Panel for their feedback and discussions which was a great help.</p>
8	Draft Quarterly Report to the Board
	<p>The Tenant Panel approved the draft presented describing the activity of the Panel in quarter 1 from April to June 2021, and agreed to add the following escalation points for Board response when the Vice Chair was due to attend in September, the Tenant Panel report would be discussed on the Board Meeting agenda at the end of July:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Panel would like to know what the Board's vision is for Placeshaping and community based activities beyond King's Lynn over the next five years? • The Panel are very pleased to hear of the plans in place to communicate with all customers over the next few weeks regarding outstanding repairs. The Tenant Panel would like the work of the teams involved in this project to be recognised as it is a very positive step. The Panel believe that this proactive approach that Freebridge is taking to achieve high standards in service should continue in all aspects of the business going forward. However the Tenant Panel have been raising the seriousness of communication issues for many years; the Panel would like to know what oversight the Board will have of the project going forward? • The Panel would like to know how the Board will have oversight of and monitor progress on the work being done around damp and mould?
9	Meeting how did it go
	<p>The Tenant Panel shared how their meeting had gone as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Like to acknowledge the work that Freebridge and the Director of Customer and Communities are doing to implement all the changes for better customer service. • Another good meeting, Covered a lot of ground. Very informative • Buzzing, busy and business like. • The meeting has been wonderful including input from the Director of Customer and Communities and Chief Executive, they had been impressed with actions going forward. • Agreement with most people, the Director of Customer and Communities and the Chief Executive and all the team, proud to be on the Tenant Panel with all their members. • Very informative, very constructive and very hopeful of some new ideas shared. • Well run, clear and packed a lot into the meeting time. A lot easier to follow than predicted as a new member. • Found it quite impressive for a first meeting, like the fact that the Chief Executive trusts the Panel to share plans to shape the business. When Freebridge comes to tell the panel

	<p>about something the Panel pick it apart, and it is a good structure and flow where the group stick to the task in hand and there is a measurable impact.</p> <p>The Tenant Panel Facilitator shared that the members were expert in terms of the Freebridge story but were good at maintaining a sense of humour so that all are pulling in the right direction. It is about asking the right questions but also having an enjoyable experience in the meeting</p> <p>The Tenant Panel shared that there were two vacancies on the Tenant Panel and if there were tenants' members knew of to share information to be involved on the Panel.</p>
10	Date of Next Meeting
	<p>Friday 16 September 2021, 9.45 am – 1.45 pm, via Zoom.</p> <p>Meeting Closed at 1.45 pm</p>