

## Notes of the Tenant Panel Meeting

Held on 9 October 2020 at 9.45 am held virtually

**Attendance** – Tenant Panel Facilitator, Governance Coordinator, Anne, Frances, Inge, Charlotte, Sandy, David W and David H.

**Apologies** – Annette, Sarah and Hazel.

**Declarations of Interest** – None.

**Work Programme** – This was noted.

	Item
1	<b>Notes of the Last Meeting held in September 2020 and Matters Arising</b>
	<p>They were approved as a correct record, and the matters arising report was noted which contained updates from the Governance Coordinator on follow up work agreed at the last meeting. All follow up actions had been resolved.</p> <p>A Panel Member thought that the Matters Arising report was very useful and it was agreed that this was a good addition to the Tenant Panel papers. The Governance Coordinator advised that any outstanding matters arising would carry forward onto the next meeting copy and any new ones would be added.</p>
2	<b>Self-Assessment of the Regulatory Standards</b> <p>The Company Secretary attended to provide an explanation of the self-assessment process against the regulatory standards by The Regulator of Social Housing they were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Governance and Financial Viability</li><li>• Value For Money</li><li>• Rent</li><li>• Home</li><li>• Tenancy</li><li>• Neighbourhood and Community Standard</li><li>• Tenant Involvement and Empowerment</li></ul> <p>Within the 'Financial Statement' that is included within the Annual General Meeting papers includes a statement of compliancy. To enable the Board to confirm the statement of compliancy, Freebridge has to self-assess against the regulators standards to ascertain if there are any areas that should be of concern. Currently Freebridge had probably the most robust method for assessing the regulatory standards it has ever had in place in the view of the Company Secretary. The Company Secretary worked with the Business Assurance Manager to do this assessment, over the year that team keeps an eye on assurance and the internal audit work programme, and over the year, it builds a picture of how compliant Freebridge is.</p> <p>A Panel Member shared that they had sent a question to the Company Secretary and the response had been shared with the Panel where they had wondered whether Freebridge reviewed alongside other national group documents, but it was only the Government Standards that were assessed against. They were satisfied with the response.</p> <p>Following a comment from a Panel member regarding having trust in Freebridge self-assessing themselves, the Company Secretary shared that the Business Assurance Team at Freebridge had a certain amount of independence for them to raise concerns. He highlighted that three of the standards called economic standards being Governance and Financial Viability; Value for Money and Rent, the Regulator of Social Housing however did review by attendance with the Leadership Team and Board at least every four years. The other consumer standards (tenant facing) Freebridge was expecting that as part of the social</p>

housing white paper, they may start to be included in direct regulation rather than self-assessment.

Depending on how concerned they were about an issue they could come into Freebridge and provide a review where grading on viability or governance ratings could be amended with timescales for improvement.

Following discussing the Panel had mixed views in relation to whether the Tenant Panel itself should be involved in assessing compliancy issues that Freebridge has but they felt assured that there were processes in place and it was important to trust management to resolve.

The Tenant Panel Facilitator suggested that the conversations around Tenant Panel involvement might be suggestions to think about inclusion in the work programme and it was agreed to discuss further. The Governance Coordinator agreed to add to matters arising for resolve.

The Panel thanked the Company Secretary for his attendance and he left the meeting.

**3 Head of Asset Management, Nick Thacker**

The Tenant Panel Facilitator welcomed the new Head of Asset Management to the Tenant Panel. The Head of Asset Management had wished to introduce himself to the Panel and started in the middle of the summer as the Head of Asset Management and he was looking to design more of a programmed approach to the way that Freebridge maintained their properties rather than a responsive way as was currently in place. The Asset Management team was small but he was determined to make it a success and make lives of tenants better in relation to providing a better service. Freebridge had a stock condition survey but he wished to seek the views of the Tenant Panel in the future in order to formulate a survey, which created a baseline of what is in all homes.

A Panel Member commented that a proactive way was a better way to approach stock condition survey

A Panel Member asked whether inspection might be one way obtaining the data. He explained that with 6,800 properties and the survey records Freebridge has it does need refreshing. Freebridge had looked at standard elements in a house, then there were compliance elements, the records needed to be renewed and an inspection or survey was required and a need to design the survey. He wished to come back to seek comments from the Panel on the redesign of the survey. The Governance Coordinator agreed to liaise with the Head of Asset Management on timescales.

Comments from the Panel were as follows:

- Better to repair something before it gets broken.
- Freebridge needs better knowledge of the external elements of their properties, and if you start to look around you can spot issues that need resolving. Freebridge seems to have fallen down by not maintaining their properties before deterioration starts to take hold and there is then something additional that needs to be dealt with on a responsive basis. For example, issues that build up can be mould in properties etc. The Head of Asset Management thanked the Panel Member for their comments and shared that a decent survey definitely would allow Freebridge to capture these issues.
- On planned maintenance, in their view Freebridge was aware of issues with properties as they had been told that the external works was on a plan for next year continually. A lot of customers had lost confidence in Freebridge and they were aware of a lot of properties with mould issues on the inside and it had been ongoing for the past five years.
- A Panel member was very glad that the Head of Asset Management had come to the Tenant Panel in advance of the project starting for their views on this issue and it was good to hear how he intended to resolve a problem.

	<p>The Head of Asset Management shared that he was looking for tenant views to take the forward with their customer experience expertise. Following a query from a Tenant Panel Member he was looking to have operatives attend 10 percent of properties either way outside of their normal duties to be able to notice and resolve or report issues that were not the reason for attending in the first place.</p> <p>He was looking for a good tenant panel relationship. The Tenant Panel thanked him for his attendance and he left the meeting.</p>
<p><b>4</b></p>	<p><b>Customer Service and Performance Monitoring</b></p> <p>The Tenant Panel received the six target areas of the business with the year to date figure and the past five years' worth of stats as requested by the Tenant Panel.</p> <p>The Tenant Panel had the following comments and the Governance Coordinator agreed to forward to the Director of Housing for a response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any changes within the business of staff will always be an big impact on performance. Concerned about the customer satisfaction on repairs being 66%, from 2018 onwards Freebridge had only hit the target once. Tenants still expect performance in certain areas on there.</li> <li>• 2017 onwards only three green squares indicating that targets have been met which was around 90% of the squares not getting anywhere near. Biggest target was 88% and it should be 100% and will never make it but perhaps Freebridge could still strive to get there. Only hit the target 25% of the time over the past five years. How are the targets set and why are the targets figures set at these rates?</li> <li>• Over the years the type of surveys that have been undertaken to obtain the satisfaction figures seem to have changed a lot of times, how do you act on the results of the survey to see if there is a pattern developing? What has been the survey methods over these years?</li> <li>• Did the rent decrease of the four recent year's effect any of the stats and were targets different to the data shown because of this?</li> <li>• Clear that tenant satisfaction like with their neighbourhoods was decreasing at an alarming rate, as Freebridge not doing anything about externals, and if some do not bother then they believe they will not bother either.</li> <li>• Community repairs not getting reported, example where raised three times and not allocated to anyone and not done, and some staff will say that it is not down to them to report. For communal repairs who is responsible for reporting communal repairs?</li> <li>• Overall customer satisfaction – how did Freebridge get the result shown? Which section is causing this answer, what part of the service is causing this figure? Is this sum a result of the other questions shown?</li> <li>• Is it correct that the survey results are just from tenants who had a repair? What is the survey methodology and maybe the results are causing a skewed result if there are tenants who have had another service, which was not a repair?</li> </ul>
<p><b>5</b></p>	<p><b>Development Slot – Health and Safety Development Slot</b></p> <p>The Tenant Panel Facilitator welcomed Dave Clack Health and Safety Manager and Birgit Lenton, Director of Corporate Services and Culture who were attending to provide a development slot on Health and Safety as per the 2020 Development Plan for the Panel.</p> <p>They shared slides during the presentation, which the Governance Coordinator agreed to share with the Panel after the meeting.</p> <p>Health and Safety ultimately the accountability rests with the Board, and they delegate this through the Policy and Procedure Handbook to the Chief Executive Anita Jones. Then the</p>

Chief Executive works with the Leadership Team (Directors), and then with their teams to ensure health and safety is taken seriously in the organisation. Then the managers below the tier of Directors work with the Health and Safety Committee, which the Director of Corporate Services and Culture chairs and this is how it is dealt at the front line level.

The remit of the Health and Safety Committee also included tenant safety as well as employee safety. The internal audit teams gave an independent view on how health and safety is managed and works. The Committee provide a report to the Board quarterly on how health and safety is being managed in the organisation. The Committee has an operational sub-group, which very much is run by operatives and a couple of additional working groups and safe systems of work ensure that employees have the safe systems in the workplace. There was a further sub-group that focused on home health and safety.

In an organisation with five or more employees there needed to be policies and procedures in place for safe working, and at Freebridge there was a raft of procedures, Safe systems of work and protocols which aimed to keep employees safe and keep people who might be effected by what we are doing safe.

Fire safety for Freebridge with 7k properties was a key function and a huge issue that we deal with. The Health and Safety Manager was also a fire safety manager in looking after the organisations need to undertake necessary risk assessments. Fire Risk Assessments were legally required in schemes, offices and any flats where there was a communal (shared) area. Freebridge has a focus on structures of buildings that it owns and they have undertook a significant amount of training, and understand how well each property is separated from another and continue to explore this. An emerging area for all housing associations is 'person centred fire risk assessments' to ensure that an individual who was unable to self-evacuate in an emergency could do so with mitigations in place tailored to their situation. There had been a programme in place to do remedial works required.

Freebridge were charged with duties to look after other health and safety aspects such as legionella, gas, lifts etc, and there was a significant amount of work to ensure that Freebridge was compliant with these statutory duties. Freebridge also inspected properties to ensure there was no gas, and ask for a 'no-gas certificate' to pick up on self-installed items that Freebridge were unaware of.

Home Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS Compliance) largely effects the tenant's safety and was put in place 2004 within the Housing Act and is applicable to housing associations in some elements. The HHSRS is a rating system which looks to categorise the potential hazards down into 29 hazard categories and the data is based on incidents, accidents, doctors surgeries etc. recorded nationally over a period of time relating to real data of occurrences in the home. A link with the 29 hazards would be provided after the meeting for the Panel to look at. A lot of compliance currently carried out is resolved by actions Freebridge has in place. The health and safety standard does not consider necessary whether an item is in good repair, for example a staircase may be in good repair but it might not have hand rails.

Queries from Panel members were as follows:

Q - Would Freebridge's responsibility for health and safety on a shared site be relevant after leaving a person's garden onto the shared area?

A - The Health and Safety Manager advised that until a tenant leaves a site Freebridge are responsible for safety in using that area, so flats and land Freebridge owns then yes. If it is a public footbath it depends on ownership.

Q - Dustbin room – are there meant to be flues to let smells out?

A – Yes it comes under a few regulations and it would need to be ventilated and be external.

Q - Where tenants have a medical oxygen supply what health and safety is covered?

A - This is a fire safety topic and this would be something Freebridge needs to know about as being present in a tenants home. So we would encourage customers to talk to us about these issues and we can look at any risks. Oxygen levels from personal cylinders may require a personalised risk assessment.

Q – A Tenant Panel member queried whether Freebridge had a connection on fire safety implementation with the fire service?

A - The Fire Service were not obliged to communicate with Freebridge or know we are the landlords of properties, however they will inform Freebridge if they know of issues they feel is important for us to be aware of.

Q – Mould in Kitchens – it was believed that some properties not had new kitchens since being in ownership and some of those now have mould reported and Freebridge have done nothing about it and the Panel Member was concerned about that and the effect on health.

A - Kitchens will have a designated lifespan. Yes, there are real issues that do effect people, if someone has reported an issue and they feel that we have not resolved an issue we will investigate.

The Tenant Panel Facilitator shared that questions in between meetings enabled those who were attending to prepare or respond sooner, and we were able to bring that into the meeting also to share.

The Tenant Panel thanked them for their attendance and they left the meeting.

## **6 Tenant Panel**

The Panel welcomed the Director of Housing Sophie Bates and Hannah Hooks the new Placeshaping Manager to the Panel meeting to discuss the proposed Freebridge Winter Covid-19 response and proposed new areas of work for the Tenant Panel.

The Director of Housing wished to share some insight over Covid-19 during the coming winter with the Panel for comments, and though not fully locked down at this time things could always potentially change, and she wished to run ideas by the Panel and see what views they had.

The Director of Housing shared that at a Director level she was now working with the Governance Coordinator closer to bring more topics to the Panel for them to have an influence and voice on. The Director of Housing wished to introduce Hannah Hooks the New Placeshaping Manager to the Panel, and placeshaping playing more of a role within tenant involvement going forward and not just the centres and customers across the whole borough and the Tenant Panel being one of the same thing.

### **Covid-19 Winter Plan**

The Director of Housing discussed welfare calls to vulnerable tenants, and wished to re-instate calls to those customers as well as tenants on schemes. Freebridge wanted to find out what support tenants had in place and then expand what is required further.

All of the front line teams were mobile again and all mitigating measures in place such as facemasks and hand sanitiser, there was a question whether Freebridge should consider home visits over the winter.

There was also wider issues around the Furlough Scheme coming to an end, and some customers may now find themselves without a job when the scheme ends. Freebridge were bringing in extra members of staff to assist with advice to this affected group.

The Placeshaping team will be looking at events for children to keep them busy over the winter to help keep them focused from energy towards negative anti-social behaviour.

The Tenant Panel Members had the following queries:

- Tenants who wished to remain independent but where it had not been possible may need help with shopping, as they may be unable to do this over the winter months. The Morrison's food parcels had not really been containing the right type of food such as packs of pasta, which some older generations do not eat. As for face to face visits that is quite important for some tenants. Because of time constraints Freebridge employees may have perhaps an external services such as Ask Lily or other organisations may be able to help with some visits or calls. The Director of Housing shared that assistance with shopping was definitely something that we could facilitate directly or work with and a review of food parcels was a good idea.
- In regard to phone calls to people in their 70s they had been fortunate that they had family to visit and do shopping for them, and since that time they had started shopping online. Perhaps the boxes of food need to be tailored to the age group, as pasta is not generally a food that is used by some of the older generation. Would it be possible for the contact centre to have an open line for individuals to receive calls from routinely? Will look to do that again certainly.
- The face to face visits are brilliant. The Borough Council also did face to face visits during the lockdown for the vulnerable, disabled and elderly, but they did not have all people on their list. A comment from someone they knew thought it would good due to the isolation. Perhaps Freebridge could work with the Borough Council to ensure there was no duplication in what they are trying to do. Whether on face-to-face visits Freebridge could help do an online shop as they might just not know how to do it. Or have a care package for face-to-face visits. Felt it was above and beyond response.
- A Panel Member commented that they benefited from the welfare calls to the scheme. This had since had come to an end by their own accord but wished to thank the employees for their time as it was very helpful when they needed it. Face-to-Face visits were essential. In answer to a query raised, the Director of Housing confirmed that no Freebridge employees had been furloughed.
- Welcome calls were essential, and the face-to-face visits were essential as Freebridge can see if a person is okay, rather than just being heard over the phone. It is a good idea to help the people who had been Furloughed and then lost their jobs. It would be good if Freebridge could help before and over the winter with heating bills for the elderly.

The Director of Housing shared that the feedback would really help to shape what services Freebridge looked to offer over the next six months.

The Director of Housing wished to understand the Tenant Panel's aspirations going forward, and aside to the annual items that keep the Panel informed of the running of the business and allow them to voice their concerns in that respect, Freebridge wanted to discuss with the Panel more specific items, such as at the November meeting the garden assistance scheme where the Placeshaping Manager wanted to collect ideas around this review before any changes were made. Other topic areas would be similar along those lines, such as when the Panel reviewed the Annual Income Letter and Freebridge received the comments that helped to form ideas internally that we would have not thought of. At different points in the year Freebridge send communications to tenants, which the Panel could look at, and in terms of the draft Placeshaping programme, the operational pieces could be added into the work programme.

The Tenant Panel had the following comments:

- It was 'music to her ears', and by coincidence, Inge had mentioned that very idea to bring in the Tenant Panel in much earlier when reviewing services prior to decisions being made, and it would be very nice to be brought in at the beginning to get opinions beforehand.
- A Panel member commented that the Garden Assistance scheme for those who are not on benefits was still a need, so would look forward to discussing next month.
- Many things occur at Freebridge and it would be easier if all or some of the Panel look

	<p>at various different parts of the business and so that they can get involved with decisions at the beginning. It was better to be involved right at the start rather than the end. In answer to the comment, the Director of Housing advised that the Placeshaping Manager would be working with managers to capture and bring forward projects and ideas for comment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It was a good idea for a calendar of projects and involvement over the year and appreciated that information in advance. This would allow the Panel to formulate some of the things they would like to ask. The ideas were brilliant and amazing that all these new ideas were coming out to involve the Panel.</li> </ul> <p>The Tenant Panel Facilitator shared that operational deadlines and priorities would help the Panel to understand what the view was over the year and fit in other topics that the Panel wished to be updated on or discuss with Freebridge.</p> <p>Following a query from a Panel member about how the additional projects fed into the work of the Customer Service Committee, the Director of Housing shared that the Committee was in effect a Committee of the Board on behalf of the Board and would be working at a strategic level to identify trends and report them to the Board. But on a customer service operational level the Tenant Panel could provide feedback on many areas of the business. The Director of Housing shared a slide that she wished to use to explain the working differences between the Panel and the Customer Service Committee.</p> <p>A Panel Member wished to thank the Director of Housing for the chart and it made it clear, but they wanted to stress that in order to do it justice the Tenant Panel needs to be brought in earlier to topics with good access to information and have a proper role to play other than just finding fault. Appreciate that big changes happen but the Panel can be part of that.</p> <p>Following a query the Director of Housing wished to share that going forward the Tenant Panel will be brought in on what the Customer Service are looking at over the year. It may be necessary to refresh them on what the Panel's role is and may take time to embed.</p> <p>The Tenant Panel Facilitator thanked the Placeshaping Manager and the Director of Housing for coming along to the Tenant Panel and they left the meeting.</p>
7	<p><b>Draft Quarterly Report to Board</b></p> <p>The Tenant Panel had no amendments to the draft report presented to go to the Board in November. After discussion the Tenant Panel Facilitator and Governance Coordinator summarised key messages conveyed by the Panel and included in the following within the report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That in terms of inviting the Panel's comments and ideas on topics at Freebridge, the Tenant Panel look forward to be able to be involved more on operational based tasks as well as their work on more strategic and policy issues.</li> <li>• The Tenant Panel would like to receive updates on the outcomes of the regulatory compliancy work on GDPR and Health and Safety.</li> <li>• A majority of Panel Members felt that the Customer Survey conducted to obtain satisfaction figures via the Customer Service Team phone calls each month should be reviewed. It was felt that because those customers who were asked questions were only customers who had received a repair service it was not possible to have a clear result, as it did not include customers who received other services provided by Freebridge. Therefore, when focusing on the 'overall satisfaction' target, it will only ever be based on customers who had received repairs and none of the other services on offer such as welfare support.</li> </ul> <p>The Panel noted that there was a large survey in 2017 that gave more in-depth and insight</p>

	<p>into answers from tenants and far more data than just 100 and covered more than just repairs.</p> <p>A Tenant Panel Member commented that it would be good to change how the Tenant Panel are being used to vouch for transparency in the organisation as it only refers to documents and certain figures that they are presented with. They felt that there was a divide between the strategic team and operational centred team. They suggested that the Panel could be observers (not telling management what to do), how operational managers go about their work to vouch for true transparency and not to interfere or intervene but then can have discussions in the Tenant Panel. The Panel Member wished to share a question of what can be changed to give the Tenant Panel insight into operational work.</p>
8	<p><b>Any Other Business</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rampant Horse Development – The Panel Member agreed to contact the Governance Coordinator about her query.</li> <li>• Appraisals and Special Meeting – The Governance Coordinator reminded the Panel of an extra meeting on the 13<sup>th</sup> November at 10.30 am on Zoom in regard to Annual Income and service charges and asked Panel Members to confirm their appraisal appointments on the same day.</li> <li>• Recruitment – Two tenants had applied for the vacancy available and the Governance Coordinator was progressing interviews.</li> </ul>
9	<p><b>Meeting how did it go</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enjoyable</li> <li>• Fantastic</li> <li>• Useful</li> <li>• Informative and new initiates in the way the Panel do things</li> <li>• Positive and encouraging</li> <li>• Satisfying after hearing from the Director of Housing and refreshing.</li> <li>• Encouraging and positive</li> </ul>
10	<p><b>Date of Next Meeting</b></p> <p>Friday 13 November, 10.30 am (Annual Report including Service Charging via Zoom).</p> <p>Friday 13 November various Tenant Panel Appraisal appointments sent on email.</p> <p>Friday 20 November, 9.45 am – 1.45 pm, via Zoom.</p> <p>Meeting Closed at 1.40 pm</p>