

2022-23

# Our Impact



**FRC**

GROUP



# Contents

## 6 Acknowledgements and CEO Reflection on 2022-2023

## 8 Creating Social Value

- 8 Understanding and highlighting the reality of furniture poverty
- 14 Campaigning and Lobbying for the eradication of furniture poverty
- 20 Developing and running successful social businesses that tackle furniture poverty
- 30 Training people out of poverty
- 31 Using our core skills to develop and run successful commercial businesses, using the profits to create social value across FRC Group

## 32 Stakeholder Feedback



# Our businesses and brands



End Furniture Poverty is a campaigning and social research charity.

It raises awareness of furniture poverty, enhances understanding of its consequences and develops and promotes evidence based solutions to furniture poverty. Increasingly End Furniture Poverty is working at the system level and advocating for – often legislative – change to combat furniture poverty.

[www.endfurniturepoverty.org](http://www.endfurniturepoverty.org)

**TOGETHER  
WE WILL  
END FURNITURE  
POVERTY**



FRC Living is the UK's leading supplier of contract standard furniture. We provide great quality, accredited, contract standard furniture in a range to suit different styles, requirements, timescale needs and budgets.

We lead the way in furnishing multiple types of accommodation, from hostels, refugee, temporary, emergency and next steps accommodation, to furnished tenancies.

[www.frcgroup.co.uk/FRC-Living](http://www.frcgroup.co.uk/FRC-Living)



Buckingham Interiors provides furniture, furnishings and interior design solutions for independent living, extra care housing and care homes.

We have over 30 years experience in the design, supply, installation and delivery of furniture and interiors of the highest quality. We provide design concepts and quality products that are fit for purpose, look spectacular and offer great value for money.

[www.frcgroup.co.uk/Buckingham-Interiors](http://www.frcgroup.co.uk/Buckingham-Interiors)



Furniture Flex provides flexible furnishing solutions to social landlords and their tenants. We give housing providers options over the way they provide furniture and appliances to tenants. Landlords can purchase items outright or can rent items, or a mix of both depending on their needs and the needs of their tenants.

We make the provision of furnished tenancies, simple, straightforward, cost neutral and impactful.

[www.furnitureflex.co.uk](http://www.furnitureflex.co.uk)



Bulky Bob's is a furniture reuse charity which manages great quality, preloved furniture. We provide a large scale collection, reuse and recycling service. Our customers are councils, retailers operating furniture takeback schemes and large scale accommodation providers such as student accommodation, hotels and holiday parks.

All great quality furniture is tested, cleaned and reused to End Furniture Poverty.

Our fully automated mattress reuse line which cleans, sanitises, deodorises and reapplies fire retardancy, makes us the partner of choice for those with unwanted mattresses.

[www.frcgroup.co.uk/Bulky-Bobs](http://www.frcgroup.co.uk/Bulky-Bobs)



CEO Acknowledgements and Reflection on 2022 – 2023

Our Impact Report for 22-23 tracks our progress through the group’s 34th year of service. We express our gratitude to our amazing team of staff, trainees and volunteers, who daily live and breathe our values. This extraordinary team work hard together, achieving great things on the road to our goal to end furniture poverty.

We offer our heartfelt thanks to all the people who have played a part in producing this report: all those who make FRC Group a great place to work – our staff, Driving Change trainees, VIPs and our Board of Trustees; our data collectors and analysers, and particularly Claire Donovan, James Frost, Helen White and Natalie Morris. We would also like to thank Crowe UK, who assured the report. Their statements are on pages 34 to 35; Nonconform, who designed the report; Deana Kay, who took the photographs; and report author Collette Williams aided by contributions from the team.

2022/23 was a pivotal year for FRC Group. We – and the rest of the world – were beginning to emerge from the trials, tribulations and impacts of covid. It became clear that covid had heightened inequalities, increased poverty and had huge negative impacts on people well beyond health.

We began to see the early signs of the cost of living crisis as energy costs soared and ever more families struggled to cope. We also saw a tightening of public spending in many areas.

The work that FRC Group does to help address furniture poverty was needed more than ever.

We continued to help our customer base of social landlords and councils to help people in furniture poverty by providing furniture for furnished tenancies and for welfare schemes to support families in furniture poverty.

Our preloved furniture business, Bulky Bob’s, suffered a real body blow with our largest contract being taken ‘in-house’ by Liverpool City Council. This meant that the activities of one of our real engines of social change was greatly reduced and effectively stopped supporting thousands of people in furniture poverty in Liverpool.

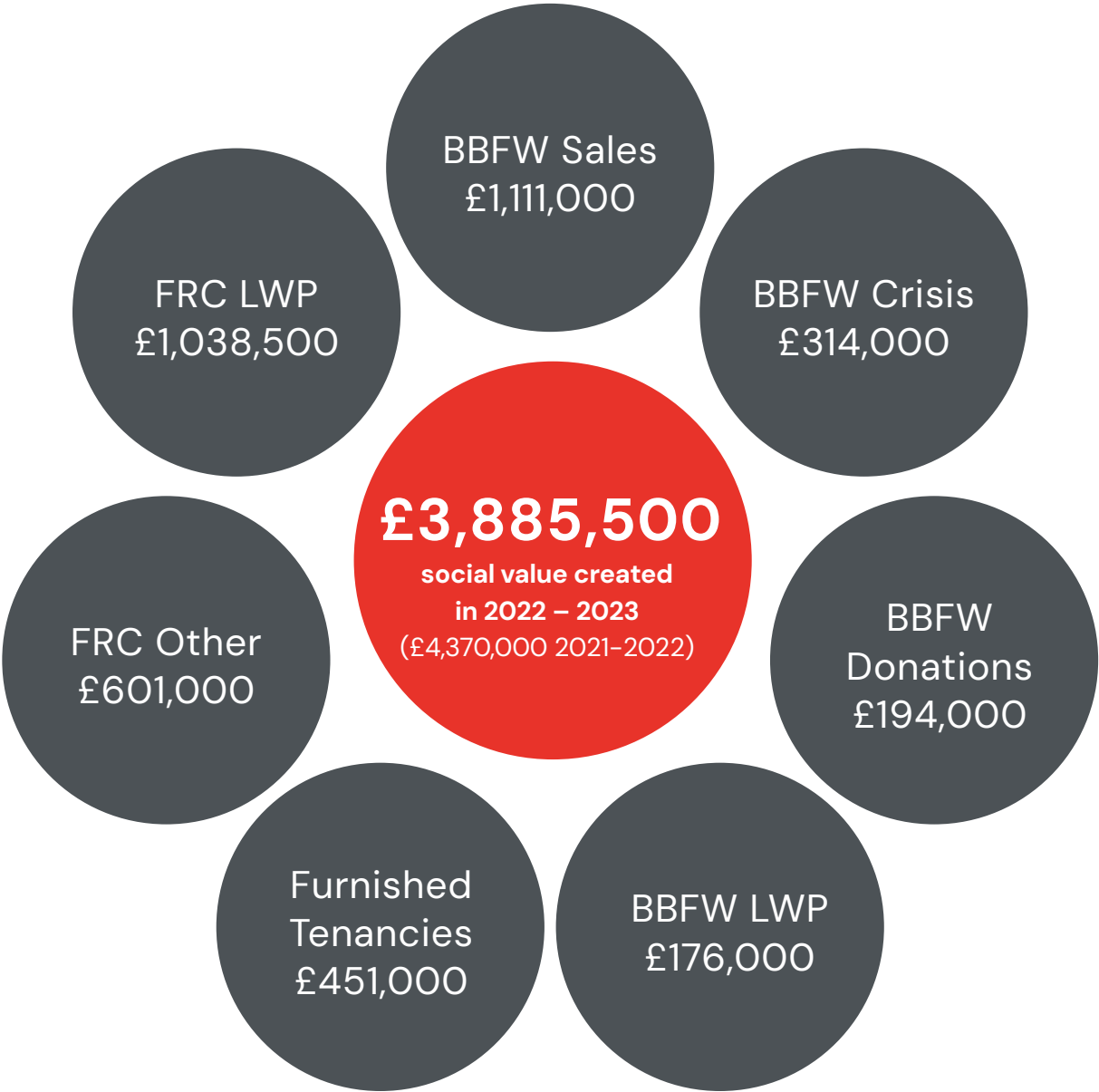
The Oldham operation continues to help lots of people and Oldham Council should be applauded for their groundbreaking approach to preloved furniture.

Even with the loss of the Liverpool contract, Bulky Bob’s created lots of social value.

Our staff continued to be a real asset and credit to FRC Group and every single staff member and VIP lived our values of Bravery, Creativity, Passion and Professionalism in pursuit of our purpose to End Furniture Poverty.

Special mention must be made to the Bulky Bob’s staff, some of whom left FRC Group and joined Liverpool Council staff at the point that the contract was transferred. They made Bulky Bob’s the powerhouse that it is and will be sorely missed.

2022/23 also saw the departure of FRC Group trustees. Lesley Dixon and Nigel Wilson (Chair) left FRC Group after many years of selfless service. They both contributed massively to FRC Group’s impact and they will be missed.



## Creating Social Value

### To understand and highlight the reality of living in furniture poverty.

End Furniture Poverty is FRC Group's research, campaigning and Lobbying arm. End Furniture Poverty focuses on two key objectives, to understand and highlight the reality of living in furniture poverty; and to lobby and campaign for the relief, and ultimately the eradication of furniture poverty. Both objectives are intertwined. We perform in-depth research, producing robust data and thorough analysis to highlight the issue, and then we promote the practical solutions through our campaigning and lobbying work to drive change.



## Research

### Local Welfare Assistance

We published two major research reports this year, 'Resetting Crisis Support', which examined Local Welfare Assistance (LWA) in 2021/2022, and 'The Extent of Furniture Poverty', which identified for the first time just how many people are living without essential furniture items.

Resetting Crisis Support also looked at the first tranche of the Household Support Fund, examining how that was spent and how much was available for people to self-refer for support.

We issued Freedom of Information requests to every upper tier local authority in England, and one to the governments of the devolved nations, to identify how much was spent on crisis support, and what form that support took.



Our research found that there are now **35 local authorities in England without a functioning LWA scheme**. Other key findings are:

- Per capita spend in England was £0.96 this year, down from £1.30 last year.
- The total spent on LWA in 2021/22 was around £56m. Of this though, only £26.4m came from local authorities' core spending power – the lowest amount seen yet.
- There was an 85% decrease in the number of LWA awards.
- In positive news, £24m of LWA funding was spent on the provision of furniture and white goods – a £14m increase on last year and a reflection of the impact of the Household Support Fund, which opened room for extra LWA money to be spent on furniture rather than food and fuel.
- Of the Household Support Fund, 69% was distributed via targeted grants, with approximately 6% distributed via local welfare, 14% via voluntary and community organisations, and 11% via parallel schemes. Therefore approximately 17% of the £500m fund was available via application.

The report also showcased best practice from across England and we carried out extensive interviews with Liverpool, Derbyshire, Oldham, and Norfolk councils to find out all about their schemes and the benefits and returns that they bring. The report was published in early December 2022, with extensive features in the Independent and Mirror newspapers.

The findings of the report have led to a range of lobbying activity which is outlined in the next section.



## Research

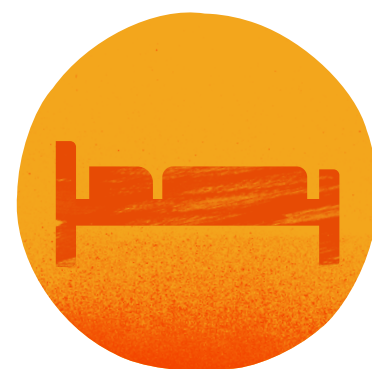
# The Extent of Furniture Poverty

Our second report, The Extent of Furniture Poverty, was published in early May 2023 because we were working with the BBC on an exclusive and were waiting to fit with their post Coronation news agenda, however it was all written during the 2022/2023 financial year so we have decided to include it in this year's annual report.

For the Extent of Furniture Poverty research, we surveyed over 5,500 people across the UK to provide statistically significant data to represent the population.

The research found that there are at least 6m people in the UK living in furniture poverty, which is 9% of the population. It also revealed that over 1 million adults are living in 'deep furniture poverty' – living without three or more essential furniture items.

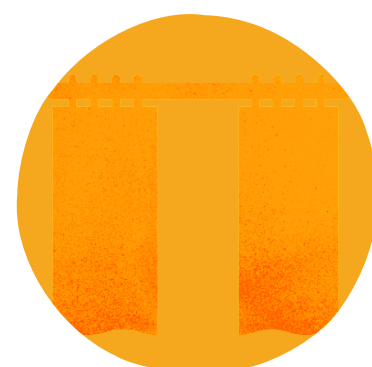
The figures within the report were truly shocking, including...



**740k**  
children without  
a bed of their  
own to sleep in



**1.2M**  
people without  
flooring

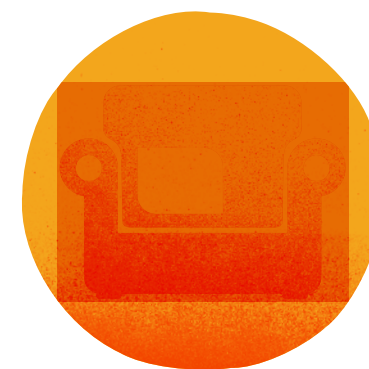


**870k**  
870,000 people  
without curtains  
or blinds

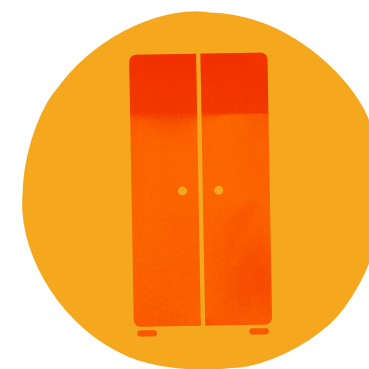


**400k**  
people without a  
cooker or oven.

Our data also showed that



**25%**  
of all British  
people are living in  
furniture poverty



**26%**  
of social housing  
tenants are living in  
furniture poverty

The recommendations for change focused on the role of the Government in funding local crisis support through local authorities, the social housing sector and the need for furniture provision, and furniture reuse. We also acknowledged the importance of tackling poverty as furniture poverty is ultimately a subset of poverty.

The report received extensive coverage across the BBC, including a report on the flagship 6pm BBC 1 news, on national radio news bulletins throughout the day, a feature on the Today programme on Radio 4, and on Radio Five Live, and was the most read article on the BBC website for most of the day. We were also invited onto Channel 5's flagship evening TV news programme for a live interview and interviewed on BBC Radio Merseyside, Stoke and West Midlands.

We were also asked to write blogs on our research for several partners, including housing and charity bodies, helping us to reach even wider audiences with our work.

Other media coverage over the year included a feature on BBC 1's Morning Live with a visit from Mr Motivator, a feature for The One Show with Matt Allwright, and a piece on the Russell Howard Show, all helping people to understand the reality of living in furniture poverty.

As part of our membership of the Grant Makers Alliance, a group of senior leaders from grant making charities, we were able to get involved in a major research project funded by the Longleigh Foundation, focusing on flooring provision in social housing. We were asked to chair the steering group which also includes representatives from the National Housing Federation, the Chartered Institute of Housing, and the Northern Housing Consortium. The first learning report was published in May 2023 (after this integrated report was produced) with further reports planned in the coming months.

Earlier in the year, we were approached by both the Mirror newspaper and a BBC journalist to talk about flooring in social housing, which led to two articles talking about the practice of social landlords removing flooring when tenants move out, no matter what condition it is in. Here's the article on the BBC website, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lancashire-61174452> – which we were told by the journalist was the most read story on BBC website for 12 hours after publication.

# Furniture Provision Social Housing

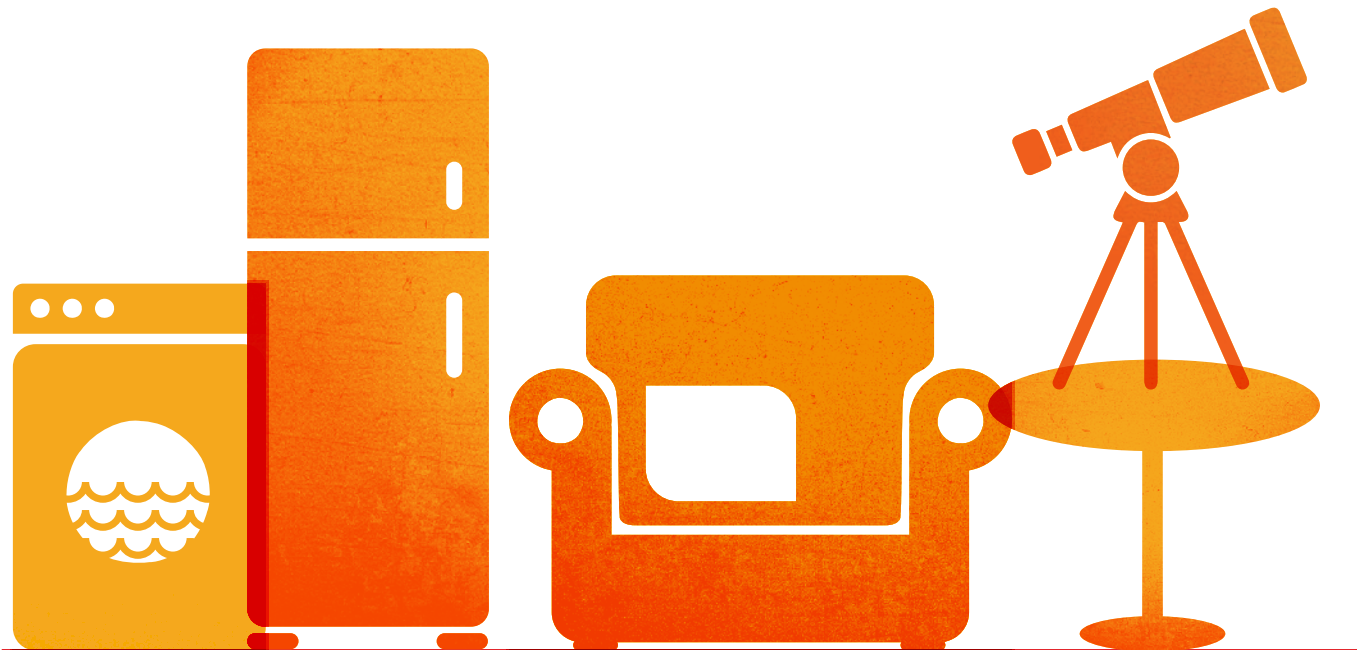
We continue to work with social landlords across the UK to ensure that they understand how many of their tenants are living in furniture poverty and the impact this has on them. Over the past year we have spoken at a wide variety of events addressing social housing professionals, and met with many social landlords. We not only raise awareness of the issue of furniture poverty, we also raise awareness of the possible solutions, and the broader benefits those solutions can provide for landlords.

Our 'Blueprint for Furniture Provision in Social Housing', explained in more detail on page 14, outlines the financial benefits furniture provision can have for landlords, by reducing their rental arrears, sustaining tenancies, and reducing their void costs. Our LWA research is also valuable for this audience because we can demonstrate that tenants in many areas cannot access alternative support for furniture items, strengthening the argument for landlords to step up and provide support.

# Planning Ahead

We know that our Local Welfare Assistance research is such a vital piece of work. It highlights the postcode lottery of support that is available and provides clear and robust data which shows the levels of crisis support that are available across the UK. Too often the default position for both social landlords and the Government, is to say people can already access local authority support thus the need for further help is less pressing. Our evidence shows that this is not the case, certainly across large parts of England. This research allows us to push for more funding for crisis support, while also evidencing the need for alternative support such as furniture provision in social housing.

As the leading researchers into local authority crisis support, we are also able to ensure that the provision of furniture and appliances remains a core objective of this type of support. Therefore, our first major research focus in 2023/2024 is Local Welfare Schemes and how the Household Support Fund is being spent around the country. Our previous research in this field has been used by the



Work and Pensions Select Committee to scrutinise local crisis support and as local authority budgets continue to be squeezed and as the Government provides another short-term funding pot to support people through the Household Support Fund, we must keep a close eye on what funding is available and how accessible it is. Once funding is diverted to other budgets, it will be even harder to bring it back to crisis support.

We are also in conversations with Liverpool City Council about a housing summit to bring together social landlords in the city and work with them to ultimately create furnished tenancies in at least 10% of their stock. This could be a real opportunity to develop a ground-breaking pilot, demonstrating partnership working between local authorities and housing associations to end furniture poverty, with End Furniture Poverty steering the way forward. We would help landlords to capture relevant data, and then produce a series of learning reports, quarterly or biannual updates and a final report to chart the progress and hopefully the success of the scheme, including tenant voices. Of course, with a joint-working project of this nature, we would require the full buy-in of all partners to make it work but there are exciting opportunities for innovation.

## Performance against targets 2022-2023

Publication of LWAS 2022/2022 Research Update	✓
Publication of Extent of Furniture Poverty Research	✓
Publication of Furnished Tenancies Blueprint	✓

## Priorities / Targets for 2023-2024

- Publication of LWAS 2022/2023 and Household Support Fund research
- Explore housing summit opportunities and partnership working with Liverpool City Council and social landlords





## Creating Social Value

### To lobby and Campaign for the Eradication of Furniture Poverty



### Blueprint for Furniture Provision in Social Housing

This year we published our Blueprint for Furniture Provision in Social Housing, a guide for social landlords to help them to create furniture schemes. This is a key campaigning tool, allowing us to support landlords, overcome their reluctance to introduce furnished tenancies, and give them all the information they need to prepare business cases.

We were very grateful to the Fusion 21 Foundation for their support and their £25k grant to allow us to bring in Ben Hardman to work with us on this vital project. Ben's former role at Citizen Housing association meant he was ideally placed to support with the research and writing of the Blueprint. Together we met with 26 social landlords, representatives of the DWP, staff from local authorities, tenant groups, and the Chartered Institute of Housing and National Housing Federation.

The publication of the Blueprint was welcomed across the social housing sector and distributed widely, both by us and between housing professionals. We had emails from several housing professionals who we were already working with saying they had been sent the Blueprint by their contacts too. We were also invited to write blogs and hold webinars with the Chartered Institute of Housing and the National Federation of Housing. It also led to a strong relationship with the Housing Quality Network and we presented at three separate webinars for them to large audiences of social housing professionals, as well as webinars for two tenant organisations, TPAS and the Taroe Trust, both of which were attended by housing association staff too.

### Work in Westminster

We continued with our lobbying work in Westminster with further meetings and briefings for Ian Byrne, Labour MP for West Derby and with Paul Maynard, Conservative MP for Blackpool North. Paul had been requesting a Parliamentary debate on furniture poverty for several months and the day after the publication of our Extent of Furniture Poverty report, his request was granted. The debate was attended by Mims Davies, as a Minister for the Department for Work and Pensions and she has agreed to meet with us and to consider including flooring as a requirement for all social landlords as part of the ongoing Decent Homes Standard review. Although this occurred in May 2023, we felt it relevant to include in this annual report due to its connection to the Extent of furniture poverty report.

A review of the Household Support Fund by the Work and Pensions Parliamentary Select Committee called for evidence submissions. We submitted our most recent LWA report, only to be told they were already using it and we received a very positive email from the chair of the committee, Sir Stephen Timms MP, who has asked to visit us in the Autumn of 2023 to discuss our work.



We also met with the Department for Work and Pensions in January as part of the review to advise them on the guidance for tranche four of the fund. We recommended that the guidance required an element of the funding to be open for applications so people can apply for support and this is now in the guidance. We also raised their awareness of the importance of furniture and appliance provision and we will be able to further emphasise that need when we publish our next LWA report which will show the levels of support available across the UK, and where the gaps are.

We were also contacted by the House of Commons Petitions Committee to brief their Chair, Catherine McKinnell MP ahead of a Parliamentary debate on bed poverty. The debate took place in December and featured extensive quotes of our research.





# Other Lobbying

We met with Sioned Williams, Member of the Senedd (Welsh Parliament), who approached us to discuss our research around LWA, (called Discretionary Assistance Fund, or DAF, in Wales). Although Wales has a much better funded scheme than in England, we were able to highlight the challenges people face when trying to find information on the scheme and we discussed how to make DAF more accessible and how to increase awareness of the scheme. We looked at how it could be more visible on local authority and Welsh government websites, and the potential to increase funding. We also talked about how the Welsh Parliament could work with social landlords to encourage more FT provision, looking at flooring policies and ways to utilise preloved furniture, such as being creative with budgets and looking at overall savings to the public purse. They pledged to look again at their schemes.

We successfully negotiated another pro bono stand at Housing 2022, the country's main social housing conference in Manchester. Our stand was extremely busy with people literally queuing to talk to us. This is partly because of our increased profile but also because of the extreme pressures tenants are facing due to the cost of living crisis and a desire from social landlords to do more to help.

We were part of the campaign led by Gordon Brown pushing for more cost of living support and a co-signatory of the letter that went to all MPs and the national media, and a letter to both Conservative leadership candidates. We will continue to ensure that furniture provision and the issue of furniture poverty remains a key part of all campaigning around poverty.

We then went on to meet with Gordon Brown to discuss his work creating 'multibanks', which bring together food banks, clothing banks, baby banks and more under one roof to offer a range of support. We found that his report outlining the project cited our research and he was very interested to hear about our forthcoming Extent of Furniture Poverty report, and later personally congratulated us on it. We hope to continue to work with Gordon over the coming year to discuss how furniture and appliances can be built into the multibank model.



# Local Welfare Assistance Lobbying

We also continued our involvement with the LWA/Crisis Support Group along with The Children's Society, Turn2Us, Trussell Trust and many more. End Furniture Poverty recommended a shift in the group's approach. We have been lobbying for increased funding for LWA from central Government for two years with no success. However, our work did lead to the creation of the Household Support Fund (HSF) - a fund that the Government is committed to, at least until March 31st 2023. HSF has managed to achieve national recognition due to its single brand, (as opposed to the variety of LWA brands across local authorities), and its continued reference in the national media. Therefore, we suggested that we pressure the Government to make HSF a permanent fund, or at least for a minimum of three years, and to continue at the current funding levels, so a £1 billion per annum investment.

The group agreed with our recommendation and together we prepared a joint briefing paper which mirrors our previous LWA 'asks', but simply changes the title of the scheme to HSF. So this means ring-fenced funding, strong guidance and a continued focus on furniture and white goods. We all know these are extremely challenging times for public finances but we must continue to bear pressure. The briefing paper was distributed to all MPs and Government ministers.

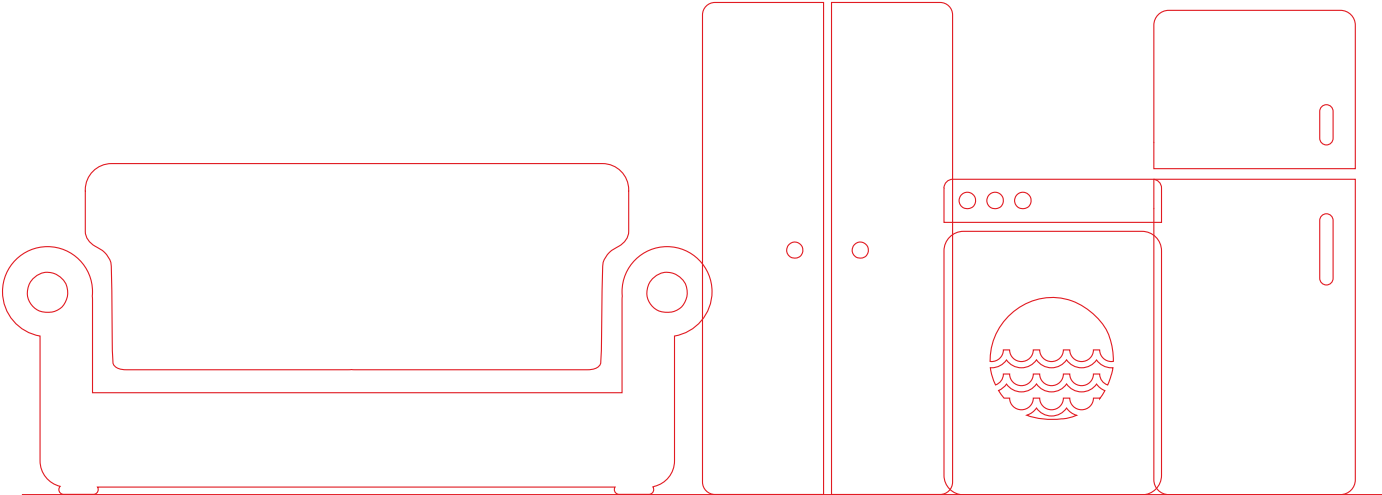
# Digital Grants Portal

We continue to be a member of the Social Innovation Council, led by Lightning Reach, and our digital grants portal is now a valuable tool for people seeking help. People can register on the portal, complete a profile, and then are matched with a range of support, such as grants, which they can then go on to apply for with most of their application already completed, and other support such as social tariffs, and support from several local authorities who have signed up to the project. This means that people no longer have to research what support might be available to them and work out if they are eligible, and it helps grant providers too by ensuring that applications are completed by those who are eligible in the first place.

The portal also makes use of our Local Welfare Assistance finder and tells people if there is a scheme in their area and how to access it.

We have been directing people to the portal and 976 people have registered for the site through us, with 765 completing a profile and receiving at least one match for grant support. So far over £5m of support has been distributed via the portal with over 50,000 people registered.

We hope that more grant providers and local authorities will come on board in the year ahead.







## Time for Bed

We were approached by a primary school teacher in Kirkby, Knowsley, saying she had several children in the school who she knew did not have a bed to sleep in. This call led to a new venture for us, Time for Bed, a fundraising appeal to raise money to give away free beds for 0 to 18 year olds across Merseyside. Our research shows that there are at least 18,000 children in Merseyside without their own bed.

We successfully applied to the Steve Morgan Foundation for funding to appoint a Fundraising Manager to head up the appeal and kickstarted the programme in January 2023, ahead of a formal launch in May 2023. During this period, we created a new website, applied for several grants which brought in £8,000 to start the fund, and met with a wide range of partners and stakeholders to build support. We expect to have much to share about this exciting project next year.



## Partnership Working

We are active members of the following groups:

- Liverpool City Council's Poverty Action Group
- Liverpool City Region's Social and Solidarity Economy Reference Panel
- The Grantmakers Alliance
- End Child Poverty Coalition
- The Reuse Network – End Furniture Poverty's Head of Policy, Research & Campaigns is also a trustee.
- Emergency Support Working Group, (formerly the Crisis and Destitution Policy Group)
- Keep the Lifeline/Cost of Living Group, led by Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- Lingleigh Flooring Research Steering Group
- Social Innovation Council

## Digital Presence

We launched an updated website during 2022/2023 with a refreshed brand. In the previous year visitors to our website rose by 47,000, up to 133,500k. We maintained this high level of traffic with over 130,000 visitors to the site.

As a small team and due to the nature of our research programme and work, while we are active on social media, it is not a primary focus. However, we still increased our X (Twitter) following from 1,892 to 2,025, and our mailing list subscribers increased from 2,658 to 3,171.

## Speaking Events

- TPAS, (Tenant Participation Advisory Group) – two webinars
- Malvern Hills Poverty Alleviation Summit
- CEOs of Gloucestershire Social Landlords
- Social Enterprise UK
- Housemark Voids Club
- Blueprint Circular Economy Roadshow
- Reuse Network Conference
- National Federation of Housing Cost of Living Webinar
- East of England Community Investment Group, organised by HACT.
- Rent Income Excellence Network Annual Conference
- EFP LWA Report Webinar
- Housing Quality Network – two webinars
- Taroe Trust
- Chartered Institute of Housing Northern Housing Festival
- Association of Charitable Organisations webinar
- University of Cambridge student engagement webinar

### Performance against targets 2022-2023

### Did we achieve?

Launch a Furnished Tenancies campaign using findings of Furnished Tenancies Research project



Increase End Furniture Poverty social media following by 20%

Maintain traffic to the End Furniture Poverty website at over 100,000 visitors a year



### Priorities / Targets for 2023-2024

- Continue our furnished tenancies campaign to encourage more social landlords to consider furniture provision.
- Maintain traffic to the End Furniture Poverty website at over 100,000 visitors a year.
- Speak at a minimum of 15 events.
- Launch Time for Bed.



We believe that our End Furniture Poverty campaign creates a huge amount of social value, but the value created by a campaign is difficult to measure. We will explore ways to measure success.



## Creating Social Value

# Developing and running successful social businesses that tackle furniture poverty

At FRC Group, all our businesses are social enterprises and registered charities that exist to tackle furniture poverty. Although all our businesses are social enterprises, they create social value in different ways. In this section, we look at the businesses that create inherent social value.

These businesses can be broadly separated into those that supply new furniture and those that provide pre-loved furniture.



## New Furniture

### FRC Living

Furniture Resource Centre rebranded as FRC Living early 2022-23 with a new website being launched. Operationally, it was a demanding year across our three sites in Liverpool, Manchester and North Tyneside, as we were still working and living with the negative impacts of the pandemic on staff availability, supply chain, recruitment challenges and increasing costs. We continued to make covid safe deliveries to protect both customers and staff, making 26,231 deliveries of essential furniture to people's homes during the year.

During the year, FRC Living retained existing contracts and won new contracts with new customers across the UK. FRC's existing Furnished Tenancy customers expanded their service into new areas resulting in more properties furnished with essential items. FRC Living continued to increase its social housing customer base, furnishing temporary accommodation units including foyers, domestic violence units and hostels. FRC Living also completed large project installations for NHS key worker accommodation.

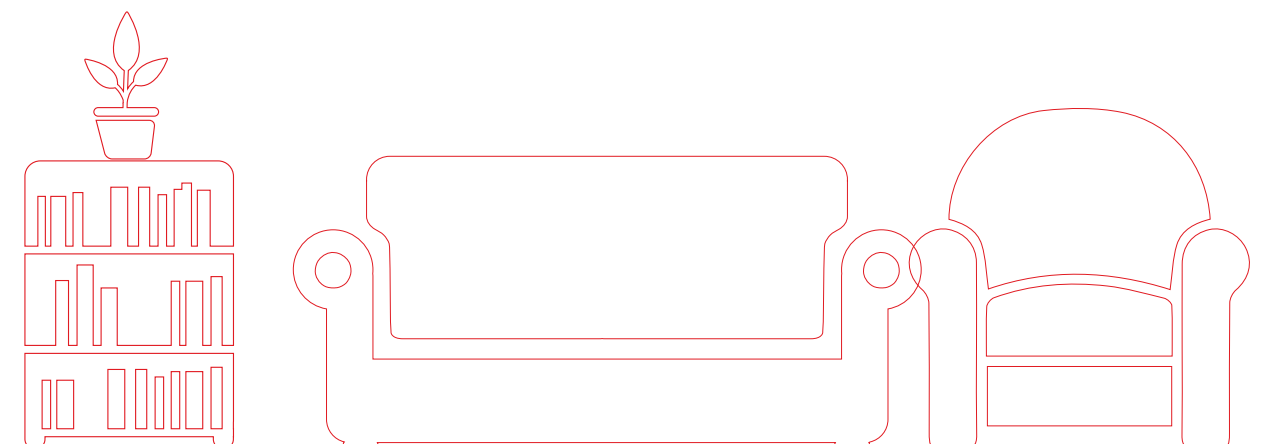
FRC Living's strategic dual supply procurement approach ensured that we were able to ensure continuity of supply on most lines throughout the year. Stock availability was vital to our customers who were continuing to support the most vulnerable at a time of real crisis and part of the reason why we were able to retain our strong customer base.

### Local Welfare Assistance

FRC continued to supply essential items from all three depots to LWA schemes across the country. By nature, these contracts have a fast delivery turnaround and need to be very customer focused and straightforward for the award recipients to receive their essential items, often in an emergency situation.

LWA spend significantly increased across all depots during 2022/23 as many local authorities used the Household Support Fund (HSF) to supplement and enhance the existing fund. HSF enabled local authorities to offer more choice and bespoke solutions to individual customer needs rather than having to select furniture items from a rigid set list. We responded by broadening our offer, e.g. increased white goods range at different sizes/capacities, so that large families could access larger capacity products which are more economical.

The sudden and sharp increase at the start of 2022 in LWA spend did raise operational challenges initially as we quickly had to increase driver and customer service resource to deal with the demand. This was against the backdrop of national driver shortages. However, through good communication and working closely with our customers we were able to navigate this challenging period and ensure that customers received their essential items.

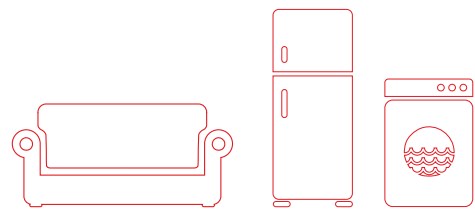




# Buckingham Interiors



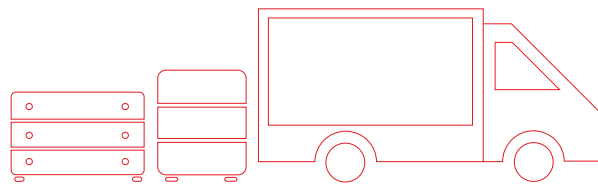
Buckingham Interiors continued to expand its customer base, delivering interior design and furniture project installations across the country. The product range and mood boards were developed to reflect changes in style and interiors whilst still retaining requirements around living with dementia where applicable.



Distributed 76,990 items of essential furniture



Won 5 new contracts



Made 26,231 deliveries across the UK



Retained 5 contracts

## Performance against targets 2022-2023

Retain existing contracts



Bring on new customers/contracts



Explore new markets relevant to FRC Living products and services

Continuous development and improvement of our range and offer

Improve our understanding of our supply chain and the impacts that we make

## Did we achieve?

### Priorities / Targets for 2023-2024

- Retain existing contracts.
- Secure new customers/contracts.
- Develop and launch a service providing flexible furniture solutions to social landlords and their tenants.
- Continuous development and improvement of our range and offer.
- Develop and enhance our supply chain to procure more efficiently and deliver financial savings.

## Pre-loved Furniture

# Bulky Bob's

The reuse of unwanted, great quality furniture has been a major part of the lifeblood and identity of FRC Group for over 20 years. FRC Group's reuse brand – Bulky Bob's – is the UK's foremost furniture reuse operation and has achieved national and international recognition.



# Bulky Bob's Liverpool

Bulky Bob's operating model of servicing council contracts on a commercial basis took a severe blow when its largest customer – Liverpool City Council – brought the bulky waste collection service 'in house' and decided to stop the reuse element in order to reduce costs.

This brought an end to Bulky Bob's large-scale reuse of great quality preloved furniture items in Liverpool. After two decades of successful partnership working with Liverpool City Council to collect, reuse and recycle bulky household waste the service ended in November 2022.

Despite losing the contract to manage bulky waste for Liverpool City Council, Bulky Bob's felt that there could be an opportunity for an independent collection service which provided great quality service, collected all furniture items regardless of quality and prioritised the reuse of furniture to End Furniture Poverty.

In 2023, Bulky Bob's launched a pilot of a very competitively priced independent service operating in Liverpool and neighbouring boroughs.

Unfortunately, despite the best efforts of a fantastic staff team, the pilot found that the commercial collection service neither produced a meaningful volume of reusable furniture or generated a surplus.

Also, the pilot did not suggest any credible alternative methodologies that would make the service profitable or increase the volumes of furniture to a meaningful level.

Therefore, the pilot was not continued. However, Bulky Bob's continues to work to develop a new furniture reuse offer which will once again use great quality preloved furniture to combat furniture poverty.



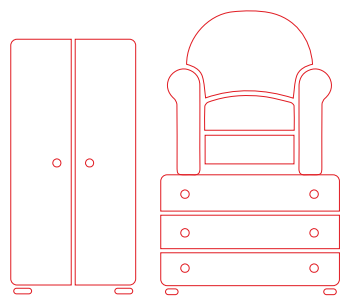
## Bulky Bob's Household Collections Oldham

Bulky Bob's holds the contract to deliver a bulky waste collection and reuse and recycling service to Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council (OMBC).

This contract was originally awarded in 2006 and has been retained by Bulky Bob's at every occasion that it has been competitively tendered since then.

The contract expired in April 2023 and was tendered during 2022/23.

OMBC took a groundbreaking and innovative approach to the tender and combined the bulky waste collection and reuse contract with its Local Welfare Assistance (LWA) contract to create a 'joined up', seamless service which fully integrates great quality preloved furniture into the support provided by the council to people in furniture poverty.



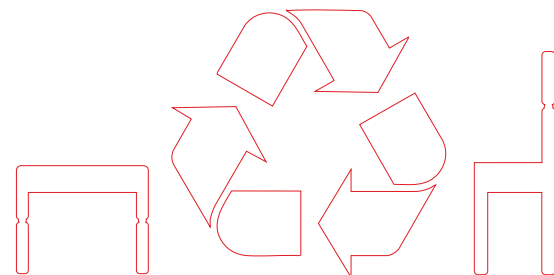
**5,610 collections of furniture from households**

In essence the new contract requires a service provider who can both collect bulky waste but then prepare great quality items for reuse and channel these to LWA recipients – along with any new furniture required due to unavailability of preloved items.

Bulky Bob's partnered with FRC Living to tender for this combined service and was awarded the contract in March 2023 with a mobilisation date of April 2023.

Bulky Bob's applauds OMBC for the vision they have shown and their ability to combine the work of two previously separate 'silos' within the council to provide an improved service to residents and provide financial savings to the council.

Throughout 2022/23 the Bulky Bob's operation in Oldham continued to provide brilliant service to people with unwanted furniture and to people in furniture poverty who benefited from the furniture.



**Reused and recycled 350,137 tonnes of furniture, appliances and other bulky waste**



## Bulky Bob's Mattresses and Bed Bases

The UK throws away more than 7 million mattresses annually, the vast majority of which go straight to landfill, massively impacting upon the environment.

This is at a time when the work of End Furniture Poverty has shown that there are over 6 million people in the UK in furniture poverty and over 18,000 children without a bed of their own in Merseyside alone.

As part of our mission to End Furniture Poverty, we prioritised the reuse of beds and designed and developed the world's first automated mattress 'UltraClean' machine, which processes up to 20 mattresses per hour, meaning huge volumes of mattresses can be given a new and extended life.

At the heart of the solution is the UltraClean seven-stage process. The process ensures high-quality, pre-loved mattresses, which may have been destined for landfill or broken down into parts for recycling, are UltraCleaned to remove:

- Odours
- Stains
- Bacteria
- Viruses
- Mould
- Mildew
- Bed bugs and fleas

Every mattress reused saves 79.5 kg of CO<sub>2</sub>, equivalent to taking 14 cars off the road for a day. Bulky Bob's first 'UltraClean' machine is affectionately named 'Mattilda.' It's the first of its kind and makes such a huge difference to those in need as we can donate good quality, clean mattresses.

However, in 2022/23 our mattress cleaning operation experienced two very substantial challenges.

In Summer 2022 Bulky Bob's began negotiations with a national hotel chain looking for an improved way to deal with the often great quality beds that they replace as part of their rolling refurbishment cycle.

Bulky Bob's mattress reuse solution provides the social and environmental value that the hotel chain are looking for.

As part of the due diligence process, Bulky Bob's had a number of mattresses tested by industry body the Furniture Industry Research Association to prove that the cleaning process did not negatively impact upon the fire retardancy of the mattress.





The mattress cleaning machine was designed specifically to protect and retain the fire retardancy of mattresses and not reduce fire retardancy and degrade performance.

However, some of the mattresses failed the post cleaning fire retardancy test. It became apparent that whilst the process had not reduced the fire retardancy of the treated mattresses, there is no guarantee that the mattress had the right level of retardancy before cleaning.

Whilst the process does not reduce the fire retardancy it does not improve the fire retardancy either.

The knowledge that some mattresses may not have optimal fire retardancy led to the decision to suspend mattress cleaning until a solution could be developed.

After intensive research and development, Bulky Bob's formed the view that the optimal solution to the challenge is to apply fire retardancy to all mattresses being cleaned. This ensures that regardless of their state prior to cleaning, they will assuredly be fire retardant to the highest level once cleaned.

Bulky Bob's work was supported by a £100k grant from Innovate UK to develop and introduce a new fire retardancy application process and capability to the UltraClean process and this work commenced in April 2023.

The other challenge that Bulky Bob's mattress cleaning operation faced in 2022/23 was the cessation of the Liverpool Council bulky waste contract. As the largest of Bulky Bob's two council contracts, this work supplied the vast majority of great condition, reusable mattresses to be cleaned and distributed to people in furniture poverty.

In the absence of this large-scale contract, Bulky Bob's began dialogue with large scale accommodation operators – hotel chains, student accommodation providers, holiday parks – to source large volumes of reusable mattresses.

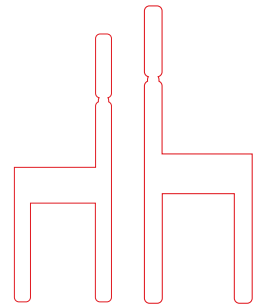
Whilst 2022/23 was a challenging year for Bulky Bob's mattress cleaning operation and a minimal number of mattresses were actually cleaned, we still believe that UltraCleaning can play a significant role in getting great quality, low-cost mattresses to people in furniture poverty and remain committed to this initiative.



## Donating preloved furniture

# Bulky Bob's Furniture World - Liverpool

As mentioned previously, Bulky Bob's Furniture World (BBFW) is the showroom in which the items that have been prepared for reuse are accessed by families in furniture poverty.



BBFW supplies furniture to various customers:

- Those referred to BBFW from a host of frontline agencies – these people are provided furniture free of charge.
- Those granted a furniture 'voucher' by the LWA schemes operated by Liverpool Council or Oldham Council. In this case the furniture is free to the end user, but Bulky Bob's receives a payment from the council for the supply of preloved furniture.
- Those who are straightforward customers who buy great quality, preloved furniture at very low cost – with even greater discounts for those who self-present as being in receipt of benefit.

In all instances, customers choose from the well-presented furniture. Those customers receiving free furniture choose the item they want regardless of the selling cost displayed for those customers who are purchasing the item.

As a response to Covid, BBFW introduced online viewing of stock which saw store staff providing a virtual tour of the store via facetime, Zoom or Teams.

This is a convenient and cost and time effective way for our customers to shop and this practice has continued.

BBFW provides a lifeline for people in furniture poverty and has become a much loved and well used part of the welfare support network in both Oldham and Liverpool.

It was a sad and devastating day when BBFW Liverpool had to permanently close its doors in November 2022.

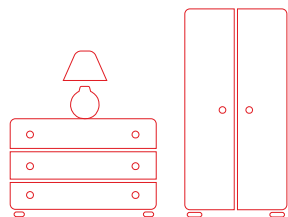
Liverpool City Council's decision to take the Bulky Household Waste Contract in-house meant that we could no longer access the volume of furniture we needed to keep the shop open. Sadly, this meant that six months into the year, we had to close the store, close our crisis referral scheme, and say goodbye to our wonderful team of staff who had supported local people living in furniture poverty so well, for so long.

This meant that whilst we were able to help hundreds of families in the early part of the year, we were not able to achieve the full year targets that we set for the Liverpool store and BBFW overall.

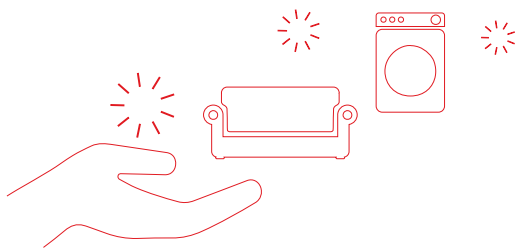


## Oldham

BBFW Oldham had a fantastic year and continued to support customers who were referred by frontline agencies, supported by Oldham Council's LWA scheme or were paying customers in need of great quality, low-cost furniture.



**Sold 606 low cost items of furniture**



**Donated 1,330 items of furniture through our crisis referral scheme to the value of £15,452**



**Helped 154 customers**

## North Tyneside

The BBFW presence located at our North Tyneside base operates differently than the Liverpool and Oldham stores.

North Tyneside Council operate a Furnished Tenancy scheme for residents and FRC are the main supplier. If a furnished tenancy is cancelled or amended because the residents' circumstances have changed, North Tyneside Council request collection of the full furniture pack or individual item(s). FRC provides a collection and stock management service which involves collecting unwanted items and returning them to the warehouse for inspection and repair/clean where applicable. White goods are cleaned, and PAT tested to ensure that they meet the correct safety standards. Wooden furniture items and sofas are cleaned and tested for stability.

Items that present as being "as new" are made available to North Tyneside Council who will allocate them to new orders. Items that are compliant and of a good standard but are not "as new" are made available for donation to the North Tyneside Council referral scheme. The council supports local charities who work with people living in furniture poverty and cannot access furnished tenancies or the LWP scheme. The local charities can make furniture referrals to the North Tyneside scheme (check name) and items are donated to people living in need with FRC providing free delivery and installation.

Performance against targets 2022-2023	Did we achieve?
---------------------------------------	-----------------

Targets not met due to store closure

All BBFW Customers	7,250
Retail sales	3,450
Crisis Donations	1,200
Community Events	800
LWP Preloved	1,800

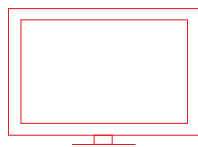
## IT Reuse

Every year businesses dispose of millions of items of IT equipment — much of which is reusable. At the same time families living on low incomes cannot afford the computers that they need to play a real part in society. Children are falling behind at school as education becomes more IT centered, unemployed people cannot develop the skills and experience they need to compete in the job market, and elderly people cannot use communication tools like Skype that would reduce their social isolation.

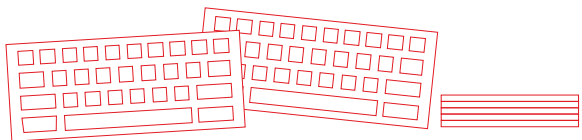
The most common way for businesses to manage old computers and IT equipment has been to consign them to a storage cupboard or room where they languish until the room is full or needs to be cleared. Whilst this may be a practical way to deal with the problem, it poses a huge risk to a company. Unless the computer — and more importantly the data on the computer — can be proven to be managed in line with GDPR regulations regarding security and access, then the company can face a fine of up to £500,000.

Through IT Reuse, we have contracts with Liverpool universities to collect, data wipe, refurbish and reuse unwanted IT equipment, making refurbished items available to low-income families and schools in the community.

**Collected 2,389 units of preloved IT equipment**



**Sold 611 units of low cost IT equipment**



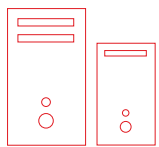
Performance against targets 2022-2023	Did we achieve?
---------------------------------------	-----------------

In 2023-2024 we will rewrite and develop our Impact Strategy considering how we can continue to make a difference in people's lives and the part that reuse will play in our strategy.

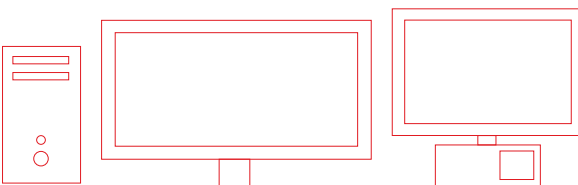
We have set a social value budget of £4,042,000 for the year, split between the different areas as below:

Area	23/24 Budget
BB Preloved Sales	£478,000
BB Crisis Donations	£138,000
BB Local Welfare Provision	£722,000
Furnished Tenancies	£570,000
FRC Other	£756,500
FRC Local Welfare Provision	£1,377,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£4,041,500</b>

**Refurbished 1,319 units of preloved IT equipment**



**Donated 66 units of preloved IT equipment**




Creating Social Value

Training People out of Poverty

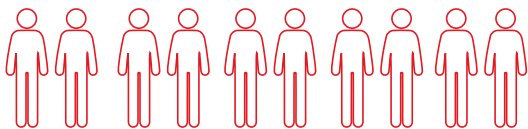
Driving Change

Driving Change is our fully salaried training and employment programme. It aspires to move people into higher-paid employment on completion of their FRC Group training. Driving Change recruits both long-term unemployed people and those in vulnerable employment such as zero-hours contracts and low wages. The programme focuses on behaviours and skills and is tailored to everyone so that they gain the experience that will allow them to move on to better paid, more secure roles. We recruit people who already have driving licences and their main training objective is to obtain a LGV Class 2 licence.

Performance against targets 2022-2023	Did we achieve?
70% of people completing Driving Change will go into employment, training, or further education	
75% working towards LGV Class 2	

Priorities / Targets for 2023-2024

- 70% of people completing Driving Change will go into employment, training or further education
- 100% working towards LGV Class 2



Employed 123 People

VIP (Volunteers, Interns, Placements and Students)

VIP is our volunteering programme where people can work towards their own goals or give to charity by volunteering their time and skills. Volunteering opportunities are available in all parts of FRC Group, however most volunteers worked in our Bulky Bob's workshop or in our store. Our work with volunteers was impacted by the closure of our Bulky Bob's store, meaning that we continued to work with our existing volunteers, but paused recruitment of additional volunteers.

Performance against targets 2022-2023	Did we achieve?
Recruit 3 cell leaders	
Recruit 8 VIPs	Paused

Priorities / Targets for 2023-2024

- Recruit a Community Engagement Coordinator whose role includes reassessing and refreshing the volunteer experience across FRC Group



100% paid at least the Real Living Wage

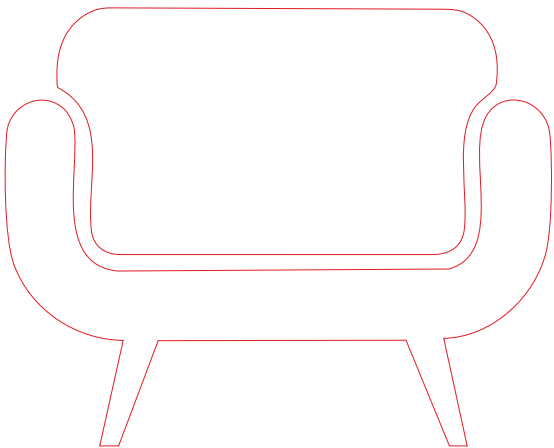
Creating Social Value

Using our core skills to develop and run successful commercial businesses, using the profits to create social value across FRC Group.

Using our skills to develop commercially successful businesses that create social value and using profits to support our social objectives is a key strategy for FRC Group. The main aim of these businesses is to create profit, although social value is created in these businesses through employment of trainees on the Driving Change programme.

Buckingham Interiors

2022-23 was Buckingham Interiors most successful sales year with steady sales throughout the year. Customers fully welcomed our Business Development Managers (BDMs) into their schemes to carry out furniture sample roadshows and resident consultations. This customer focused engagement received positive feedback and delivered successful scheme fit outs. The active role of the Account Executives, who support the BDMs, substantially increased the capacity to help us retain current customers and win strategic contracts with new customers across the UK. During the year we exhibited at the national CIH Housing Conference in June 22 and the Northern Housing Festival in February 23 as a means of networking with existing and new customers.



Performance against targets 2022-2023	Did we achieve?
Retain existing contracts	
Bring on new customers/contracts	
Explore new markets relevant to Buckingham Interiors products and services	
Continuous development and improvement of our range and offer	
Improve our understanding of our supply chain and the impacts that we make	

Priorities / Targets for 2023-2024

- Retain existing contracts
- Bring on new customers/contracts
- Increase Sales and Customer Experience team capacity to boost new sales
- Explore new markets relevant to Buckingham Interiors products and services
- Continuous development and improvement of our range and offer to meet the changing needs of our customers
- Improve our understanding of our supply chain and the impacts that we make



## Our Stakeholders

**During 22/23 FRC continued to have regular account management meetings with customers to gain feedback on service provision and performance. These meetings are a vital part of FRC's stakeholder engagement and where we get our most useful feedback which enables us to improve. Through these contract meetings we can receive feedback around quality of service from the end users who are receiving our furniture packages.**

During 22/23 we identified that we need to invest more time and resource into contract management so that we can ensure a consistent and quality driven service. During 2024/25 we will be recruiting for the new post of Customer Account Manager.



- Our Blueprint for Furniture Provision in Social Housing required extensive stakeholder engagement. To gather the information for the report, we engaged with 41 housing professionals from 27 different social landlords. The distribution of the report included a copy sent to our mailing list of 2,905 participants where it was opened 2,230 times.
- Copies were also emailed to all of the contributors to the research, and it was sent to the 14 members of the Grant Makers Alliance. This includes the CEOs and senior directors of a range of grant making charities including Buttle UK, Glasspool, Family Fund, BBC Children in Need and others.
- We also met with Ian Byrne, Labour MP for West Derby, Paul Maynard, Conservative MP for Blackpool North, and Catherine McKinnell, Labour MP for Newcastle, in her role as Chair of the House of Commons Petitions Committee, to discuss the report and our other work. We delivered a webinar on the Blueprint with 41 attendees and a further 26 people have viewed the recording of the session online.
- The Blueprint was also sent out to our contacts across the housing sector, which led our writing a comment piece for Inside Housing: <https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/comment/comment/furnished-tenancies-are-the-obvious-answer-to-furniture-poverty-78833>
- There was a guest blog on the Homes for Cathy website: <https://homesforcathy.org.uk/2022/11/07/furniture-provision-piece-of-the-puzzle-to-sustainable-tenancies-as-cost-of-living-escalates/>
- A blog on the CIH website: <https://www.cih.org/blogs-and-articles/a-blueprint-for-furniture-provision-end-furniture-poverty>
- The Blueprint also featured in a series on the Cost of Living produced by CIH: <https://www.cih.org/media/qcojptr4/0508-cost-of-living-crisis-volfive-v1.pdf>
- We also presented to TPAS members, (Tenant Participation Advisory Service) to talk about the Blueprint in November, attended by around 30 members, and the Taroe Trust in December, attended by around 15 members. We also presented at CIH's Northern Housing Festival in Harrogate in February.
- Our Resetting Crisis Support report involved sending Freedom of Information requests to all 152 upper tier local authorities in England. We distributed the report via our mailing list of almost 3,000 people and it was opened just under 1,500 times. We met with the Department for Work and Pensions in January to discuss the report and presented a webinar on the report, attended by 18 people.
- We presented at the Reuse Network Conference, attended by over 100 reuse charities from around the UK.
- We also engaged with dozens of social landlords across the UK, all asking for help and information with furniture provision. We provided one to one advice and guidance to all in the form of meetings and presentations.
- We received extensive coverage across national media, liaising with broadcast and print journalists on a variety of publications and shows to highlight the work End Furniture Poverty and the issue of furniture poverty in general.
- We received 5,556 emails from people asking for help, all living in furniture poverty. They all received a response specific to their need, (furniture or flooring) and where they live in the UK.

# Independent Limited Assurance Report to FRC Group

We have been engaged by the FRC Group to provide independent limited assurance on the selected aspects of the Furniture Resource Centre Limited standalone Social Value Report 2022-23 for the year ended 31 March 2023.

**Our conclusion**

Based on the work performed, in line with the agreed scope, nothing has come to our attention that indicates the Selected Information presented in the report has not been prepared in all material respects with the methodology as set out in the report. This conclusion is to be read in the context of what we say below.

**Professional standards applied, level of assurance and our independence**

We conducted a limited assurance review in accordance with International Standard on Assurance Engagements 3000 – “Assurance Engagements other than Audits and Reviews of Historical Financial Information” (‘ISAE 3000’) issued by the International Auditing and Assurance Standards Board. A limited assurance engagement is substantially less in scope than a reasonable assurance engagement. It does not include detailed testing of source data nor the operating effectiveness of processes and internal controls.

Our review has also been conducted in line with the principles of the AA1000 Assurance Standard and AA1000 Accountability Principles.

We have complied with the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (‘ICAEW’) Code of Ethics, which includes independence and other requirements founded on fundamental principles of integrity, objectivity, professional competence and due care, confidentiality and professional behaviour.

**Work done**

We are required to plan and perform our work in order to consider the risk of material misstatement of the Selected Information. In doing so, our procedures consisted primarily of:

- a) Interviews with FRC Group Management;
- b) Review of the FRC Group Approach to stakeholder engagement in the Impact Report 2022-23 and assessment of the outputs against performance targets set for 2022-23;
- c) Review of the FRC Group Approach to stakeholder engagement through interviews with employees responsible for managing engagement activities and review of selected associated documentation;
- d) Review of the approach of FRC Group in determining material issues to be included in the Report;
- e) Review of the coverage of material issues within the Report against the topics discussed by the FRC Group Board;

**FRC Group’s responsibilities**

The Directors of the FRC Group are responsible for:

- a) Designing, implementing and maintaining internal controls over information relevant to the preparation of the Selected Information as designated by the Board of Trustees, that is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error;
- b) Establishing objective Reporting Criteria for preparing the selected information.

**Our responsibilities**

We are responsible for:

- Planning and performing the engagement to obtain limited assurance about whether the Selected Information is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error;
- Forming an independent conclusion, based on the procedures we have performed and the evidence we have obtained; and
- Reporting our conclusion to the FRC Group.

This report has been prepared to assist the FRC Group in reporting its Social Value. We permit this report to be disclosed on the FRC Group’s website as a part of the Social Value Report 2022-23.

The procedures that we have performed are solely to assist you in reporting the Furniture Resource Centre’s social impact. Our report is not to be used for any other purpose and is solely for your information.

To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the FRC Group, for our work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.



