

Assets and Sustainability Panel

Chair's Report

Topics Discussed & Presenter

1. **Platform Property Care Board Meeting update** – Rosalind Maxwell-Harrison (CVP Member)
2. **Asset Management changes** – Steve Eaves (Regeneration Director)
3. **Platform Property Care** – current priorities/challenges/successes – Marc Mayall (Director of Operations – Property)
4. **The King's Speech** – Planning and Infrastructure Bill and Platform

Observations, Recommendations & Actions

1. Rosalind (Panel member) provided an update on her role as Platform's customer rep attending the Platform Property Care (PPC) Board. PPC is a separate entity within Platform Housing Group, employing operatives and subcontractors to serve PHG, Rooftop, and some Stonewater customers. Three customer reps, representing the three housing associations, attend monthly PPC Board meetings and pre-board meetings to discuss and provide feedback on upcoming Board presentations.

Customer reps focus on customer-related items and innovations at PPC Board meetings. Their role includes asking questions, offering feedback, and reviewing PPC's performance metrics, including customer satisfaction. A challenge noted was the inconsistency in how each organisation reports on customer satisfaction measures, but the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) are expected to provide more comparable data in the future.

2. Steve Eaves, Regeneration Director, outlined the responsibilities of the Assets team, which last year included spending approximately £40 million on installations (kitchens, bathrooms, windows, doors, heating systems) and £10 million on energy efficiency improvements (solid wall insulation, solar panels etc). The team ensures legal safety compliance through gas servicing, electrical tests, and asbestos removal, and handles aids and adaptations for customers' specific needs. They also manage major projects, damp and mould issues, and disrepairs, working closely with PPC and subcontractors.

Steve discussed the ongoing Asset Change Programme aimed at enhancing energy efficiency and introducing technology to monitor property conditions. He highlighted a heating network installation in a tower block of 272 apartments to reduce carbon emissions and customer bills. The Asset Essentials project ensures accurate data on all homes, focusing services to meet customer needs.

We asked about how Platform integrate building data from new builds into Platform systems and were informed that there is collaboration with the development team to record details of installations and their life cycles which helps track when replacements are due.

We were informed of work being carried out to develop 'customer journey maps' to map the current processes and work with customers and specialists to improve and develop future processes, incorporating customer feedback and experiences.

We heard about a project to review over 3100 garages across 350 sites, some in poor condition, with an options plan expected by September 2025 and there was discussion and assurance that customers living in these areas would be consulted as part of the process.

Steve also discussed the challenges of maintaining listed buildings and homes in conservation areas, which can be difficult and costly to retrofit to achieve energy efficiency. PHG aims to bring all homes to an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of C by 2030. We suggested supporting customers to move to new homes from these buildings to more comfortable and affordable, which was acknowledged as a consideration.

We asked about the impact of climate change and overheating and flooding and were advised that while new homes are being designed with these considerations, existing homes currently do not have a specific plan for flooding. However, we were advised that flood risk mapping is ongoing, and retrofitting existing homes is a focus to improve sustainability.

Further conversation was had around air source heat pumps, and we were informed that Platform is targeting homes needing whole house retrofits for these installations however future commitments will be gas-free, and decisions on heat pumps are made on an individual basis. Members of the panel raised concerns about the performance of air source heat pumps in cold weather and some specific examples were provided for follow up investigation.

3. Marc Mayall, Director of Operations (Property), provided an update on the challenges in responsive repairs, voids, and grounds maintenance. There has been a significant increase in demand for responsive repairs in 2024-25 compared to the previous year, leading to longer wait times for repairs. To address this, PHG has employed subcontractors and is working to fill vacancies. Despite these efforts, it currently takes about five more days to complete repairs than it did a year ago.

We asked about algorithms for predicting repair needs based on property age and Marc explained that they do apply growth expectations, but the current demand has exceeded their forecasts.

We asked about an online booking system for repairs, which Marc confirmed is in development. We also suggested offering all-day appointment slots as an option for customers who would be happy with any time, to improve efficiency, Marc said this would be considered in their system review.

Marc noted that void (empty property) volumes are lower than expected, but the cost to return properties to a lettable standard has increased, leading to more subcontractor use. He also discussed the transition of grounds maintenance services in-house in 2023, which initially faced complaints due to resource shortages but has since improved.

4. Kate Ellison, Director of Land, Partnerships & Business Development, presented on key government commitments following the King's Speech on July 17, 2024, highlighting three significant Bills affecting PHG: the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, the English Devolution Bill, and the Great British Energy Bill. The Labour government aims to deliver 1.5 million homes by 2029, a target PHG supports but finds ambitious given historical challenges in meeting such goals.

Key commitments include:

- Increasing annual housing completion targets from 300,000 to 370,000.
- A 10-year social rent settlement anticipated in the Autumn budget (CPI +1%).
- Updates to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Future Homes Standard (FHS).
- Potential review of the Decent Homes Standard (DHS).

Kate advised that planning reforms will reinstate mandatory housing targets, remove the Infrastructure Levy, and redefine "grey belt" land to require 50% affordable housing. She also explained that Housing policy may be devolved to county and unitary authorities, similar to the Greater London Authority's management of its housing fund.

We inquired about Platform's engagement with local nature recovery strategies and Kate explained that their land-led strategy allows for significant influence over development, incorporating green infrastructure plans, such as a current project in Nottingham.

We enquired about the challenges in increasing housing supply, and it was noted that regulatory changes and new laws drive much of the current activity and that National Housing Federation is lobbying for manageable implementation of these targets.

Kate offered to return for further discussions on design guidance and sustainability with the panel.

Summary

Overall, we found the updates and information provided to be positive and provided assurance that steps are being made towards improvements that will benefit the experience of Platform customers. The update about system improvements for repair planning is welcomed and we hope this will bring improved efficiencies for customers and Platform in scheduling repairs. We found the updates about retrofit and modern methods of construction extremely interesting and inspirational, and we look forward to further updates and discussions about how these plans are implemented, with a focus on customer communications and how the approaches are implemented equitably.

The update about Platform Property Care (PPC) has provided us with a greater understanding of how the entity operates and we welcome the opportunity to take part in their board meetings in collaboration with representatives from Stonewater and Rooftop.

