

Customer Service Panel

Chair's Report

Topics Discussed & Presenter

1. **Procurement update** – Alan Pibworth (Head of Procurement Shared Services)
2. **Community Chest Update** – Chris Reed (Community Investment Project Manager)
3. **Wellbeing Fund update** – Georgina Bailey Allen (Income Locality Manager)
4. **Rent Settings/Calculations** – Elizabeth Birdsall (Head of Policy, Procedure, Governance and Rent) and Idris Rehman (Rent Accountant)
5. **Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Update** – Tom Piotrowski (Diversity and Inclusion Manager)
6. **Customer and Community Engagement Update** – Gem Murphy (Head of Customer and Community Engagement)

Observations, Recommendations & Actions

1. The panel were able to further their knowledge around procurement within Platform Housing Group. Presented with an overview of their 3-year strategy, with customer experience put at the forefront of this. The panel were shown a graph of the team members and were pleased to learn that the Procurement team offer apprenticeships. The panel feel that the Procurement team have clear and realistic goals for their department and look forward to seeing these changes.
2. The panel enjoyed learning about some of the fantastic community projects that have been funded by Platform Community Chest. The panel was shown that in 2023/24 funds had been allocated by locality – 40% Severn, 30% Tame and 30% Witam. The panel discussed some of the projects that have been funded by the community chest fund, leading to the topic of measuring the social impact of the projects. The panel were given an overview of future plans for Platform Community Chest; improve spread of applications, review scoring tool and improve follow-ups with groups to capture impact of funded projects. **ACTIONS:** Michael Bruce to share information on measuring social impact and for the panel to have access to a copy of the scoring tool used in decision making.
3. The panel was shown some of the data for 2023/24 consisting of around £1,113,000+ total spend, approx. £80,000 on special projects from 7009 customer applications. The panel learnt about new voucher suppliers and amended framework and criteria. The panel was pleased to

learn that the wellbeing fund has secured £1.25 million for the upcoming financial year. The panel asked about how often a customer can apply for the wellbeing fund, we were informed that an application for items such as white goods could be applied for once. But an application for help with food shops, uniforms etc. could be once every 12 months. It was discussed that the application will be reviewed, and that customer input is important to this process.

4. The panel was given some information on the difference between social rent and affordable rent and how rents are decided. **ACTIONS:** Panel questions to be sent to Elizabeth Birdsall and Idris Rehman
5. Panel members were given an update on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). We learnt about some of the changes that are being implemented to bring more diversity and inclusivity to platform. Such as measuring the benefits of EDI and to create leadership accountability and how these fits into PHG's corporate strategy. The panel asked questions surrounding Platforms readiness for recent political changes regarding individuals with disabilities being urged back into employment, PHG has clear policies and procedures in place to help both customers and employees who may be affected by these changes (including the successful tenancy team for customers who advice on an array of topics).
6. The panel was presented with a customer and community engagement update, including information on how the team is getting word out about the panels. These include changes to the website, brochures, email banners, customer connect magazine, flyers and working with partner advocacy groups to directly approach customers who may have additional support needs. The panel feels optimistic that these changes will bring around more customer involvement. The panel is happy to have input on the development of upcoming changes.

Chair's Thoughts

There was a lot of information presented to the panel, giving insight into the inner workings of Platform Housing Group. The Customer Service Panel appreciate and support the positive impact that Community Chest has on the communities that PHG serves and that the Wellbeing Fund can bring essential support for customers who are struggling financially during the cost-of-living crisis.

The panel feels that the EDI, Procurement and Rent setting presentations were informative and all have clear goals for the next financial year that should bring around positive customer experiences. We look forward to helping the Customer and Community Engagement Team to get word out to more customers about customer involvement via the Customer Voice Panel. The panel will discuss the information shared with them and decide on updates and briefings they would like in the future.