

Customer Service Panel

Chair's Report

Topics Discussed & Presenter

1. **Customer First Update**
Huw Davies, Consultant - Information - Data and Applications
2. **Voids and Lettings Programme Update**
Katie Williamson, Operational Project Lead - Empty Property Management and Lettings
Chris Robinson, Programme Lead
3. **Review of Customer and Community Engagement Activities**
Karen Little, Head of Customer and Community Engagement
4. **Panel Members Participation**
All

Observations, Recommendations & Actions

1. Huw gave the panel comprehensive information on the volume of data collected in the project and some specific trends that were shown from this. He explained that we need accurate customer data to ensure our services are suitable and the best they can be for our customers. The Customer First project is preparing PHG to meet the Consumer Regulation where we are required to make service adjustments to meet customer needs. We are in Phase 1 and have been contacting all Platform customers to collect the data. To date 10,000 customers have been contacted, of those 50% of customers consenting to answer the questions. Our questions covered demographic, health and other personal information such as sexuality. We found that overall, men in the age range of 50-70 were the most likely not to give consent or refuse the answer certain questions.

Phase 2 will be all about how we use the data to offer reasonable adjustments to customers who need them. This will include training and support for all teams working with customers, with an annual update to keep the data up to date and relevant. We will be introducing the option for customers to 'self-serve' to provide their data. Included in Phase 1 was a 'tone of voice', evaluation of ASB letters, which will be expanded in Phase 2 to other tenancy management areas.

Karen Little is leading on a sub project of Customer First to increase more involved customers with an additional 100 customers so far agreeing to be contacted to discuss further.

Phase 2 is scheduled to last throughout 2025, and we will be adding new reasonable adjustments working with business teams to make sure colleagues know what to do when helping vulnerable customers. And finally, we will review 12 months of data collection to see how it can help us strategically – such as in new service design and internal resource planning.

Action: Megan asked for a copy of the data questions posed to customers to be shared with the panel. (Huw)

Action: ASB letters to be shared with the panel for comment (Huw)

Action: Panel members to give feedback on their thoughts on the newly created ASB letters.

2. Chris and Katie gave the panel a presentation explaining the progress of the modernization and automation of the voids and letting processes within Platform.

For the last 6 months the project team have looked at the current process from end to end and established that there is a need for a new system as the current system is heavily reliant on spreadsheets and lots of manual work.

The new system will have automation capabilities and self-serve functionality for customers. It will be capable of reporting and trend analysis activity and will improve the experience for customers coming into Platform properties as well as tenancy terminations which will reduce the loss of rent whilst homes are empty (void).

The panel were advised that the driver for this programme is to increase efficiency and to ensure customers are given the right properties with sustainable tenancies.

The next steps of the programme will be for the requirements gathering exercise to end, and to carry out the tender exercise and supplier appointment for the new IT system. This will happen over the summer of 2025 with the Voids and Lettings new solution going live in 2026.

There is a pilot for pre-tenancy inspections starting which should support customers leaving properties as well as enabling Platform to timetable void works to reduce void time.

Action: Chris and Katie to present the pilot results to the Panel at a future meeting. (Chris/Katie)

3. Karen gave an update on Customer Engagement activities that have taken place over the last 9-12 months, including 30 Customer Sound Board projects, which included specialist housing, lettings and building safety with a total of 402 customer responses received.

Platform Voices was launched in July 2024 and currently has over 250 participants. There have been several case studies launched on the website and Platform Voices to demonstrate the outcomes of engagement activities.

The Scrutiny Panel (SP) completed a review of Complaints and are now reviewing PHG's Anti-Social Behaviour process.

There were 242 applications made to the Community Chest during 2024/25 totalling £800,000. Of these, 118 applications were approved by the panel for a total of £159,025.02.

Karen talked about upcoming events such as Communities Connected fortnight which ran from 12th to 23rd May, with approx. 50 various activities planned. Lisa asked panel members to look at the range of local activities available to them, with a view to attending where they are able.

The team are finalizing arrangements for Community Conversation Roadshows, most of which will be taking place between June and September and the Community Engagement Officers will continue to support community Walkabouts, again, Panel members were asked to join local Walkabout where possible.

Karen explained that the Community Hero Awards were well received last year with preparation and filming underway for this year's Awards which is scheduled to be broadcast on the 1st July. As part of this, we receive sponsorship and have more sponsors than we have had before.

Karen gave some case studies of community involvement activities including one that took place at Bradley Thursfield Court in Kidderminster. This was held in conjunction with West Mercia Police Safer neighbourhood team/PCSO/Neighbourhood Officer and was around issues relating to ASB and repair reporting and discussed lack of digital skills and support offered to get issues logged for Platform Property Care (PPC). The results of the discussions led to the recruitment of a Neighbourhood Watch Coordinator and a Community Rep. Incidents of fly tipping, overfilling bin store and other ASB issues have reduced since this activity, repair of the lock on the laundry room has now been completed - rough sleepers had gained access, and customers had been put off from using the facilities.

Customers have provided feedback through Customer Feedback, and we also have a customer video stating improvements through lived experience.

Action: Link to the Community Hero Awards broadcast on the 1st of July to be shared with the Customer Voice Panel (CVP) and SP members (Kim)

4. This Agenda item provided Panel members with the opportunity to talk about and reflect on the content of presentations, as well as discuss anything else that they felt was of value.

There was a good discussion about content of the presentations and volume of information and at times content is very technical. The panel felt that they need time to process the information and to make sure they have time for questions, clarification etc.

The panel wanted to both understand the information shared with them but also to be clear about how they can influence Platform for the benefit of the organization and customers.

There was feedback that panel members do not always find the layout or information in presentations clear or understandable and it was agreed that we would ensure a summary is undertaken by presenters which can be used to check understanding.

Action: Summary document to be produced to ensure understanding of presentations. (Karen)

Action: Lisa asked the Panel members to define the questions to make sure presenters are made aware of what needs to be included in presentations. (Panel members)

Chair's Thoughts

The presentations were of interest to Panel members, which resulted in excellent questions and follow-up actions.

It has been noted that panel members are keen to have time to absorb the information shared so they can ask questions and seek clarification where needed.

There is a need to ensure that presentations are not too technical, or too many acronyms used so that panel members get the best from the meetings. Summarization of presentations is to be introduced as well as summary documents as needed.

Panel members really want to see how the expertise they are given can be of use to Platform and customers and they really value the time to reflect, absorb and discuss topics in addition to receiving presentations.