CABINET REPORT

Open		Would any decisions proposed :	
Any especially affected Wards	Discretionary / Operational	Be entirely within Cabinet's powers to decide Need to be recommendations to Council Is it a Key Decision	YES NO NO
Lead Member: Cllr Adrian Lawrence E-mail: *cllr.adrian.lawrence@west-norfolk.gov.uk*		Other Cabinet Members consulted:	
		Other Members consulted:	
Lead Officer: Duncan Hall E-mail: Duncan.hall@west-norfolk.gov.uk Direct Dial:01553 616445		Other Officers consulted: Ray Harding	

Financial Implications	Policy/Personnel Implications	Statutory Implications	Equal Impact Assessment YES If YES: Pre-screening/ Full Assessment	Risk Management Implications
NO	NO	NO		YES

Date of meeting: 1St December 2015

STRATEGIC FORUM: FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING & BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK

Summary

This report proposes the establishment of a structured forum involving Freebridge Community Housing (FCH) and the Council. Whilst an effective relationship has been maintained since stock transfer in 2006, there is currently no existing forum for the two organisations to engage in discussion on strategic matters at a Senior Member/Director level.

In recent years FCH have developed into an increasingly important partner to the Borough Council not only in terms of the provision of social and affordable housing but also on wider community issues. Close working with FCH is vital in relation to speedily addressing the need of homeless people and families to whom the Council owes a statutory duty, as well as in terms of providing homes for people on the housing register. FCH are a key partner within the West Norfolk partnership and have played a significant part in a range of community initiatives, an example being their acquisition of the Providence Street Community facilities in King's Lynn which has been enhanced and improved both operationally and physically since FCH acquired the building from Norfolk County Council.

A strategic forum has been proposed (to include two meetings per year) that will provide an opportunity to ensure that respective priorities are understood; that new opportunities are explored; and that challenges and risks are identified. The proposal to establish formal arrangements for engagement comes at a time of significant change in the operating environment of registered housing providers.

Recommendation

- To agree the proposed terms of reference to a strategic forum between

the Council and FCH as set out in this report.

- To agree that the Leader and the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Housing, along with the Chief Executive, represent the Council at the proposed Forum.

Reason for Decision
A structured arrangement will help ensure that an effective relationship with FCH the major provider of affordable housing in the area is maintained.

Background

The proposal for a structured arrangement to enable appropriate engagement regarding strategic matters has arisen for the following reasons:

The operating environment of registered providers of social housing is currently subject to change. National policy changes have necessitated the need for most housing providers to review their business plans based on reduced income assumptions. New cost pressures will lead to decision making and policy changes that will possibly have impacts on stake-holders including Councils. FCH will need to keep their policies, practices, and development strategies under review in this new operating environment.

The Borough Council has two places on FCH Board which are allocated by Annual Council. Alongside the tenant representation and the independent board members and two executive board members. These provide for direct engagement in the direction and management of the organisation.

The Council also holds a 'golden share' which is exercised by the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for housing. Certain key decisions are reserved to Shareholders meetings and require the agreement of the Borough Council. Perhaps the most significant of which relates to any proposed changes to the constitution of the organisation, for example if they were to be proposed changes to the board structure or perhaps for a merger with another association at some point in the future.

There is currently no framework for strategic priorities of the Council's Lead member or Leader to be directly voiced. The proposed forum will provide this opportunity and help maintain understanding and trust into the future.

Operational activities and issues will continue to be dealt with at an officer/ staff level within the respective organisations. The strategic forum will consider wider cross-cutting matters and explore opportunities to work together.

The proposed terms of reference are as follows:

Proposed Terms of Reference

The aims of the joint group established by BCKLWN and Freebridge Community Housing shall be to work together in order to:-

(a) Identify the potential for strategic joint action on a range of cross cutting issues which concern both Freebridge and the Council; in particular to ensure that partnership between both organisations is used effectively to the benefit of Freebridge tenants and/or the wider West Norfolk community.

(b) Identify issues of common interest to the community, including housing need.

(c) Review and monitor the outputs of joint involvement in Government funded schemes in liaison with appropriate agencies.

(d) Discuss issues relating to the Borough Council's role as a Freebridge shareholder, for instance any proposed changes to the Freebridge constitution, and including Board Member recruitment.

(e) Discuss any areas where the working relationship between Freebridge and the Borough Council could be improved or developed.

(f) Share information around key areas of activity.

Membership shall be:-

- Freebridge: Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Chief Executive

- Borough Council: Leader, Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Housing, Chief Executive

- Co-optees as determined by the Group

The Group can be attended by Officers of the Council and Freebridge.

Venue: Alternatively Council offices and Freebridge premises

Convenor/Clerk: Host of the 'next' meeting

Meeting Frequency: Twice a year (but can meet more often if required)

Other Options Considered

Do nothing – This option is not considered appropriate as it does not address the need for engagement at a strategic level. The new operating environment presents challenges and opportunities (including investment opportunities) that will need to be dealt with in an environment of understanding and co-

operation. The proposed formal strategic forum offers opportunities for both organisations to maintain and develop an effective relationship.

Policy Implications
There are no policy implications.

Financial Implications
There are no financial implications

Personnel Implications
There are no personnel implications

Statutory Considerations
The arrangements that the Council has with FCH connected with temporary accommodation and allocation of social housing tenancies assist the Council in delivering some of its statutory housing functions.

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)
Pre-screening form attached as a Background Paper.

Risk Management Implications
Important issues could be misunderstood or opportunities missed without effective communication at the strategic level.

Declarations of Interest / Dispensations Granted
None

Background Papers
EIA pre screening form

Please Note: If there are any positive or negative impacts identified in question 1, or there any 'yes' responses to questions 2 – 4 a full impact assessment will be required.