

# Customer

# connect

Keeping **Platform Housing Customers** in the know

## I am pleased to be able to share with you the latest edition of our Customer newsletter.

It brings us the opportunity to share the wide array of activity which has happened across our geography throughout the pandemic, ways in which many of you are engaged in helping us to redesign our services and opportunities for those not already involved, but interested, to be part of future events or maybe even become Community Champions.

Times remain difficult and despite us having a **"Freedom Day"** in July covid still remains as a shadow to how we do things both as individuals and as a business. We are seeing the supply of many routine things slow down, gaps on supermarket shelves and the now famous petrol shortage, that wasn't really a shortage. Like many businesses this is affecting us at Platform as well and our ability to get many things, especially materials and parts for maintenance is taking much longer and often more expensive.

As we came out of lockdown we also had backlogs to deal with on top of routine business, as did many of our suppliers, and this has all meant we have often found ourselves unable to respond as quickly as we would like to your requests.

For this I can only apologise and ask for your ongoing patience as we get through the coming few months which are often very busy in a normal year.

During October we have been asking all of our colleagues across Platform to just get out and involved in a number of Community activities, this allows them to get a feel for what is happening across our Communities and also for them to be more visible and accessible to you all.

We have had many useful conversations whilst out and about and will take all of your input and ensure it helps us prioritise things over the coming months. It also allows us the opportunity to learn about things we can do better or differently to make our services more accessible or useful to as many of our customers as possible.

In addition we have built a new Customer Survey system, which asks for your feedback on services as they are delivered. This will allow us a greater depth of understanding of what works well and not so well and allow us to improve how we work with you.

Over the rest of the year we will add more and more areas of service in to the system so we can capture your input and push forward with improving services across all areas of the business. More detail about this further in to the newsletter.

We have a new Customer Portal which many thousands of you are using and will be bringing additional functionality to it over the rest of the year. If you haven't yet signed up, please do so as it allows you access to information about your account, a simple way to keep your personal and contact information up to date and the ability to make payments online or request repairs.

Our Wellbeing fund continues to support many who are truly finding times difficult and will remain in place for the rest of our financial year, as times continue to be uncertain for so many. The newsletter tells you more about this, as well sharing information on many other areas of information an service access you may need.

**I hope you find the newsletter informative and helpful and wish everyone well until our next edition.**

**Elizabeth**



Elizabeth Froude.

# Customer Experience Panel

## What have the Panel been involved in?

- The Panel has been instrumental in the operational delivery of our Wellbeing Fund; working with us to create the processes around this to ensure it is as accessible and easy as possible for customers to apply for and receive funding.
- The Panel continue to influence and shape policy for the Group, with members regularly reviewing, amending and challenging policy and process documents to ensure the best outcome for our customers.

One example of this is their involvement in shaping our Platform Customer Contents Insurance to ensure it reflects the best possible solution for our customers as well as ensuring our communication and wording is clear and accessible.

- The Panel has also led a piece of work around the White Paper, creating a peer-to-peer project to better understand the implications of the Paper for tenants and then holding the Group to account with key questions and discussion.

Building safety is always front and centre in conversation for the Panel and they consistently act as a critical friend for the Group, challenging risks and decisions around gas compliance and fire safety.

- **Funding our Communities**

The Customer Experience Panel have been an integral part in awarding our Community Chest funding across our communities in 2020/21. The Panel helped us to award over £111,000 to community projects, groups and communities across our operating areas who used the money to fund community gardens, neighbourhood watch schemes, remote education equipment, lunches for the homeless and much more.



## How we worked during the pandemic

**Whilst the pandemic may have stopped our teams getting out and about for some of the year, it presented us with a huge opportunity to take stock and review how we involved customers across the Group to ensure this was consistent and fit for purpose.**

We refreshed role profiles, reviewed how we reward our involved customers and created new roles to allow customers more flexibility in how they might commit their time to supporting us.

We were able to carry out a broader range of engagement activities virtually with customers and communities and opened up opportunities to get involved to a wider range of customers who would have previously been unable to take part due to time, travel or other commitments.



Our focus is now turning to plans to involve more customers in our roles to ensure that the customer voice represents the diversity of customers across Platform neighbourhoods.

We want to build on the success of the past year and develop more ways for customers to have their voice heard where virtual engagement best suits their needs in addition to the face-to-face events and activities that we will run across our localities.

# Scrutiny

During 2020/21 our legacy scrutiny panels came together to create a unified Platform panel.

The newly formed panel brought together a diverse range of customers, from across Platform, with a wealth of knowledge and experience. We worked closely to support them in getting to grips with virtual meetings that they took to with ease and commenced with their first investigation as a new panel, along with a number of newly recruited panel members.

The scrutiny investigation was centred upon a review of the Voids Process (empty properties) and Lettable Standard, to get an understanding of the customer experience in this process as well as review the suitability of the Standard itself. The investigation surveyed new customers as well as those who had refused properties and interviewed a range of staff across the organisation.

The scrutiny panel put forward many recommendations as a result of the investigation, including a proposed review of the Standard which has been taken forward by the Group. As a result of their work an internal review is now taking place and further customer involvement has been embedded to ensure we maintain the customer voice throughout the process to create a new Platform Standard.



# Community Champions



## - making a difference in your neighbourhood

We are proud to have recruited **64 Community Champions** from the following areas:

<b>Severn</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Tame</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Witham</b>	<b>7</b>



Our Champions work with us to ensure your neighbourhoods are a friendly, safe and clean place to live. They're a real asset to us as our eyes and ears on the ground and have made a great start in delivering the role in their local areas - all whilst we've only been able to connect with them virtually!

Champions were invited to a Welcome Session in March 2021 with CEP members and Lisa Fairlie, Director of Operations. They heard from a number of key colleagues from across the organisation with presentations on a range of topics including Communities and Neighbourhoods, Asset Management, the Wellbeing Fund and Stay Nimble, and the Customer portal to equip them with information and knowledge to effectively signpost and inform customers out in the community. The session was recorded to share with future recruits.

Community Champions received welcome packs (pictured below) and newly recruited Community Champions will be provided with a Handbook, pin and pen. We will run virtual information sessions with Community Champions routinely and choose speakers based on what the Community Champions tell us they are interested in so we can best support them in their role.

We stay connected with our Champions throughout the year as they work in partnership with our Engagement Officers and Neighbourhood Officers to report key issues and identify areas for improvements out in our communities. They also communicate with each other, sharing best practice via our closed Facebook group that allows us to also share information and updates with them more efficiently and easily.

We're excited to continue to recruit customers across our operating areas into this valuable role and continue to see the impact it has across our communities.

We'd love you to get involved, so please complete the form on the Get Involved page ([www.platformhg.com/get-involved](http://www.platformhg.com/get-involved)) to register your interest and you can find out more here <https://www.platformhg.com/download.cfm?doc=docm93jijm4n5075.pdf&ver=7517>

# We're on a mission to find customers to join our Customer Experience Panel to represent the diverse voice and views of our customers...

Are you passionate about making sure the customer voice is heard?

Would you like the opportunity to be an ambassador for our customers?

We are looking for customers to join our Customer Experience Panel (CEP) to represent the voice and views of our customers who live in our 45000 homes across the country. The panel is a group of Customers, Board Members and senior colleagues who meet regularly to shape our strategy and the way deliver its services.

It's important to us that our Panel is truly representative of our customers so that what we do and deliver is shaped by the real challenges faced by people in our communities and properties across Lincolnshire and the East and West Midlands.

As a member of the Customer Experience Panel you will play a pivotal role in ensuring that customers are at the heart of everything we do by:

- Taking an active role in discussions and decision making that will shape the services we provide, through bi-monthly meetings that will take place flexibly and work around panel members' commitments and circumstances.
- Approving Platform Community Chest applications to support a range of improvements and initiatives across our communities.
- Taking an active role in feeding back on and overseeing the implementation of our strategies, our commitment to the Together with Tenants charter and our performance against our Customer Commitments.

If you want to work with us to improve services and represent the views of Platform customers, and gain new skills and experience, please email [involved@platformhg.com](mailto:involved@platformhg.com) or call us on **0333 200 7304** for more information.

Panel members will be paid £2,500 year, with the option to undertake the role on a voluntary unpaid basis. All reasonable expenses will be covered.

We welcome applications from customers from all diverse backgrounds to ensure that our panel mirrors our diverse demographics. We are particularly interested to receive applications from customers who meet any of the following criteria: BAME background, identifying as LGBTQ or visible/invisible disabilities. Full support will be provided to customers who require assistance due to physical or learning disabilities.

CUSTOMER



FOCUS ON DELIVERING RESULTS

# Repairs & Maintenance

## We have some important information about our repairs service

We are aware that you are waiting longer than we would all like for repairs to be completed; firstly, we would like to apologise for this and secondly, we feel it is important to tell you the reasons for this and what we are doing to address them.

### Why is everything taking so long?

#### Emergency repairs

Throughout the pandemic we have continued to deliver emergency repairs. We have completed more emergency repairs over the last 18 months than we ever have done, with 30% of our total repairs delivered on the day they were reported compared to 25% before the pandemic.

#### Routine repairs

Routine repairs are those that are currently most effected; in some cases customers are waiting three times longer for non-urgent repairs to be completed than they would have done prior to the pandemic.

The reasons for this are:

- There has been an increase in repairs being reported to us in a short period of time following the lifting of Covid 19 restrictions; this has created a peak in demand;
- Impacts of self-isolation and sickness across our team has reduced the number of colleagues available to complete your repairs;
- A booming construction industry which is making it really difficult for us to recruit people to our repairs teams;
- Material supplies taking much longer to arrive.

### What are we doing about it?

- We are continuing to work on ways to improve our communications to customers to ensure that you are always kept up to date on issues that affect you.
- We will continue to share important updates with customers via the website, our social media channels and also our customer newsletter.

### What can you do to help?

- We would ask you to be patient; if your repair worsens however please get in touch as we may need to adjust the priority of your repair;
- Ensure that you know where your fuse board is to reset tripped circuits, and your stop tap or isolation valves should you have a leak;
- And remember, please do not report any repairs that fall under your responsibility.



Please be assured that we are maintaining all safety and compliance works as a priority during these times.

We're not alone in this; these are sector wide issues that are affecting all housing providers delivering maintenance services. We are focused on resolving these for you as quickly as possible; for example, we are recruiting more people to deliver our services and are continuing to meet with our suppliers regarding our supply chain.

We'd like to thank you for your continued patience, support and understanding as we work hard to get our services back to normal.

**Please note**, due to this issue we have increased call volumes to our Call Centre; please use our Portal if possible during this time.



# Customer Transactional Surveys



We have been working on transforming how we collect feedback from you following you receiving a service from us.

We have adopted a new approach and we will be asking you to score us out of 5 for your most recent interaction with us, 5 being excellent and 1 being poor and then we will be asking you to tell us why you gave that score. There may be some additional questions on each survey, but these will be the standard questions used when you have completed a transaction. The surveys will be sent to you as close as possible to the time that you received a service from us.

The surveys that we are currently completing through this method are:

- Satisfaction with your most recent completed repair
- Satisfaction with your recent gas service
- Satisfaction with using our customer portal
- Satisfaction with the process of purchasing a home with us

In October we will also be collecting satisfaction on your experience with Our Contact Centre.

We will be starting to include other surveys in the same way throughout the year.

## Why are we doing this?

The survey will allow you to give us feedback whilst your experience of the service is still fresh in your mind.

## How will the surveys be carried out?

The surveys will be carried out by text message or e-mail, depending on which contact details we hold for you.

## Who is carrying out the survey?

The surveys are being carried out by Platform Housing Group.

## Will my answers be anonymous?

A small number of Platform Housing Group staff will have access to your answers in order to carry out a detailed analysis of the results. However, individuals will never be identified publicly.

All information will be kept safe and secure, and handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

## What happens with the survey results?

Once the survey is complete and we receive your feedback, a member of the team at Platform Housing Group will contact a sample of very dissatisfied customers to better understand their feedback.

As a whole we will look at the results in detail to identify the areas where we are performing well and where we have room for improvement. Our senior management team and staff will discuss the results and decide upon any action we may need to take. We will feedback details of the results and any consequential actions through the website.

If you have any questions regarding the article, or if you want to opt out of this survey, please email:

[surveys@platformhg.com](mailto:surveys@platformhg.com)

## Over the coming 12 months we will be working to:

### Deliver our planned improvement works including:

Kitchens	<b>670</b>	Roofs	<b>227</b>
Bathrooms	<b>405</b>	Lifts	<b>3 +2</b> major upgrades
Heating	<b>297</b>	Independent Living Scheme Modernisations	<b>3</b>
Boilers	<b>2,082</b>	Solar Thermal or Solar PV	<b>320</b>
Doors	<b>1,252</b>	Electrical Testing	<b>9,635</b>
	<b>+26</b> block entrance doors	Fire Safety	<b>£4m</b>
Windows	<b>419 +15</b> screens	De Montfort House works (see page 22)	<b>£3.7m</b>

We will also continue the development of the Platform Standard for all of our homes. With the help of our customers, we have already agreed kitchen and bathroom styles and design options. We are now moving forward renewing the standard of other elements including fire resistant front entrance doors.

# New grounds maintenance contract reduces fuel consumption

Earlier this year we signed a new grounds maintenance contract which is set to reduce fuel consumption.

The new contract - with **Ron Smith & Co** - will see fuel cost savings of around 7 per cent.



Our Property Care arm has leased 15 new tractor mowers to tackle a substantial workload throughout our operating area, including maintenance of our sheltered schemes, villages, estates, public open spaces, pre-sale shared ownership units and our Rooftop Housing contract.

## Our specialist housing retirement service is changing

**Over the coming months our Specialist Housing team will be embarking on a journey to transform its current retirement services.**

Our plans will build on all the excellent work that currently happens and seek to ensure consistency and elevate further our good reputation both internally and externally working to ensure what we do is really what our customers value.

Our vision and key aims for Specialist Housing Retirement Services are Harmonisation and Consistency which includes delivering consistent services and service charges across the group that our customers feel offer value for money and meet their needs and aspirations, clear communication about our services so everyone knows and understands what our retirement properties and services offer and consistently monitoring our retirement buildings to ensure health and safety, compliance and quality of work, managing our accommodation in ways that always meet customer expectations and property standards, maintaining and investing in homes and buildings in a planned way.

We want our customers and partners to understand all the excellent work that we do across Specialist Housing Retirement Services, with robust performance information and marketing that can be used to promote our services, its benefits and added social value, to be the first choice for retirement communities in our operating areas and have branding that celebrates the good reputation of our retirement services and is instantly recognisable across the country.

We aim to provide homes and services that support the changing needs of our customers by ensuring you see us as the obvious choice to provide you with a home for your retirement, allowing you to remain a customer of Platform for as long as you wish in a home of your choice.



# Celebrating Property Care's ISO certifications

**This year saw our Property Care arm achieve three ISO certificates following an audit - ISO 9001, ISO 14001 and ISO 45001 by Direct Assessment Services, a UKAS accredited certification body.**

The audit covered approximately 26,000 properties in Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Birmingham and Lincolnshire.

The ISO 9001 standard offers a quality management system - QMS - model for obtaining and meeting customer requirements and enhancing its satisfaction. The intent of an ISO 14001 environmental management system - EMS - is to develop a systematic management approach to the environmental concerns of the organisation. ISO 45001 is the world's international standard for occupational health and safety, issued to protect employees and visitors from work related accidents and diseases.

The audit involved more than 25 interviews with senior managers, lead engineers, service managers and trades people and nine site inspections to observe safety working practices and environmental compliance.

We will offer choice in the levels of service and accommodation types, enabling customers to live independently, enjoying active and quality lifestyles that meet individual needs and preferences with a range of services that will better support independence through enabling access to a wide range of assistive technologies and activities to promote health and wellbeing.

# Wellbeing Fund

emerge better



## Our Wellbeing Fund offers essential help and support.

The Wellbeing Fund provides fast and flexible support to our customers during challenging times and can help cover the cost of food, essential items such as school uniforms, energy and utility costs as well as helping to bridge the gap between a benefit application and the first payment.

The fund has already provided more than **£810,000** of fast and flexible support to almost **1,500** customers. Of immediate and practical help in the form of payments to cover fuel and water costs, benefits delays and other essentials. We have also supported local foodbanks and Christmas toy and gift appeals across our areas with donations of more than **£57,000**.

## Our Wellbeing Fund offers **ESSENTIAL SUPPORT** for



### FOOD

If you are struggling to eat regularly and well or you're being caught out with the spiralling cost of home school and homework catering, we can help.



### HOUSEHOLD ESSENTIALS

School uniform costs, new clothes, household cleaning items, washing powder, sanitary items all add up. We can help cover the cost of these, as well as the repair or replacement of your household white goods.



### ENERGY AND UTILITY COSTS

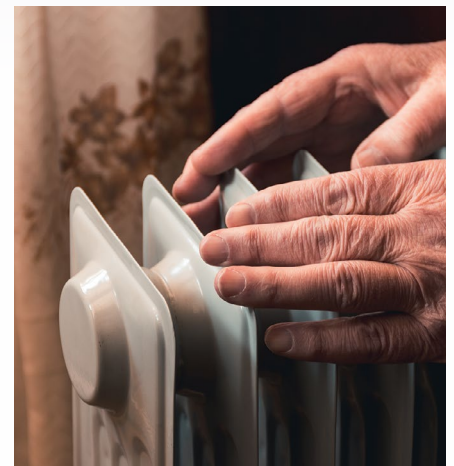
We can help with high heating costs, high rate debt repayment meters and water costs. **Don't forget to tick the 'referral to the support team' box when you apply so we can help look for grants and other schemes to help you.**



### NEW BENEFIT CLAIMS

The Benefits system is never easy to navigate and we know this may be the first time you may have had to use it. We can help bridge the gap between your first payment and any unplanned spend. Tick the 'referral to the support team' box when you apply so we can look for grants and other schemes to help you.

Make an application online today at <https://www.platformhg.com/wellbeing-fund>.







## Our Wellbeing Fund offers **SUPPORT PACKAGES** for



### **EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING**

If you're looking for help with training or accreditation costs or need sponsorship for tuition or a course, we can help. We can also give practical help with travel costs or work wear to get started in a new job. We have also joined forces with Stay Nimble to offer FREE online career coaching.

Find out more at **Stay Nimble can help you find a new career at Platform Housing Group (platformhg.com).**



### **HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE/WHITE GOODS/FLOORING**

Whether your white and kitchen goods are in need of repair or you've just moved in and need some help getting started, we can help.



### **DIGITAL INCLUSION**

Whether it is help getting connected to stay in touch or easing the multiple device broadband pressure, we can help. Whatever your digital need, we can help with a device to get you online.

**Tick the 'referral to the support team' box when you apply so we can look for grants and other schemes to help you.**



### **HEALTH AND WELLBEING**

Give your physical and mental health and wellbeing a much needed boost with support for classes, activities and groups.



Make an application online today at <https://www.platformhg.com/wellbeing-fund>



# Come work with us!

If you are a team player who want to help us to make a difference to local homes and lives, then why not join the Platform team.

Keep up-to-date with all our vacancies at [www.platformhg.com/join-our-team](http://www.platformhg.com/join-our-team)

We are **proud** to have been shortlisted in the UK Housing Awards 2021.

**Homebuilder of the year (more than 16,000 homes)**

For the work we do beyond building houses, working with customers to create **better communities**.

**Best supported housing landlord**

For services delivered at The Foyer in Malvern and within Worcester that **support young people** who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

**Congratulations to everyone involved and fingers crossed for the results!**



INSIDEHOUSING   
**UK HOUSING  
AWARDS**



Putting Customers First

# Our Annual Report to customers is available now!



**Packed full of facts and figures, it tells you more about the work we have been doing over the past year and the role that your Customer Experience Panel (CEP) has played in helping us to learn and improve services for the future**

**Here's a taste of what's in there...**

## Our Customer Experience Panel

Make up of customers from all parts of the country, the CEP continue to be a driving force in making sure our service delivery is up to scratch. They challenge our performance and make sure that customers are at the heart of all we do.

You can find our more about the work they have been doing to:

- Help support our Wellbeing Fund
- Develop our new customer Contents Insurance offering
- Review how we deal with complaints
- Raise the standard of the homes we let
- Understand the government charter for social housing residents and what we need to do to deliver it

## Your Feedback

A look at the complaints and compliments you have made and how satisfied you are with our services. You can also find out more about what changes we have made because of what you said and other work to improve your services.

## Getting Your Voice Heard

It's been a challenging year! But it hasn't stopped us giving you all the opportunities we can to get your voice heard. Find out about what you have been doing to help us up our game.

## Letting our Homes

A look at the work we are doing to make sure we let our homes quickly and to an agreed Platform standard. You can also find out more about our work to reduce homelessness.

## Stepping up Support

It's been a tough year for everyone and in response we have stepped, reached out and supported our customers through it all. Find out how we made it happen.

## New Homes

Discover how many homes we built last year, how many shared ownership sales we made and our plans to build more over the coming 12 months. You can also hear how you are helping us to set our new home standard for the future.

## Asset Management and Sustainability

More details on the work we are doing to improve the condition of our homes, plus, work to improve energy efficiency, reduce living costs and to protect the environment. You can also find out how the CEP are playing their part.

## Value for Money

What we are doing to make best use of our resources and how we spend each pound of rent you give us.

## Platform Property Care

How we have worked through the challenges of the last year.

## ...And not forgetting the numbers

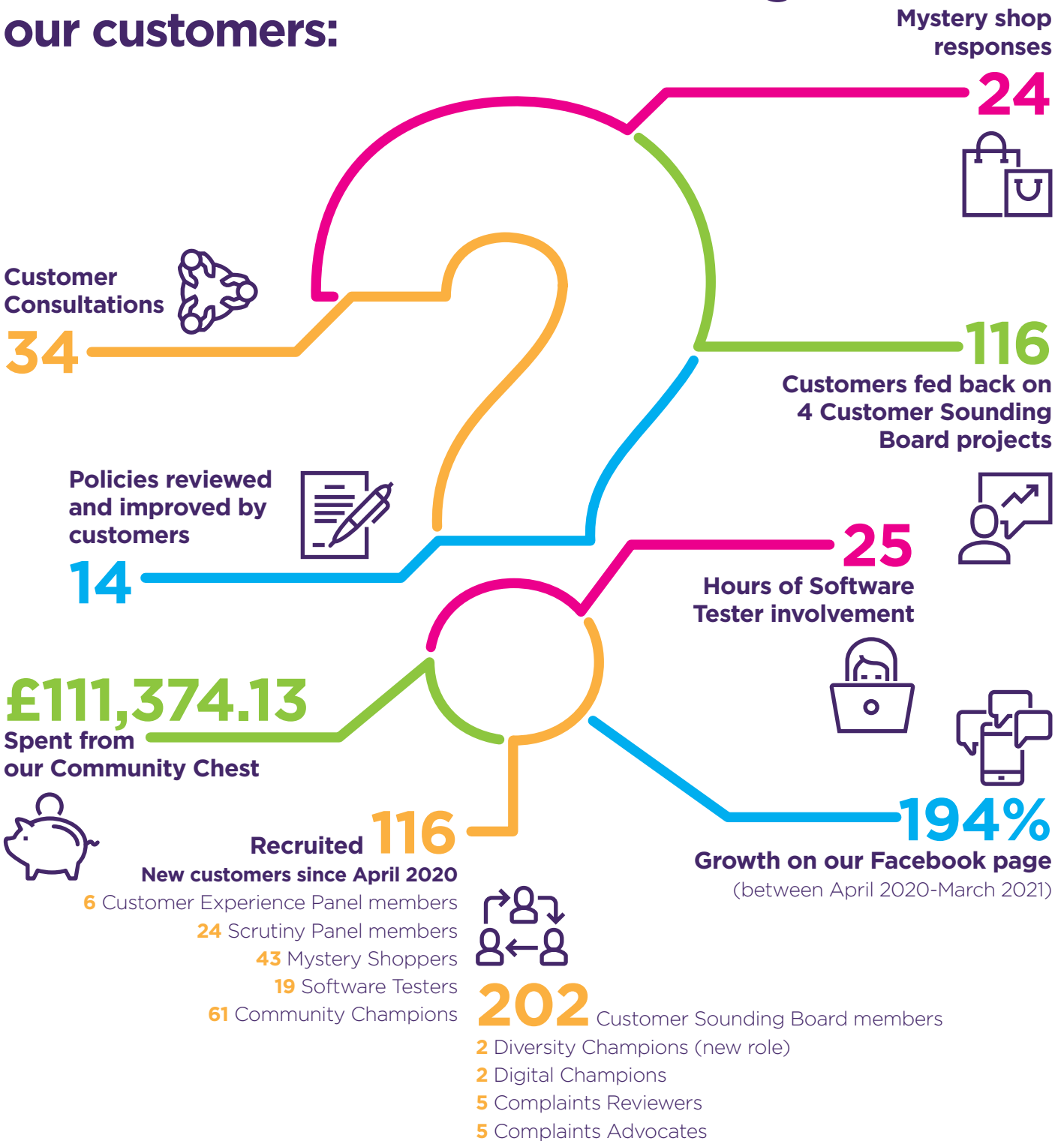
All the up to the minute performance data you need.

You can see the full report at [www.platformhg.com](http://www.platformhg.com)

Or call us on **0333 200 7304** and we will send you a copy in the post.

# How you can get involved

## Here's how we have been involving our customers:



Customers are at the very heart of everything we do and that's why we've created roles for customers to get involved with us in a range of ways to provide feedback and shape how we deliver our service.

We've also adapted some roles so they can now be carried out virtually, wherever you are and which fit around all the other commitments you may have.

We're also looking for customers to get involved in their local communities, whether that's in our rural locations in Herefordshire or Lincolnshire or cities like Worcester or Leicester- or somewhere in-between!

# Diversity Champions

Here at Platform Housing Group, we are committed to making Equality, Diversity and Inclusion our key priority. Do you want to make a genuine difference in your local community by helping us shape the way we our deliver services for vulnerable people?

As a **Diversity Champion** you could get involved with:-

- An awareness campaign around an issue which you are passionate about, e.g., mental health, disability, LGBT, ethnic or religious diversity, Autism.
- An event celebrating different cultures and traditions.
- Start a group for people who may feel excluded.
- Support staff and residents in your chosen area of interest
- Make a difference by working with local charities on Equality & Diversity (E&D) issues.

If you feel that becoming a Platform Diversity Champion is for you, please visit our website [www.platformhg.com/get-involved](http://www.platformhg.com/get-involved) for further information or you can call us on **0333 200 7304** and ask to speak to a member of our Equality and Diversity Team.



# Community Champions

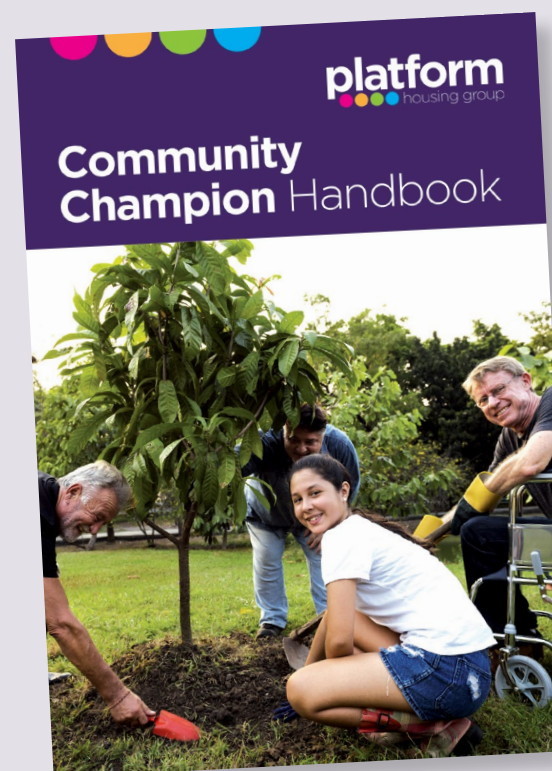
Do you care about where you live? Would you love the chance to support your local community & make a real difference to your community?

If the answer is “Yes” then you may be interested in our Community Champions role.

The role includes:-

- Being an active voice within your community.
- Helping ensure good communication between Platform Housing & your neighbours.
- Informing us of where we aren't performing to the standard we say we will.
- Reporting, and supporting neighbours to report communal repairs through effective signposting.
- Informing us of anything that is a risk or nuisance within your neighbourhood, which may include issues like graffiti, fly tipping and anti-social behaviour. We'll then work to identify where we can help to resolve these, where possible.

If you think this role would interest you then please visit the Get Involved pages of our website [www.platform.com/get-involved](http://www.platform.com/get-involved) to find out more, or you can call us on **0333 200 7304** & ask to speak to a member of the Customer Engagement Team.



# Other Ways to Get Involved



## Helping to make a difference

### Did you know that as a Platform customer you could apply for funding to help make a difference in your community?

The Platform Community Chest provides funding to support a range of improvements, activities and initiatives that promote:

- Community Cohesion.
- Community Safety.
- Health and Wellbeing.
- Digital Inclusion.
- Skills and employability.

This funding is available for community groups or organisations to apply for where initiatives benefit our customers and wider communities. The Customer Experience Panel review all the applications received and are responsible for either approving or rejecting the applications.

The Community Chest has supported a number of valuable projects, including:

- Supporting the continued delivery of meals on wheels for isolated and vulnerable people.
- Working with a group of communal gardeners to install raised beds and seating areas to bring people together.
- Supporting the growth of a neighbourhood watch scheme to help the community feel safer.
- Supporting schools and colleges to purchase laptops to help children with home schooling during lockdown.

If you have an idea that you think would benefit your community please visit [www.platformhg.com/community-funding](http://www.platformhg.com/community-funding) to find out more.

## Scrutiny Panel



Customers conduct in-depth investigations to scrutinise our services, focusing on a specific area of the organisation at a time. As part of scrutiny investigations, panel members are able to interrogate our services from a customer perspective, providing detailed reports to influence service improvements for all customers.

## Mystery Shopping



Customers play a pivotal part in providing feedback on their experience of Platform services. Mystery shops are short exercises and can include tasks such as, calls to our contact centre following a script or reviewing our website to locate specific information. You'd then complete a short online form to feedback on your experience. Mystery Shoppers can opt in or out of each exercise (with many taking 15-30 minutes), at times to suit you. This role provides a really flexible way to get involved and provide valuable insight to influence the services you receive.

## Customer Sounding Board



This online panel provide us with regular feedback on a range of documents to ensure that our communications with customers are clear and understood. This is a flexible role that can be carried out online. We would give you at least one week to carry out any task (which would take between 10-30 minutes) at a time to suit yourself and when you can fit in around your other commitments.

## Software Testers



We're not looking for IT experts – in fact we want people with all levels of IT skills to make sure our services are accessible for everyone. This exciting role involves customers, testing our online and digital services. Projects undertaken by Software Testers range from short online exercises to more in-depth projects which provide tangible feedback to help shape the digital services we offer customers. With the option to opt in or out of each exercise this role offers a flexible way to influence our services.

## One off Consultations



During the course of the year, we run a variety of one-off consultations and activities in order to get detailed customer feedback on specific topics. Last year we consulted and sought feedback from our customers which led to changes to policies such as Electrical Safety and Repairs and Maintenance. Changes were also made in the way we communicate with customers in respect of anti-social behaviour.

**If you are interested in joining us on any of the involvement groups, please do contact us, your involvement really does make a difference to how Platform delivers its services and it is only with your help and working together that we can continually improve our services.**

# FREE Help with CV writing, job searching, interviewing skills

Platform Housing Group have partnered with Stay Nimble, a digital career coaching platform, to help get people into work.

2020 was a tough year for sure! We are hoping to reach out and provide some help for Platform customers that may be experiencing difficulties in their work life. Are you searching for work or looking for a different direction? This could be the perfect tool for you!

You would benefit from 6 hours of coaching with a dedicated career coach, a career development platform (Thrive), and lifetime free access to the Stay Nimble platform. The Stay Nimble coaching service will help you to build your confidence and inspire belief in a brighter future.

It can help you find rewarding career options matched to your skills and strengths and will introduce a wide range of career matches and job vacancies in your local areas.

To find out more about how we can help you please complete the web form on our website and we'll help you start your journey.

<https://www.platformmhg.com/stay-nimble-on-line-coaching>

Alternatively, register your interest with us via email at [welfarereform@platformhg.com](mailto:welfarereform@platformhg.com) with your name and address and we will get back to you.

## Works enhance and improve Young Peoples services in Malvern



This year work began on our £500,000 refurbishment of the Malvern Hills Foyer.

The service offers vulnerable young people a place to stay and learn important life skills whilst getting support and advice to eventually live independently. As part of the work a new 'safebase room' was added enabling the service to take in emergency cases where a young person needs shelter right away.

A new kitchen/dining space has already been completed as well as improvements to the IT skills room and interview room. Over the next year, 3 more bedrooms will be added as well as en-suites installed in all rooms replacing the shared facilities.

The contractors have been working closely with the Foyer to avoid major disturbance to current residents and are constantly liaising with them as and when different elements are completed.

# Community Heroes



Through our work in communities we regularly come across individuals who give up their time to make a positive difference for their neighbours and community.

This has never been more apparent than the past 10 months with communities pulling together in the face of COVID-19. We want to recognise and celebrate those individuals to remind them how valuable they are, to do this we have developed Platform Community Heroes.

Do you know a **Platform Community Hero** who deserves recognition?

We'd love to hear about individuals and groups who have had a positive impact on their community. We'll feature their stories and make sure that they get the appreciation they deserve.

We'd love to receive your nominations about someone who deserves recognition for one or more of the following categories:

- **Exceptional Times: Going the Extra Mile** - People who have risen to the challenges of these times to help those around them.
- **Outstanding Contribution to Customer Involvement** - Involved Platform customers who have shown tremendous commitment to improving services.
- **Young Person Award** - Young people (under the age of 18) who have stepped up to make a difference for others in their community.
- **Communities Together** - Individuals or groups who have done great work to bring communities together, ensuring that no-one is excluded.
- **Outstanding Platform Volunteer** - Platform volunteers who have shown outstanding commitment to helping others.
- **Environmental Award** - Individuals or groups who have taken steps to improve the world around us, either focusing on immediate surroundings or tackling more global issues.
- **Positive Changes Award** - People who have taken brave steps to take their lives in a positive direction.
- **Digital Award** - People who have gone the extra mile in helping others to develop digital skills or individuals who have developed their own skills against the odds.
- **Street Award** - Communities that are proud of their street or block.

Please check that the individual or group is happy to be nominated and to have their stories shared before making nominations.

To find out more and to make a nomination by October 31 2021, visit [www.platformhg.com/platform\[1\]community-heroes](http://www.platformhg.com/platform[1]community-heroes) we would love to hear from you!

## Our Corporate Strategy and YOU!

Earlier in 2021, Platform launched a new corporate strategy with a huge focus on what we should be doing for all our customers.

Across the next five years, we've set high standards to meet across all the ways we serve you. We want to use the technology at our disposal to make it easier for you to access us and our services but also consult you a lot closer on what works best. It'll include investigating digital options that can lead to problems being solved quicker.

Of course, it focuses on complaints and how we deal with them and new ways of reporting, logging and fixing things. It sets out a Platform Standard for us to work towards along with a vision of creating homes that will be sustainable and more environmentally friendly to live in.

You'll see us making all sorts of upgrades to help improve the energy efficiency of our current homes as well as our new ones in the coming months.





# Complaints Process

Customers are at the heart of everything we do and we welcome feedback that will help us to improve.



If you have a complaint, you can send us an e-mail to [customerfeedback@platformhg.com](mailto:customerfeedback@platformhg.com), by Phone 0333 200 7304 or in writing to Platform Housing Group, 1700 Solihull Parkway, Birmingham Business Park, Solihull B37 7YD.

Our Customer Experience Team will assess if your complaint can be resolved by Quick Resolution in two working days. If it cannot be resolved within this timescale, it will be escalated to a formal complaint investigation and will be acknowledged within three working days of receipt. The team aim to complete investigations within 10 working days, however some may need more time.

If you feel any part of your complaint hasn't been resolved, you can ask for a Final Review which is then carried out by a Director or Assistant Director.

If you feel that your complaint remains unresolved following completion of our internal procedure, you can either refer your complaint to a Councillor or MP. You can find your local Councillor [click here](#).

Or you can wait 8 weeks and refer your complaint directly to the **Housing Ombudsman Service** [click here](#).

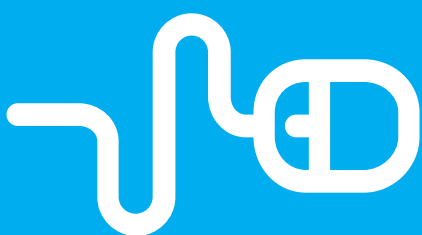
# Compliments

If you think we are doing something well or that our colleagues are giving a great service then please do let us know. Compliments and comments tell us that we are on the right track and that our efforts have made a difference to you. All compliments will be passed directly to the people concerned.

# Comments

We want you to have your say and there are lots of ways you can do this:-

- On our website.
- By e-mail [customerfeedback@platformhg.com](mailto:customerfeedback@platformhg.com).
- By Phone **0333 200 7304**.
- In writing.
- In person (when any lockdown restrictions have been lifted).



## Our New Customer Portal – Access our Services 24/7



### Our new Customer Portal is now up and running!

By registering to use the portal, you will be able to:

- Check your rent balance and recent transactions.
- Make a payment or change a Direct Debit.
- Report a repair.
- Update personal information.

We already have over 1500 customers taking advantage of this new service which is available 24/7 and so you can access it at a time that is convenient to you.

To register to use this service, you will need:

- Your Tenancy Reference Number.
- Your Date of Birth.
- Your Email Address.

We are really keen to get your feedback on this new service and would like to know what new features you would like to see over the coming year. You can do this by filling in one of the surveys within the portal.

If you would like to get more involved in helping to test new features and shape the service going forward, please do drop us a line at [involved@platformhg.com](mailto:involved@platformhg.com) we would love to hear from you.

# Tenancy Health Checks

**It's important to us that every time we make contact with you, we make it count.**

That's why over the last 12 months we've been completing Tenancy Health Checks by calling or visiting (where possible) you in our localities. These checks look at all sorts of elements of your home and your experience as a customer.

It's a way of addressing important issues you have but also trying to fore see any problems before they happen. Above all we want them to be conversations that act as a great way for us to discover just how we can help you with the many support services we offer beyond your tenancy.

This might mean accessing our Wellbeing Fund or signing up to employment and training schemes. Up to March 2021 we had clocked up over **800** checks and since then we've managed around **200** a month.

From our side, it's really helping us keep up to date records and start conversations about any difficult issues. So far you've told us it's a great source of support knowing someone is on the end of the phone.



## Housing First

Housing First is a national policy that offers permanent housing as quickly as possible to homeless people, and other supportive services afterward and we continue to support this through projects within the West Midlands, one of the pilot areas.

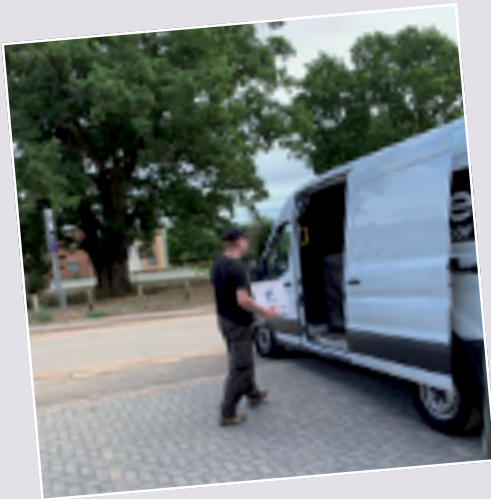
There are a significant number of good news stories surrounding the customers that we have provided with accommodation as part of the project.

We hope that Housing First will continue to extend throughout the country and we look forward to extending this support to more Local Authority partners.

## Housing Transfer Process

We have streamlined the process for our existing customers, providing more suitable accommodation should they be successful through the housing waiting list in their area.

We recognise that our existing customers have different requirements and queries during this process so we have introduced a specialist officer to provide a bespoke service to meet their needs and ensure their move is a smooth transition.



# We're making your tenancy more secure!

We're in the process of converting over **800** Probationary and Fixed Term Affordable Rent Tenancies into Lifetime Tenancies.

This means if you live in an Affordable Tenancy home (properties that have been capped at the level to be no more than 80% of local market rent), we'll be asking you to sign a new tenancy agreement for a lifetime tenancy (this ensures the customer holding the lifetime tenancy has the right to stay in the property for as long as they are alive).

## Why are we doing this?

Affordable Rent Tenancies were originally introduced in the form of Fixed Term Tenancies (a tenancy lasting 5 or 10 years). Some customers were worried about losing their homes at the end of the fixed period and there have been occasions with mutual exchanges where applicants have refused to exchange due to lack of security.

We have looked at current legislation and terms of the Tenancy Agreements and it is now agreed that we are able to grant Affordable Rent Tenancies on a Lifetime Tenancy. These are periodic tenancies running from month to month with no end date.



All our new Affordable Rent Tenancies will be either probationary or Lifetime, with the probationary ones automatically converting to lifetime.

Our dedicated team are working through the process and will be calling customers affected to support you through this by helping you sign the new tenancy agreement through Adobe Sign digitally where possible.

## Are you social?

Keep up to date with all our news, essential information, campaigns and more on our social media channels!

You can find us on:



# Customer Hub – Long Hold Times

Currently we are not able to respond to telephone enquires as quickly as we would like to, this means our wait times are increasing and you may be on hold for a period of time.

**In recent months, we have been working with a reduced number of colleagues in the Customer Hub. We have since recruited a number of new starters within the team who have undertaken training, so we are able to take more calls and better assist with your enquiries.**

As we continue to build the team back up to full capacity, we would like to remind customers of the following:

- A call back option is available when waiting to speak to us, we would encourage you to select this option if your call is not an emergency. Your call will be returned within 60 minutes.
- Contact us via webchat - we will be able to assist with your housing, rent or repair enquiry.
- Log any non-urgent repairs, housing enquiries or make a rent payment via the Customer Portal at [www.platformhg.com/your-platform](http://www.platformhg.com/your-platform). You will need your tenancy reference number to register if you have not done so already, this can be found on any recent correspondence from us.
- Send us an email with your enquiry (stating name and address if you are a customer) via: [info@platformhg.com](mailto:info@platformhg.com).

We anticipate that we will provide an improved call handling service within the next 4-6 weeks. During this period we will continue to monitor the progress of other changes that we have recently implemented to improve service delivery.

**We'd like to thank you for your continued patience, support and understanding as we work hard to get our services back to normal.**



## What's your view on our housing management service?

**We're planning to expand the ways customers can get involved to shape Platform services and will share more details at the end of 2021, in the meantime we are keen to hear your views to shape these plans.**

'Governance' relates to the systems and processes that Platform Housing put in place to ensure it delivers its aims and objectives in an effective, open and accountable way.

To ensure we maintain the highest standards of governance, and that we remain accountable to you our customers, it's important that we seek your critical feedback (scrutiny) of our housing management services.

This feedback allows us to continuously review and improve our services to ensure they best meet your needs. As part of this we would really value your feedback on the following questions:

1. What do you think about the different ways in which customers can get involved in scrutinising the services of Platform (e.g. the Customer Experience Panel and Scrutiny Panel - please see the Platform Housing website 'Get Involved' page for further information on the ways in which we involve customers)?
2. What do you think works well in how we involve customers in scrutinising our services?
3. How can we improve the opportunities to get customers involved in scrutinising our services?
4. Do you have any other suggestions or comments on the scrutiny of our services?

Please give us your feedback on [involved@platformhg.com](mailto:involved@platformhg.com) by 30th November 2021.