



UNDER OCCUPATION POLICY



Under Occupation Policy			
Last Reviewed	June 2025	Next Review	June 2027
Responsible Officer	Director of Operations		

Policy Statement: Freebridge shall endeavour to make best use of our housing stock and provide satisfaction to tenants, whilst supporting tenants who are currently under-occupying and wish to downsize to smaller homes. We shall encourage mobility within the social rented sector and assist tenants to alleviate financial hardship caused through inappropriate housing.

Policy Detail:

We shall:

- Ensure that all tenants are aware of the options that they have to move to a smaller property by way of mutual exchange, or the Choice Based Lettings scheme that the Council operates.
- Work in an integrated manner with the relevant Local Authority and other Registered Providers to facilitate and promote opportunities for tenants to move to smaller properties through existing means.
- Participate in and promote appropriate home-swapping schemes.
- Ensure that all relevant staff are aware of our approach to under-occupation and that resources are available to us to help to reduce this.
- Give consideration and encourage tenants who need aids or adaptations to move to a more appropriate property if they are currently under-occupying and retaining adapted properties for tenants who can make the best use of them.
- Evaluate identified housing needs in respect of under-occupation into Freebridge's future development plans.

Support Needs

In assisting with housing need we will take into consideration your individual and household situation, circumstances, the impacts of your current home, and support needs so that we can support you in the best way possible.

Decisions on downsizing will be made on a case-by-case basis and consideration will be given to the individual circumstances. We may need one of our team to visit your home in reaching a decision. Decisions relating to downsizing will also be made alongside FCH Vulnerability Policy and Principles.

Accessibility

We are committed to ensuring that all our customers can access our support for Under Occupation where appropriate. 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 regarding the process (such as sign language, interpreters and Induction Loops).
- Providing information in alternative formats (e.g. large print, Braille, coloured paper, audio etc.)
- Giving extra time for you to provide information, take decisions or make arrangements.
- Sending emails or communicating via telephone in preference to hard copy letters.
- Communicating with a nominated family member or third party such as support agencies or advocates.
- Providing a named contact to work alongside you throughout the process.
- Providing a tailored assistance package according to your individual needs.

Customers can let us know about any additional support needed at any point during the process. 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.

Under-Occupation Assistance Scheme

Eligibility for assistance and support

We shall:

- Consider providing the following for customers requesting assistance to downsize if they:
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 - Are under occupying by at least one bedroom; *and*
 - Have had a clear rent account for at least a month prior to, and at the time that an offer of a smaller home is made; *or*
 - It can be evidenced that the reason for any rent arrears is directly linked to the unsuitability of the accommodation, and a payment agreement is in place; *and*
 - Have kept to the terms of their tenancy agreement; *and*
 - The downsize will not result in the household becoming overcrowded
- Additional consideration will be given as to whether it is reasonable to assist a downsize where:

- The health or wellbeing of a tenant(s) or their family, or their ability to maintain their current tenancy is being jeopardised by their current housing.

Where assistance is provided with arrears outstanding, a formal repayment agreement with an initial lump sum payment shall be required.

Appeals

If a customer does not agree with our decision to refuse support to downsize then they may appeal via our [Appeals Policy](#).

Alternative Accommodation Offers

In accordance with our [Allocations & Lettings Policy](#), customers downsizing with assistance from the scheme will mainly access accommodation through the relevant, local choice based lettings scheme (where additional priority may be awarded for downsizing) or via Mutual Exchange.

In some circumstances, including, but not limited to, where a customer needs to move more urgently because of medical reasons, a direct offer of accommodation may be made.

In these instances, customers will be offered a property that is adequate for their housing need.

The table below illustrates the minimum property size Freebridge will consider offering different household types:

Size	Max	Min
Studio / 1 bedroom	2	Single person or couple
2 bedrooms	4	Minimum 2 persons or 3 if household includes a couple
3 bedrooms	5	Minimum 3 persons or 4 if household includes a couple
4 bedrooms	6	Minimum 4 persons or 5 if household includes a couple
5 bedrooms	10	Minimum 5 persons or 6 if household includes a couple

Assistance to Move

We shall:

- Help our customers who are under occupying their home to move to a smaller property by offering both practical assistance as well as direct support.
- Tailor our assistance packages according to the needs of each customer, and may include one or more of the following:

Practical Assistance

- Clearance of gardens, sheds or lofts.
- Provision of a skip/recycling of unwanted household items.
- Removal/refitting of appliances.
- Removal/refitting of alarms.

Support

- Assistance to complete mail redirection forms, change utility suppliers and register new accounts.
- Liaison with other agencies i.e. the Local Authority, Schools, GP etc.
- Coordination of removals.