

BUILDING BETTER **FUTURES:** TENANT CUSTOMER CHARTER **2022 - 2026**



2023 Update

Freebridge
COMMUNITY HOUSING



OUR COMMITMENT TO OUR CUSTOMERS

Our customers are at the heart of all that we do, and our Building Better Futures strategy demonstrates our wider commitment to both our customers and communities over the next five years.

This Charter is our 'Customer Plan' to deliver excellent customer service and has been shaped using feedback from over 1,000 of our customers. It connects our strategy with how we intend to deliver services day to day, to achieve excellent customer service and provide quality, safe and secure homes and communities that our customers are proud to live in.

For more information about how we are performing against our commitments, or to get involved, visit our website at www.freebridge.org.uk

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CREATING HOMES, COMMUNITIES & LOCAL SPACES TO BE PROUD OF

YOUR HOME

We recognise that everyone deserves a good quality, safe, well maintained, affordable home, but we believe that our responsibility is wider than just the home and we want to be more than just a landlord. Repairs and maintenance are top priorities for our customers and we want to concentrate on these services.

Providing homes - we will:

- let our homes in a fair, transparent, and efficient way, which responds to your housing needs and supports your wishes
- have a clear application, decision-making and appeals process to help you to access our homes in a simple way

New homes - we will:

- provide you with a home user guide so you know how to care for your new home
- provide a clear process for reporting and resolving any defects that you find once you move in

Moving in and on - we will:

- make sure your home is safe and secure before you move in
- help you to swap your home in a simple and straight forward way with other customers
- we will arrange a welcome call to see how you're settling in
- provide clear guidance around the process for moving out of your home

Maintaining your home - we will:

- make it quick and easy for you to report repairs, whilst keeping you informed at each stage of our process
- provide you with an emergency repairs service 24 hours a day, 365 days a year
- respond to your emergency repairs within 4 hours, urgent repairs within 24 hours and routine repairs within 28 days

Your home security - we will:

- provide you with secure access to our sheltered scheme and flat blocks

Damp and mould - we will:

- take all reports of damp and mould very seriously, triaging every case to understand the most appropriate course of action for each home
- act on the most serious cases of damp and mould immediately, carrying out a risk assessment within 1 working day, and taking action to downgrade the risk within 21 working days
- work with external specialists to provide a range of advice and guidance to customers on managing mould in their homes



Details of our repairs target times and categories can be seen below:

Emergency Repairs - we will respond to emergency repairs within 24 hours*

We define emergency repairs as those relating to any defect which puts the health, safety or security of a customer or third party at immediate risk or which affects the structure of the building. Examples include:

- blocked flue to open fire or boiler
- blocked foul drain, soil pipe or toilet (where there is no other toilet in the property)
- total loss of heating or hot water during the heating season from 31st October - 1st May
- serious water leak
- unsafe electrical fittings e.g. exposed wiring
- insecure external window, door or lock
- unsafe stairs
- serious roof leak

If you have any of these please call our 24 hour emergency service on 03332 404 444

Urgent Repairs - we will respond to urgent repairs within 7 days*

We define urgent repairs as those relating to any defect that does not cause immediate risk to the health, safety or security of a customer or third party and although therefore not an emergency, still needs to be carried out quickly to ensure that the risk does not increase. Examples include:

- leaking or faulty radiator valve
- faulty extractor fan
- defective cistern or overflow
- faulty communal TV aerial

Routine Repairs - we will respond to routine repairs within 28 days.

We define routine repairs as those carried out to remedy a defect which can be deferred without causing discomfort, inconvenience or nuisance to the tenant or a third party or the long term deterioration of the building. Examples include:

- dripping/leaking taps or shower units
- general joinery repairs e.g. floor boards, work tops, internal doors
- kitchen fittings
- easing of doors and windows and repairs to door/window furniture (handled etc.)
- plaster work
- tiling (including floors)
- fencing/gates/garage doors
- blocked or broken guttering

*Certain types of repairs are covered under the right to repair scheme, called qualifying repairs. These must be responded to within specific timescales and will override Freebridge emergency and urgent response times.

CREATING HOMES, COMMUNITIES & LOCAL SPACES TO BE PROUD OF

YOUR SAFETY

We are committed to investing in our homes and local communities and continue to make improvements to their quality and standards, in particular, prioritising customer safety.

Home Health & Safety - we will:

- provide clear information on how you can protect your home from flood, fire and other loss
- support the 'My Home Contents Insurance' scheme to give you access to affordable contents insurance to keep your personal belongings safe

Safeguarding each other - we will:

- raise awareness of abuse and neglect, the signs, and how to report concerns, so that you can keep yourself and others safe
- vet and train all relevant staff and contractors, to ensure that we provide safe services to you at all times
- work closely with partners to take a person-led, outcome-focused approach to safeguarding, supporting you to make choices about how you wish to live

Tackling Hate Crime - we will:

- take a zero tolerance approach to hate incidents, supporting you to live hate free
- adopt the Stop Hate in Norfolk protocol to provide you with a safe, accessible and supportive place to report a hate incident
- work closely with you when reporting hate incidents, to understand what support you need us to provide

Additional services - we will:

- provide tailored information, advice and guidance to our older and more vulnerable customers
- promote the use of our community facilities to you to encourage social inclusion and improve wellbeing
- provide practical and financial help if you wish to move from a larger home to somewhere smaller

Details of the safety checks we make to your homes:

Checks we complete every six months, include:

- inspections of lifts

Checks we complete every 12 months, include:

- gas safety inspections
- non- gas safety inspections
- inspection of oil heating systems
- inspection of air source heating systems
- inspection of solid fuel heating systems
- inspections of domestic stair lifts
- asbestos inspections
- fire alarm checks
- fire risk assessments of communal areas
- sprinkler system checks
- communal alarm / pull cord checks
- emergency lighting checks

Checks we complete every 5 years, include:

- electrical testing in homes
- electrical testing in communal areas



My Home Contents insurance

Contents insurance is designed to help protect your possessions. No matter how careful you are, there's always a risk that your belongings could be broken, damaged or stolen so home contents insurance can help provide peace of mind should the worst happen.

Freebridge do not cover your contents as part of the tenancy agreement, however we have teamed up with Thistle Tenant Risks who provide specialist Tenants Contents Insurance policies.

My Home Contents Insurance is a specialist insurance scheme provided by Thistle Tenant Risks and all tenants living in social and affordable housing are eligible to apply.

My Home Contents Insurance scheme can offer you insurance for the contents of your home including cover for items such as furniture, carpets, curtains, clothes, bedding, electrical items, jewellery, pictures and ornaments.

For more information visit

www.freebridge.org.uk/Home-Contents-Insurance.html

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CREATING HOMES, COMMUNITIES & LOCAL SPACES TO BE PROUD OF

YOUR COMMUNITY

We strive to make an impact through investment in well-being, community support and green spaces. Our two community centres are at the hub of local areas, and we are committed to providing other opportunities in our rural areas, to help build strong community spirit and offer people support and opportunities to increase their life satisfaction.

Estate Services - we will:

- deliver effective cleaning and maintenance services to shared communal areas so that you can take pride in the area around your home
- provide quality grounds maintenance services which enhance the appearance and quality of your local community

Neighbourhoods and Communities - we will:

- consult with you to agree Neighbourhood Plans for investment and improvement in your area

Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour - we will:

- offer you a range of ways to report anti-social behaviour including by telephone, letter, and email or in person
- contact you within 24 hours for all serious cases (such as harassment, violence and/or the threat of violence), and within five working days for all other cases
- deal with your concerns with sensitivity and respect at all times, focusing on your safety and wellbeing
- investigate your concerns fully and keep you updated with progress regularly
- be open, honest and realistic about what we can do, and what choices you have
- provide digital tools for you to record anti-social behaviour and noise nuisance
- work closely with the Police, Local Authority and other partners to take a joined up approach to resolving your concerns
- provide clear advice and guidance as to how you can challenge our handling of anti-social behaviour through the 'Community Trigger'



CREATING HOMES, COMMUNITIES & LOCAL SPACES TO BE PROUD OF

YOUR SUPPORT

We have a strong commitment to our communities and to transforming lives, tackling disadvantage and health inequalities. We work hard on preventing tenancy breakdowns and homelessness through offering advice and support.

Housing support - we will:

- provide a housing related support service that helps you to remain independent in your own home
- work with partners to make sure that our sheltered schemes are vibrant and inclusive communities which provide opportunities to improve your wellbeing and sense of connection
- make it easy for you to request minor adaptations to your home such as grab rails and ramp, and provide advice and guidance on larger changes
- work with you to identify another suitable home when your current home no longer meets your needs

Sustaining tenancies - we will:

- provide advice, guidance and support throughout your tenancy, to help make a success of turning a house into your home
- make our offer of support clear and accessible to you
- offer a safety net to you when times are particularly hard through our household support fund
- support you into alternative accommodation when your tenancy is at risk due to your current home

Domestic abuse - we will:

- treat all reports of domestic abuse from you seriously and with sensitivity
- provide our staff with training to identify signs of abuse, to assess risk and work with you to report to other statutory agencies
- provide referral and signposting services to the appropriate partner agencies to keep you safe

Rent support - we will:

- provide you with easy to read rent and service charge statements at least every 12 months, so that you understand your account balance
- provide you with a range of ways to pay your rent and service charges, including direct debit, standing order, credit or debit card, online, over the phone or at Paypoint outlets to make paying your rent as easy as possible
- offer repayment agreements that are affordable to bring your account back up-to-date when you experience problems
- signpost you to support agencies and a range of free money management services and benefits advice if you are experiencing difficulties in paying your rent



Our leaflet, Making Every Tenancy Count, explains our commitment to taking an active role in preventing homelessness in West Norfolk, by providing quality homes. In addition provides details of the additional help we can provide when people need help to make their tenancies work, including:

- Advice on moving home
- Benefit advice
- Money management and budgeting
- Aids and adaptations for the home
- Domestic abuse, hate crime or other forms of abuse or neglect
- Hoarding and home safety
- Personal support plans
- Anti-social behaviour

To read the leaflet in full visit www.freebridge.org.uk/makeeverytenancycount

PROVIDING EXCELLENT CUSTOMER SERVICE

YOUR VIEWS

We are committed to hearing the voice of our customers, and to using feedback to inform decisions at every level in the organisation. We want every customer to feel listened to by us on the issues that matter to them and can speak without fear.

Engagement - we will:

- provide a range of different opportunities for you to give feedback, raise concerns, scrutinise our performance and be involved at a level that suits your needs and wishes
- work with our recognised tenant group(s) to enable you to scrutinise our performance and hold Freebridge to account for the decisions we make that affect the quality of your home and services
- make it easy for you to share your views with us in real time, and to understand what we have done as a result of your feedback
- report annually on our engagement work and the difference this has made to the services you receive

Communication - we will:

- consult with our recognised tenant group(s) to understand which measures of our performance you are interested in knowing more about, and to agree a transparent, clear and accessible way to share this information
- publish our Annual Report in an accessible and transparent format so that you can understand how we have performed

Complaints and Compliments - we will:

- operate a simple, transparent and effective complaints process which supports you to seek redress when things go wrong
- always attempt to resolve your complaint at the earliest stage possible
- acknowledge all formal complaints in writing within 5 working days, where we have not been able to resolve the concern initially
- investigate your complaint and provide you with a full response and suggested resolution within 10 working days
- provide access to a simple and effective Appeals process, so that you have a way in which to challenge certain decisions that we make

Our complaints process is detailed on the next pages.



PROVIDING EXCELLENT CUSTOMER SERVICE

YOUR FEEDBACK

We are committed to hearing the voice of our customers, and to using feedback to inform decisions at every level in the organisation. We want every customer to feel listened to by us on the issues that matter to them and can speak without fear.

OUR COMPLAINTS PROCESS

When it is established that an enquiry is a complaint rather than a request for service, or when we considers that it meets the definition of a complaint, the matter will be passed immediately to our Customer Complaints Team, for escalation to Stage #1.

STAGE #1

- Within five working days of receipt you will receive direct contact from the Customer Complaints Team, followed by an acknowledgement letter and leaflet.
- Within a further four working days (a total of nine working days from original receipt) and following investigation, the Customer Complaints Team will again make direct contact with you to discuss the findings of the investigation to date.
- Within a further one working day (a total of 10 working days from original receipt), you will receive a full response.
- When the investigation takes longer, you will be kept fully updated of progress; in any event this will not exceed a further 10 working days without good reason.
- The Customer Complaints Team will carry out an investigation into the complaint, in conjunction with the appropriate service manager.
- As part of the investigation process the Customer Complaints Coordinator will make direct contact with you to understand the nature and the content of the complaint fully. The format for this is not prescriptive, however the Coordinator must ensure that they have engaged with you to fully understand your concerns before a conclusion is reached and the Stage #1 outcome letter is sent.
Where the complaint concerns, or involves other members of staff, then the Coordinator must also engage with each member of staff.
- The Customer Complaints Team will then write to you with the outcome of the investigation into the complaint, striving to resolve the matter at this stage wherever possible.

ESCALATION TO STAGE #2

If you are still unhappy about how your situation has been dealt with, you can ask for your complaint to be progressed to the second stage of our process within 60 days of the date of the decision at Stage #1.

In a limited amount of circumstances we may refuse to escalate a complaint to Stage #2. These are set out below:

- Matters that have already been considered under our Complaints policy.
- Complaints about anti-social behaviour or nuisance by Freebridge tenants. Such complaints will be handled by a separate Anti-social Behaviour policy and procedure. However, if the complaint is about the way in which the nuisance has been handled then this will be covered by our policy. See also 'Anti-Social Behaviour and Complaints'
- Initial requests for a service or information, for example initial reporting of a repair. However, when we fail to meet our service standards this will be covered by our policy.
- Complaints where legal action is already taking place or a decision has been made by the court.
- Complaints about our decision to end a starter tenancy; refusal to offer a tenancy after an applicant has been referred or nominated to us; a tenancy review; refusal of a mutual exchange – these would be dealt with under our Appeals policy. However if the complaint is about the way in which the process has been handled then this will be covered by this policy.

In the event that we do not agree to escalate a complaint we will provide the customer concerned with a response detailing the reasons for this; if a customer wishes to challenge our decision not to accept a complaint they may contact the Housing Ombudsman who will review the matter – and where appropriate will instruct us to take on the complaint.

STAGE #2

- Within five working days of receipt of a request to escalate you will receive direct contact from the Customer Complaints Team, followed by an acknowledgement letter and leaflet.
- At Stage 2 the complaint will then be reviewed by a Director not previously involved in the original complaint.
- As part of the investigation process the relevant Director must make direct contact with you to understand the nature and the content of the complaint fully. The format for this (i.e. meeting, telephone call etc) is not prescriptive, however the Director must ensure that they have engaged with you to fully understand their concerns before a conclusion is reached and the Stage Two outcome letter is sent. Where the complaint concerns, or involves other members of staff, then the relevant Director must also engage with each member of staff.
- The Director will write to you with their final decision within 15 working days of Freebridge being asked, and agreeing, to escalate the complaint to this stage.
- When the investigation takes longer, you will be kept fully updated of progress; in any event this will not exceed a further 10 working days without good reason or without your agreement.
- Where the complaint relates to debt advice or our other Financial Conduct Authority regulated activities this update will take the form of a final response letter which will be sent to you within eight weeks of the complaint first being received.

PROVIDING EXCELLENT CUSTOMER SERVICE

YOUR SERVICE

We treat all customers fairly, and with respect in all we do. Our relationship with our customers is based on openness, honesty and transparency. We promote equality of opportunity and value the differences between our customers and everyone who works for Freebridge Community Housing. All our staff, contractors and consultants must treat colleagues and customers with politeness, tolerance and respect, regardless of their age, colour, disability, ethnicity, sex or gender identity, marital status, nationality or national origin, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, caring responsibilities or any other unjustifiable reasons. We will not tolerate unfair discriminatory behaviour of any kind and we encourage the reporting of any such behaviour. We will act upon all complaints appropriately.

Service Commitments - we will:

- make it as easy as possible for you to contact us across a range of channels, from over the phone, to social media and email
- make it quick and simple to reach the right service or person that you wish to speak with
- ensure that you receive the same level of service regardless of which colleague or team you communicate with
- ensure our receptions are clean, inviting and accessible to you, with a range of useful information available
- publish our hours of business in our offices, on our website and in other relevant literature so you are aware of when and how you can contact us
- respond to your enquiries in writing within five working days, or via voicemail or email within two working days
- endeavour to respond to enquiries made via social media within two business hours, whilst protecting your privacy
- avoid using jargon or technical language in our communications with you

Dignity & Respect - we will:

- be polite, respectful and fair in all of our communications with you
- value your time and ensure we attend your home or office appointments at the time we have agreed to, or update you in a timely way when plans change
- ensure that our staff and contractors greet you in a friendly, polite and respectful way, providing you with their full name and ID clearly displayed
- accommodate any needs you may have to provide information in alternative formats
- provide a quiet, private space in our offices to discuss your enquiry

Customer Focus - we will:

- take ownership and responsibility to answer queries and fix problems at the first point of contact, providing the name and contact details for the member of staff dealing with your query
- listen carefully to understand what you need and want from us, and check with you to make sure we have understood
- always be honest and transparent about what we can do, and about the choices you have
- go the extra mile to reach a solution or outcome that you are happy with and which suits your individual needs
- ensure that you are always informed of the outcome of your enquiry or the next steps, who will be responsible and when this will happen
- respond when things go wrong to put it right for you and learn from our mistakes, so that our services continually improve

PROVIDING EXCELLENT CUSTOMER SERVICE

YOUR RIGHTS RESPONSIB

We take our role as a responsible landlord very seriously, and we are committed to the highest standards of openness, probity & accountability. We also have a responsibility to protect the information we hold about you and you have the right to see it and make sure it is correct.

Your Personal Data - we will:

- make available the information we hold on your file at your request
- make you aware if we withhold confidential or sensitive information that has been supplied by a third party
- act promptly to update the information we hold on you as soon as you notify us of a change
- make clear to our contractors their responsibility to maintain confidentiality and respect your rights to privacy

Your Responsibilities

When you move in to a Freebridge property you also have a role to play in creating a happy and safe home and community. The following responsibilities we expect you to fulfill will help play an important role in delivering excellent customer service.

You will:

- let us know when things go wrong, so that we can put it right
- let us know when you have received great service from our staff or contractors so that we can celebrate, reward and continue this

Rent - you will:

- pay your rent on time. Rent is usually paid in advance every month or week. You should pay it on time
- claim benefits if you need to. Call our team to find out if you are eligible
- report any changes in your circumstances, or provide any information requested in a timely way
- contact us as soon as you believe you may have problems paying your rent and service charges, so that we can agree a solution together

OUR RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES

Keeping your data up-to-date - you will:

- update us as soon as your personal circumstances or contact details change so that we can keep your file up to date at all times
- let us know if you have specific needs or vulnerabilities so that together we can agree how we might meet these needs
- respond to surveys with your views and feedback
- let us know when we have got things wrong and when things have gone well. This information is key to developing and motivating our teams to deliver a consistently high level of customer service

Looking after your home - you will:

- report any repairs needed to Freebridge promptly
- make sure your home is well ventilated to help avoid condensation
- do minor maintenance such as regularly checking smoke alarms and changing light bulbs
- dispose of your rubbish properly

- ensure internal decorations, furniture and equipment are maintained
- allow access for repairs and inspections
- give us access to your home to see if repairs are needed
- allow access to tradespeople or engineers to carry out repairs or safety checks

Ask for permission:

- to take in a lodger
- to run a business from the property
- to make improvements to the property
- to keep a pet or park a caravan on the property

Taking responsibility for behaviour - you will:

- take responsibility for the behaviour of anyone who lives with you or visits you in your home
- show our staff the same courtesy and respect that you can expect to receive
- show consideration for your neighbours and your wider community at all times

Living in your home - you will:

- live in your home as your main home
- not rent out your home to someone else while you're away
- tell us if you'll be away from home for more than a month and keep paying the rent while you are away

Ending your tenancy properly - you will:

- end your tenancy properly if you want to move out or you may still be liable for rent. This applies even if you are no longer living there

MONITORING OUR COMMITMENTS

We will monitor how we are performing against these commitments and will publish our performance on our website, in Streets Ahead and via social media. Some of the monitoring will be done using in-house systems but we will primarily reach out to tenants for feedback. The more people who respond, the more robust the data will be and we will be able to make significant improvements to the services you receive. We are committed to Building Better Futures and encourage everyone to be a part of this change.

