

Notes of the Tenant Panel Meeting

Held on 18 November 2021 at 10.00 am held virtually

Attendance – Tenant Panel Facilitator, Governance Coordinator, Director of Customer and Communities, Frances, Sandy, Charmaine, Charlie, Anne and Roger. Also observing were the Complaints Manager and Customer Voice Lead.

Apologies – David, Charlotte

The Complaints Manager and the Customer Engagement Manager, internally known as the Customer Voice Lead, introduced themselves and observed the meeting.

Declarations of Interest – There were none.

Work Programme and Review of Group Contract – This was noted.

	Item
1	<p>To Approve October notes, to note the Matters Arising Report</p> <p>The Tenant Panel approved the notes of the October meeting and noted matters arising. The Tenant Panel agreed that their default to meet was via zoom, but it was hoped to have some face-to-face meetings in the new year.</p>
2	<p>Quarterly Update from the Board and Chair Annual Update</p> <p>The Chair of the Board Andy Walder and Board Member Donald McKenzie attended the Tenant Panel meeting. The Chair of the Board provided an update to the Tenant Panel reflecting on what Freebridge had achieved so far this year and what the challenges were for the next. Donald introduced himself as a newer member of the Board and also the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee and the challenges next year to be overcome.</p> <p>Last 12 month reflections shared by the Chair of the Board were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Very proud of how Freebridge had dealt with the pandemic keeping everyone safe and the ability to keep going. As a result Freebridge had learnt how much community meant to everyone and the value of working with the local community.• Delighted of the calls to tenants to understand what repairs were required.• Recruitment of four new board members with skills in finance, asset management, development, local knowledge, knowledge of other housing associations and key issues that Freebridge face and the opportunities going forward. <p>The Chair of the Board shared his reflections for the next 12 months:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The repairs project needed to be completed to meet the needs of customers including health and safety compliance.• Improving customer engagement and communications with a wider number of tenants was critical.• Improvement of homes, most of which were built between 1950 and 1970.• In the wider environment costs were increasing and there was a low availability of labour, all of which would have an impact on the services that Freebridge can provide. <p>The Chair of the Board wished to thank the Tenant Panel for their continued work with Freebridge and in particular, engagement around the recent rent increase conversations which the Board had found useful.</p> <p>Donald McKenzie who had joined the Board earlier in the year introduced himself to the Panel and thanked them for the opportunity to attend. He was proud to be appointed to the Board of Freebridge, lived in Norfolk, understood the issues that Freebridge face and worked for a housing association currently in London that had over 50k homes. He was Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee at Freebridge, whose key focus was on tenant health and safety.</p>

The Panel shared the following queries and comments:

- A Panel member queried how risk was reviewed, and Donald shared that the Board and the Audit and Risk Committee reviewed the risks as well as Executive Team and Management.
- A Panel Member queried whether there was a timescale to improve homes generally. The Chair of the Board shared that Freebridge needed to ensure that the estate was fit for purpose such as insulation because if 'fabric first' wasn't right then nothing else was worthwhile.
- A panel member queried how long energy efficiency improvements may take, the Chair of the Board shared that around half of homes were above D energy rating, so half were below. The commitment was to improve the E and F rating homes in the next five years to a D, and then all homes improve up to a C or above by 2030. There were grants available from major energy providers to improve homes.
- A Panel member queried whether tenants were aware of the energy efficiency grades for their homes. The Chair shared that there should be a review of be communications with tenants to make them aware if they were not already.

The Chair of the Board asked the Panel to comment on the best way to keep tenants up to date of any plans in terms of home improvements, the following responses were provided:

- A Panel member shared that we can see how hard Freebridge were working, but sometimes you can't do right for doing wrong and you cannot please everyone. But they felt for the majority of tenants information needed to be drip fed.
- A Panel Member shared that tenants like to be kept informed, so it may be best to inform them what Freebridge are doing now and what it is doing in six months time to keep them in the loop.
- A Panel Member shared that they felt it was important to let tenants know that changes are coming and emphasis that there would be minimal disruption as possible.
- Following a query by a Tenant Panel member, Donald shared that the works and improvements to homes were not grant dependant, but if there grants were available they would look to making bids.

The Panel shared the following comments in general:

- A Panel member queried whether the Board had any thoughts on raising their profile to tenants. The Chair of the Board shared that in terms of presence of the Board, they do want to increase their profile and there was many ways of doing this and they will be working with the executive team to do that.
- A Panel Member queried that when Freebridge go into people's homes to do improvement works, how will it work where additional jobs are found as a result, such as asbestos and other issues. The Chair of the Board shared that in relation to works to homes, there will not likely be a one size fits all, each home will have a tailored works programme.

The Chair wished to thank the Panel for the invite and everything that the Tenant Panel was doing. He was looking forward to 2022 where the executive team has the ability to take Freebridge to the next level. Donald also thanked the Panel for the invite and he looked forward to meeting them in person next year. The Tenant Panel thanked them for their update and they left the meeting.

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Support Service Update

The Housing Support Manager attended the Tenant Panel to provide an update on projects in the team for sheltered schemes.

He shared the following information:

- The team looked to communicate with residents and be visible, and available in person, email or telephone as much as possible.

- The team supports tenants by using the Freebridge Winter Support plan and support from external partners. Including referrals for housing, debt management, safeguarding, wellbeing needs etc. They use the Borough Council's early help hub programme, where tenants can be supported by those organisations that are members of the group. There had been positive results from being members of the group.
- The Team were currently working on corporate communications to share energy information with tenants on how to reduce bills and minimise fuel poverty.

In regard to a query from a Panel Member of how referrals were coming into Freebridge, the Support Manager shared that the early help hub and its partners worked together with Freebridge to support individuals identified and create an action plan. The Director of Customer and Communities shared, that self-referrals from customers was something that had a very low response so any feedback of how this could be improved would be greatly appreciated.

A Panel member suggested that Freebridge consider other ways to communicate other than on social media as many did not use it, perhaps by phone. The Support Manager shared that at schemes they did drop-in sessions, but the team would be placing posters and sending text messages to advertise them not just over the internet. A Panel member shared that working with Parish Councils to push information out to communities may also work well. A Panel Member shared that if the support team could do a door knock at schemes to see if tenants were okay, share information in person and via a hard copy they can keep and perhaps in addition check that their heating was working.

A Panel Member shared that there was a communal notice board, but properties not within the main centre of a scheme was unlikely to view this and therefore door to door flyers would be best.

Following a query by a Tenant Panel Member, the Support Manager shared that they worked in partnership with the British Heart Foundation to provide donated furniture to those in need.

Following a comment from a Panel member with regards to concerns about tenants who are also experiencing internet poverty, the Support Manager shared that where anyone had been struggling with access to the internet, Freebridge had provided them with an iPad or laptop and support of how to use it. The Support Manager shared that this was a good point and one which the team would look at over the winter. The Director of Customer and Communities shared that over the winter support period there were many tenants that needed other support not just food, such as accessing digital information and phone credit, as this was a cost that many people could simply not afford.

The Director of Customer and Communities shared that an annual rent letter in February would be posted to all tenants and the team could look to include information at that point, the Tenant Panel thought that was a good idea. The Tenant Panel thanked the Support Manager for their update and he left the meeting.

4 Damp and Mould Update

The Head of Asset Management joined the Director of Customer and Communities to provide an update on the procedures for dealing with damp and mould issues.

He shared the following information:

- There was a high level of repairs and dissatisfaction about damp and mould, and it was sector wide issue also.
- He shared that a process was to be signed off by Leadership Team, where questions and answers would identify the severity of the issue resulting in information being provided to the tenant to resolve or if needed a surveyor visit made.
- In 2022 Freebridge will start a stock condition survey where there will be a proactive inspection, a record will be compiled of items in the property and their life cycle, and information on damp and mould.

	<p>The Head of Asset Management shared that when the design process is approved the Tenant Panel will be consulted with for their views. The Governance Coordinator agreed to liaise with him to circulate a copy.</p> <p>In answer to queries from the Tenant Panel the Head of Asset Management advised the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was not one size fits all in resolving the issues of damp and mould, however Freebridge would aim to resolve a problem within 28 days of inspection. • As part of the stock condition survey, every property will be visited and a leaflet with information shared with the tenant. As part of the survey the surveyor will refresh tenants on using their heating systems, thermostats and about ventilation. • The team were working on a cavity insulation project were grant funding had been available and it was starting to make progress. • For new builds there were modern building regulations which stipulated that properties should be highly ventilated and should have temperature controls that can be varied more greatly. <p>The Head of Asset Management shared that complaints data nationally showed a trend in damp and mould being a common theme and the regulator was very interested in this issue. The Director of Customer and Communities shared that the Tenant Panel would be consulted on the draft protocol for dealing with damp and mould enquiries. The Tenant Panel thanked the Head of Asset Management for attending the meeting and he left.</p>
5	<p>Customer Charter</p>
	<p>The Director of Customer and Communities shared an update with the Tenant Panel on the first draft of the Customer Charter and a continuation piece from previous meetings. The Charter was the promises that Freebridge believed mattered most to tenants.</p> <p>The Tenant Panel gave the following comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home security was important, the Director of Customer and Communities shared that the charter stated what Freebridge did now, but in future there may be other methods included. • The document appeared clear, and as long as it continued to have plain english and gets to the point with no waffle and good grammar will be fine. • A commitment on keeping tenants up to date on any changes to plans it makes is important to be included. <p>The Director of Customer and Communities shared that they would collate final feedback from colleagues for a final design for December and at the next Tenant Panel meeting in January they will come back with a fuller reworked version which will be as accessible as possible. The Governance Coordinator agreed to add to the work programme.</p> <p>The Tenant Panel felt that they were in favour of the Customer Charter still as an idea.</p>
6	<p>Repairs Task and Finish Group Representation</p>
	<p>The Director of Customer and Communities shared that following on from the project to call all tenants in regard to repairs, there were other work ongoing to meet the repairs service improvement project such as the setup of a Repairs Task and Finish Group, which included both Leadership Team and Board Members. A Tenant Panel member had observed the first meeting of that group and had fed back the experience to the Tenant Panel. The Board were keen that the observatory capacity from the Tenant Panel continued.</p> <p>The Director of Customer and Communities shared that you cannot always capture everything in the minutes, so a Panel member attending gets the tone and energy of the meeting and the challenges made, they felt there was a lot of value in attending.</p>

	<p>The Tenant Panel member that attended shared that there was a lot of value in attending as she found it incredibly interesting. The Tenant Panel agreed that they would like one Tenant Panel to attend and then canvass who might be available to attend to maximise attendance for each meeting. The Governance Coordinator and the Director of Customer and Communities would liaise in the weeks before each meeting.</p>
7	<p>Quarter 2 Customer Service Performance Measures</p> <p>The Tenant Panel had received information in relation to the Quarter 2 Customer Service Performance Measures for any items that any member wished to highlight in the meeting.</p> <p>The Director of Customer and Communities highlighted that the main area of concern was the repairs service, which would be discussed in the next item. She also highlighted that there was still a very high number of complaints predominantly in repairs. The change in the repairs process and the appointment of the Complaints Manager will make the process of complaint resolution quicker. The indication of direction of travel for each measure needed improvement and the Panel agreed to share ideas to improve offline if they had any. The Panel shared that the word ‘disrepair’ was unclear.</p> <p>The Director of Customer and Communities shared that all phone calls of three attempts had been completed, and Freebridge had made contact with 65% of tenants as a result. The other 35% Freebridge would continue to try and make contact by arranging a visit in person.</p> <p>Following a query from a Panel Member the Director of Customer and Communities shared that the Regulator did not currently require any data on damp and mould, she added that this may change in the future.</p>
8	<p>Managing Future Customer Demand</p> <p>The Director of Customer and Communities provided an update to the Tenant Panel in regard to how Freebridge will be managing customer demand and communications in future. She shared some slides about the launch of the new repairs diagnostic team from January and how tenants can expect when they call from that time.</p> <p>The Tenant Panel had the following queries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Panel Member was satisfied with what Sophie had discussed. • The 0800 would still be available for tenants who call on landlines and for free with this number. • A Panel Member felt it is going to be excellent and would resolve a multiple of issues and had been a good piece of work that tenants should be delighted with. • A Panel member commented that it all appeared to be heading in the right direction. <p>The Panel thanked the Director of Customer and Communities for their work this year and they left the meeting.</p>
9	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>Placeshaping Activities Report - The Tenant Panel had received the report within a pack of information prior to the meeting. A Panel member felt it was an excellent report. Any offline comments could be emailed in.</p> <p>The Panel considered appreciation as the last meeting of the year. The Panel agreed that attendance from the Director of Customer and Communities in the year with various managers made the Panel feel more appreciated. Freebridge does a lot over and above the services that it needs to provide and there would be more to ensure that tenants are aware of this and they fully understand it. All the support staff had given to tenants throughout the pandemic was commendable.</p>
10	<p>What did we do well – Feedback from the Meeting</p>

	<p>The Panel shared the following comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forward thinking and futuristic • Forward thinking. • Captured information as always and very informative. • The meeting was very good today and one of the better meetings in the year with a lot of information covered. • Appreciation to Freebridge for all the hard work to Freebridge for making it all work. <p>The Complaints Manager shared that it was really good to hear the Tenant Panel's discussion and feedback. The Customer Voice Lead shared that the Tenant Panel meeting felt like a safe environment for all to share their views comfortably with Freebridge and a great forum to share ideas with no judgement. She added that it had been a very productive meeting. The Governance Coordinator shared a well done to the Tenant Panel for 2021 and what had somewhat merged into 2020, for all their commitment to coming to meetings to make services better for all tenants. The Tenant Panel Facilitator shared that the level of discussion and scrutiny had been at a high standard.</p>
11	Date of Next Meeting
	A date in January to be on a Thursday in 2022 to be confirmed from 9.45 am – 1.45 pm, via Zoom. Meeting Closed at 1.50 pm