

## Notes of the Tenant Panel Meeting

Held on 20 November 2020 at 9.45 am held virtually

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

**Apologies** – Sarah and Jo

The Tenant Panel Hazel had resigned from the Panel, wished her well, and thanked her.

The Tenant Panel welcomed the Chief Executive to the meeting. The Tenant Panel also welcomed the Assistant Placeshaping Manager (Estates) who as part of a qualification they were undertaking wished to observe the meeting in respect of their module on tenant engagement.

**Declarations of Interest** – There were none.

**Work Programme** – This was noted.

	Item	Added Value/ Action
1	<b>Notes of the Last Meeting held in October 2020 and Matters Arising</b>  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.  The Governance Coordinator shared the matters arising report, and shared that the Head of Asset Management had updated to advise that smoke alarms in the Communal areas didn't stop having checks through the first lockdown period from March/April 2020, a company called SCCI who covered schemes did stop for a short period within domestic sheltered properties. In addition, when lockdown ended early summer they hit the ground running with only one scheme left to be done in the next two weeks. The Assets team were working closely with the Support Team and the Community Safety Manager.  The Head of Asset Management had since updated the Governance Coordinator about the work on the stock condition survey that he met with the Panel about previously, and he and the Chief Executive were currently discussing how to take the work forward and he hoped to update the Panel again by end of February.	Matters Arising
2	<b>Quarterly Update from the Board</b>  The Vice Chair of the Board Simon Smith attended the Panel meeting and shared that Board Member Marcus Hopkins hoped to attend the next update from the Board.  The Vice Chair shared that the Board were pleased that the Chief Executive had spent a lot of time talking to Tenants and gave a report on her first 100 days at Freebridge to the Board at their meeting on Monday. The Board and the Leadership Team discussed issues that were really good about Freebridge and the things that were not so good. Specific areas of discussion included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consideration of reviewing the values.</li><li>• Stock Condition Survey with the Head of Asset Management</li></ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The new Director of Development Paul Newbold provided a presentation.</li> <li>• Data protection.</li> <li>• The Board holding the Leadership Team to account as opposed to leaning into operational issues.</li> <li>• Finances, which were strong with no major concerns and plenty of scope to borrow and invest more over time.</li> <li>• The Customer Voice and the Social Housing White Paper with exciting opportunities to be involved in the review, which may span at least over the next 12 months. The Board were due to discuss at their Strategy Afternoon on 7<sup>th</sup> December. The Customer Service Committee was a nine-month pilot and we needed to see how it worked running forward and in light of the white paper, and in terms of roles and responsibilities to maintain the status quo of itself and the Tenant Panel.</li> <li>• The Board were conscious of whether any controls within the business had changed because of the pandemic and that they were all working properly.</li> </ul> <p>The Board felt that they were in full support of any changes that the Chief Executive wished to make and as new management arrive, the Tenant Panel should have an opportunity to meet those relevant in person.</p> <p>The Vice Chair wished to share thanks to the Panel for undertaking a fantastic job in continuing holding meetings this year, with no outside opportunities or in person meetings.</p> <p>A Panel Member commented that it was important that the values and the operational model is reviewed, as these were the hub of the business and needed to work well. They added that there was a great feeling of opportunity opening up with a new influx of employees and management and this was very much felt on the Tenant Panel. They further commented that the rules laid down in the social housing white paper were very basic, and what every tenant would expect landlords to adhere to and nothing new, and Freebridge has always attempted these aspects by their own internal regulation. The Panel Member added that they felt very comfortable to volunteer on the Tenant Panel to provide tenant voice but at times, the power of the Tenant Panel was restrained if they did not get access to the sub-committees within the operational model. They also felt that they were unable to provide a larger tenant voice from what is currently being provided to them, but they are energised and pleased to have a place within this operational model. The Governance Coordinator agreed to discuss with the Director of Housing about more in-depth information or in person experience for the Panel when reviewing service.</p> <p>The Vice Chair shared that the Panel did need involvement and access to papers in order to do the job, and the Panel will have that opportunity and centre stage at reviewing what comes next. The Board does look at the Tenant Panel points raised at their meetings. The Vice Chair added that they hoped that the Panel could look ahead to the next period with some excitement with a lot of work and opportunity.</p> <p>The Tenant Panel Facilitator shared that the Panel had received the new Customer Performance report for Quarters 1 and 2 on email for overview, and the Quarter 3 report would be provided for discussion within a meeting in this</p>	<p>Added Value</p> <p>Gov Co Matters Arising</p>
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	<p>new format. It was noted that quarter 1 and 2 had been reviewed by the Panel but via an alternative report.</p> <p>The Chief Executive wished to share a general point that it was important as Chief Executive to come and listen at Panel meetings. She agreed with the points that the Panel had raised and she was optimistic to get where she needed Freebridge to be, and to repay that faith in the organisation. She shared that when a Customer Service Committee worked well it did the heavy lifting for the Board and looked at core strategies and policies, flagging what was going well and not going so well. She added that the Tenant Panel was however, an independent voice, which was a great position to be in for challenge and oversight. The Chief Executive advised that the Customer Service Committee had a set of rules to run to and the Tenant Panel had more freedom and autonomy of oversight to share.</p> <p>The Panel thanked the Chief Executive for her overview and the Vice Chair for his attendance and he left the meeting.</p>	
<p><b>3</b></p>	<p><b>Property Services Team Development Slot including an Update on Property Services and Repairs</b></p> <p>The Head of Service Delivery attended the meeting to provide an overview of Property Services and the repair service in relation to the first lockdown of the recovery position and some of the deadlines that had been set since the Panel's engagement on the topic in March 2020. The Head of Service Delivery shared a live tool called the Property Services Dashboard showing various areas of his service enabling him and management to monitor and plan the service depending on the flow of work and completed jobs.</p> <p>Part of the remobilisation plan since Covid-19 outbreak had been to complete all the outstanding works raised prior to June by the end of December 2020. This would in turn mean that we could meet our service demands to complete an emergency repair job within a 24 hour timescale and routine repairs within the 28 day timescale. There were two additional contractors to help Freebridge achieve this as well as specialist jobs in asbestos removal, pest control etc.</p> <p>They were currently on track to achieve clearing jobs outstanding and where no contact had been possible with a tenant Freebridge was noting that a card had been left in their door..</p> <p>The Head of Service Delivery confirmed that where there were issues with contractors Freebridge would look to manage the contract they have by firstly asking them to resolve issues as part of the contract at their own cost and if necessary conduct 10% checks with customers of jobs completed via telephone calls. If there were still issues, the contract could be considered for termination. Following a Panel query the Head of Service Delivery advised that Freebridge did monitor Social Media posts from customers in order to try to resolve.</p> <p>Following a question by a Panel Member, the Head of Service Delivery confirmed there was a programme to upskill and create multi-skilled operatives.</p> <p>The Head of Service Delivery shared that special inspections were being reviewed and jobs costing over £1k will always have a post inspection as well as 10% satisfaction surveys by telephone, which in time would create data on</p>	<p>Added Value</p>

	<p>post inspection satisfaction.</p> <p>In regard to queries from the Panel on mould the Head of Service delivery advised that historically a Freebridge customer would receive a kit to wash down effected areas within their property but this wasn't felt to be a very customer focused approach and much better to get an operative to treat it and raise any follow up work. It was hoped that in time work such as seasonal gutter clearances, winter slip and trip, hazard resolutions etc. could be actioned as a planned approach but at this time, the teams were looking to work through what needed to be done.</p> <p>A Panel Member shared that proactive was a better approach than sitting waiting for the phone calls.</p> <p>A Panel Member commented that the presentation was well understood and wished to say well done on the progress made so far as for a long time the Panel had asked questions about assets and properties including the issue of mould that had been raised on many occasions.</p> <p>A Panel Member commented that in their experiences there was some way to go to perfect the process of reporting a repair and how it was dealt with, as there had been occasions where a repair had not been resolved and sometimes created another. They added that the work of the customer services staff was excellent, though after confirming to forward through to management to call back there were occasions when no one calls back and that needs to be resolved.</p> <p>A Panel Member commented that they felt there were good intentions on Freebridge's part to get the new system to work better, and acknowledged that at times it could have been better but understand that some tenants have been let down, and was hopeful that this new way of approaching things would be more effective in improving how repairs are carried out finished and customer satisfaction increased.</p> <p>The Chief Executive shared that she was committed to improving the repairs and maintenance service and the team were improving but it was a long way from where she and the Head of Service Delivery wished it to be. The Chief Executive shared that she would like to continue coming to future Tenant Panel meetings.</p> <p>The Chief Executive shared that we all know what good looks like and she was grateful to have the Tenant Panel alongside on this journey, and it will never be a concern to have open conversations. She wished to tell the Tenant Panel to keep up with the great work and she felt it was a good opportunity for her to come and listen.</p> <p>The Panel thanked the Chief Executive for attending and she left the meeting.</p> <p>The Tenant Panel Facilitator thanked the Head of Service Delivery for their presentation and advised that the Tenant Panel would discuss a further visit on repairs and let him know.</p> <p><i>David H had to depart the meeting at this point.</i></p>	<p>Added Value</p> <p>Added Value</p> <p>Added Value</p> <p>Added Value</p> <p>Added Value</p> <p>Added Value</p>
4	<p><b>Various Items for Discussion – Housing Management Related</b></p> <p>The Director of Housing, Placeshaping Manager, Assistance Placeshaping Manager (Estates) and Housing Operations Manager were all in attendance</p>	

to provide an overview of some of the items that follow and receive comments or feedback from the Tenant Panel.

### **Review of Annual Rent Letter to Customers**

The Housing Operations Manager shared the draft letter to go to tenants in relation the annual rent and service charging from April 2021 for comments which would be sent out in February.

The Panel shared the following comments and queries:

- The letter was clear because the breakdown was on page 3, but it was suggested to add the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 date in the heading of the table that appeared here again under current rent and new rent figures.
- For the Layout it was suggested that the section 'what if I struggle to pay my rent' should come immediately after the sections on housing benefit and universal credit
- Following a query on whether all service charges go up, the Panel was advised that a variable service charge was applied so it will go up or down depending on usage.
- In regard to additional formatting on making increases or decreases clearer, the Director of Housing shared that they could add a note to say if more information was required to contact the team, as opposed to colour formatting which some may not understand. [Subsequently a Panel Member shared that some people with colour visual deficiency may struggle to view].

### **Covid 19 – Winter Response Plan Update**

Great feedback was received from the Panel at the last meeting and the Director of Housing wished to provide an update on the nine key projects. The Panel may have seen some of the projects on the local media. Such as:

- Reinstatement of welfare calls for vulnerable tenants and face to face support where needed.
- Delivery of essential packs to those who don't have basics of food or hygiene items and sign posting people to other agencies.
- Tablet devices for the team to offer vulnerable customers who do not have contact with their family over the winter or assistance to be online.
- Extension of the hardship fund for such as items as faulty white goods or to cover essential transport costs, clothing, fuel, utility bills etc.
- Activities for young people – looking at online and at home, colouring Christmas cards with schools, warm meal projects through referrals and through young carers of west Norfolk who not normally needed help with meals but find themselves in hard ship.
- Hampers for families who do not have access to Christmas dinners through the Community Caterer and information in the current weeks.

The Tenant Panel had the following queries:

Q - Were Freebridge working with any disabilities agencies for those with

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<p>special needs for additional support?</p> <p>A - They were exploring many partnerships to see how we can grow and involve everyone from the community.</p> <p>Q - What is the criteria to get hampers at Christmas?</p> <p>A - There was a referral form to complete that has gone out to a multitude of different agencies such as children services, Carers of West Norfolk, schools, adult services and the foodbank.</p> <p>Q - Is there a limit on the hampers available at Christmas?</p> <p>A - There is a limit as it is through donations from Tesco and Morrison's. There is around 60 available currently of roast dinner hampers. Have been working on emergency food parcels, which we have a large supply of through supermarkets and foodbanks and keep constantly under review that we are not running out.</p> <p>Q – Could the food hampers be more age appropriate, as some older people do not tend to eat food such as pasta?</p> <p>A – Yes this can be considered going forward, but the packs contain mainly essential food items along with hygiene or cleaning products.</p> <p><b>Garden Assistance Scheme Criteria Review</b></p> <p>The team were looking to refine the service with the assistance of any comments the Tenant Panel may be able to provide. The Tenant Panel had received the proposed application form and letter going out to users of the scheme. There was capacity for 250 people on the free scheme and criteria to be eligible. The criteria would remain the same, but become more bespoke such as one off hedge cutting, or a lower amount of grass cuts in the year with weed spraying.</p> <p>Comments from Panel Members were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Tenant Panel Member shared that they did not know that the garden assistance scheme existed and wondered how many people did know.</li> <li>• Overgrown gardens can bring a neighbourhood down so this was an additional positive in some areas.</li> <li>• The communal gardens service charges that should be paid for, then why do some get it free.</li> <li>• Some people may be able to contribute towards the scheme in time.</li> <li>• A Panel Member shared that a lot had been covered, but if in time there was a service they could paid for they would wish to.</li> <li>• It was a commendable service and it was good to see that Freebridge were looking to ensure it was easy to understand, save money and right people accessing the service. It would be annoying to see if a garden in a neighbourhood is unkempt, on the other hand would be a burden on Freebridge. Well-kept gardens raise the status of a housing organisation and in the end rather than expense, if people who are apply are honest. Therefore, it is not generally a waste of time ensuring that gardens are tidy and it is a plus for the community.</li> </ul>	<p>All Added Value</p>
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	<p>The Placeshaping Manager explained that the team was looking to refine the free service to ensure that those people get the support that they needed. They added that it might be possible for Freebridge in time to set up a connector service where it works with local businesses and should the opportunity arise the team will come back to the Panel to discuss further.</p> <p>The Placeshaping Manager shared that the feedback from the Panel was invaluable in order to shape the service going forward.</p> <p><b>Proposed areas of work for the tenant panel</b> – The document was available within the agenda and if the Tenant Panel had queries to contact the Governance Coordinator.</p> <p><b>Response to customer satisfaction and performance queries</b> – The responses would be circulated on these points by the Governance Coordinator.</p>	Gov Co Matters Arising
5	<p><b>Any Other Business</b></p> <p>Following discussing the Governance Coordinator agreed to invite the Head of Service Delivery for continued updates on the repairs service in January or February.</p> <p>It was agreed for the Panel to pull together quarterly three key messages as was done to the Board for the CEO staggered. The Governance Coordinator agreed to add to the work programme.</p> <p>It was agreed for the Governance Coordinator to arrange Information in advance more and where it is provided it be done so as ready so that more time can be given for Tenant Panel feedback.</p>	Gov Co  Gov Co  Gov Co
6	<p><b>Meeting how did it go</b> Upbeat Very informative, each came today were quick to pick up on points Appetiser as the main course is yet to come Encouraging Very useful and informative, and enjoyed it Encouraging Honesty</p>	
7	<p><b>Date of Next Meeting</b> - Friday 18 December, 9.45 am – 1.45 pm, via Zoom.</p> <p>Meeting Closed at 1.45 pm</p>	