

The background of the image features three miniature human figures standing on a large pile of coins. The figure on the left is a woman in a pink dress. The figure in the center is a man in a grey suit with a red tie. The figure on the right is a man in a green shirt and brown trousers. The coins are stacked and scattered, creating a textured foreground. The overall scene is set against a dark, solid background.

FINANCIAL INCLUSION POLICY



Financial Inclusion Policy			
Last Reviewed	January 2025	Next Review	January 2027
Responsible Officer	Director of Operations		

Policy Statement: Freebridge endeavour to maximise customers' income and ensure access to high quality benefit and money advice and, financial services, whilst developing financial capability.

Freebridge recognises the need to reduce financial exclusion, not only to lower rent arrears levels but also to provide individuals with access to mainstream financial services. This is seen as an important step towards social, as well as financial inclusion that fits with the organisation's overall role in developing communities.

In order to be effective, the organisation recognises the need to adopt a positive and pro-active approach to tackling financial exclusion. A tenant's lack of financial awareness can have a serious impact on our ability to collect rental income which then impacts upon corporate cash flows.

Freebridge is also committed to maintaining authorisation for its regulated consumer credit activities with the Financial Conduct Authority and providing robust training for all relevant staff to ensure compliance at all times.

Policy Detail:

Accessibility

We are committed to ensuring that all our customers can access our support. Whether you need to access our services in alternative ways, want to update your details to reflect a change in circumstances or need additional support, we want to help as best we can.

Examples of support we provide are:

- Supplying auxiliary aids to assist in communication (such as sign language, interpreters and Induction Loops).
- Providing information in alternative formats (e.g. large print, Braille, coloured paper
- etc.)
- Giving extra time for customers to respond to our communications
- Sending emails or communicating via telephone in preference to hard copy letters
- Communicating with a nominated family member or third party.

Customers can let us know about any additional support needed at any time. We will always try and meet the needs of our customers. There may be instances where this isn't possible. When this happens, we will do our best to work with you to find another solution.

Maximising Tenants Income

We shall:

- Provide affordable social housing and low-cost home ownership.
- Ensure effective rent arrears management, identifying debts early and offering affordable repayment agreements.
- Promote the take up of benefits via awareness campaigns and individual support.
- Promote and support social enterprise initiatives.

Ensure access to high quality benefit and money advice

We shall

- Provide all new tenants with a financial health check to ensure they are claiming the benefits they are entitled to and identify any money problems.
- Partner with others to offer all tenants access to welfare benefits advice.
- Signpost tenants to appropriate money advice from independent advice agencies.
- Provide direct money and benefit advice to tenants wishing to access our services.
- Partner with money advice and benefit charities to support and promote access to further specialist information and advice.

Tackle fuel poverty

We shall:

- Switch properties to the cheapest supplier when they become empty.
- Maximise the energy efficiency of our properties through our Homes and Community Maintenance Strategy.
- Provide direct advice on cost effective fuel and energy efficiency measures.
- Consider the possibility of joining or developing an Energy Club.
- Support customers to access affordable loans for fuel.

Improve access to financial services

We shall:

- Provide general information to tenants on the range of banking services available.
- Promote the availability of affordable home contents insurance, partnering with the National Housing Federation's recommended insurer.
- Support the work of The England Illegal Money Lending Team, to raise awareness regarding loan sharks and illegal money lending.

Promote Financial Capability

We shall:

- Support the development of initiatives to improve tenant financial capability.
- Provide information about low-cost credit and promoting savings and money management skills.
- Support initiatives to provide financial education in the community.
- Partner with others to provide money management training for tenants.
- Promote information and advice to tenants regarding welfare reform and benefit changes.

Take a whole organisation, strategic approach

We shall:

- Develop a long-term approach based on clear social, business and organisational rationales.
- Engage with other social landlords, and partners in the delivery of their financial inclusion strategy.
- Fully engage front line housing staff in the delivery of the strategy.

Digital Inclusion

We shall:

- Promote the use of the internet to buy essential goods and services that can save a family significant amount over a year. Therefore, reducing digital exclusion can have a real impact on increasing financial inclusion amongst our customers.
- Freebridge has a [Digital Engagement Policy](#) that identifies a number of strands of activity to help our customers become less digitally excluded. Digital inclusion is an essential part of financial inclusion and therefore the two policies need to be considered together.