

2023 | Issue 1

Customer Connect

Welcome

I cannot believe that we are already in March and sharing with you our latest updates on what we have been doing over the last few months.

We continue to see every day the difficulties we all face, especially with costs continuing to rise. We remain committed to our primary objective of being able to support our customers and communities wherever possible. Our Wellbeing Fund continues to be a valued lifeline for many of our customers and also your wider communities where we have supported local foodbanks and charities.

As a business with an eye on the future, we must also find a way, even in a difficult environment, to continue to invest in all areas of our business. This edition will hopefully give you an insight into how we are investing in improvements to our existing homes whilst still trying to keep building much needed new homes. We are also looking at ways to use technology to help both you and ourselves in the delivery of quicker and easier responses to routine services.

The issue of damp and mould condensation is at the front of many peoples' minds at the moment and we are dealing with a large number of enquiries. We are also widening our employees skills in this area with a dedicated training programme. Much of the information we share with you is to help deal with the easier symptoms and this has also been warmly received by many of our employees in relation to their own homes. We are all learning about how we can prevent this and you will find further information in the article on page 13.

As you will see later in the magazine we are also creating lots of opportunities for us all to be engaged in community activities across the whole of Platform's geography. There will be opportunities to join us in conversations about things that are important to you all and for us to share more about our plans and what we are doing in your area. Keep connecting with us and together we can make a big difference to what matters most to you and your communities.

I hope you will all find something which is of interest to you in this edition and that you take away some new information that you weren't aware of before. Finally, we look forward to meeting many of you during the next Communities Connected events.

Wishing you all safe and well.



Elizabeth Froude,
Group Chief Executive

Over the past 12 months our focus has been to maintain our homes and provide our customers with all the support we can through these continuing difficult times.

Our Wellbeing Fund has been crucial in supporting our customers with essential items including food and help with fuel bills. We haven't stopped there, our teams have gone beyond this and supported our customers to apply for any additional benefits and grants that are available.

We have introduced new ways that you can access our services including chat bot and video calling where you can talk to an advisor. We are also using this technology in our Specialist Housing Schemes to improve our customers' lives and make them feel safer. Read more about these services further in the magazine.

Our Neighbourhood and Community Engagement teams are now regularly out and about in your communities. You will also see them at the next neighbourhood walkabouts and the Communities Connected events, the dates of which are included in the magazine. Please come along and join us, we'd love to see you there!

Our Housing Teams continue to carry out Tenancy Health Checks face to face with our customers to ensure that we are giving all the support we can and you have told us that these checks are very welcome.

Our Customer Experience Panel, Scrutiny Panel and all of you who work closely with us continue to ensure that the customer voice is heard and that we deliver improving services in areas that we need to. I would like to take this opportunity to thank every one of you for the time and commitment you give to us.



Marion Duffy,
Chief Operations Officer

Platform Customer Hub

Our contact centre telephone lines were incredibly busy during November and December and we would like to apologise if you experienced long wait times to speak to our advisors.

We are currently recruiting more team members and have integrated a number of new technologies to ensure you experience excellent customer service, first time, every time.



Video chat

New technology that enables us to interact with you via live video was successfully launched in November 2022.

Since its launch nearly **1,600** video calls have been handled, leading to a large percentage of these calls either being downgraded from an emergency to a routine repair or resulting in a different outcome.

In some instances, our advisors have been able to resolve a simple repair task or concern by diagnosing what the repair problem may be and talking customers through what they need to do, for example, how you can pressurise your boiler or offering advice on how an issue can be quickly resolved.

Chatbot and Live Chat pilot

A six-week Chatbot and Live Chat pilot was launched in December 2022 and was available to customers 24/7 over the Christmas and New Year periods.

During the trial period:

5,028 customer interactions were recorded.

26 involved customers tested the software.

These involved customers gave an average rating of **4.04** out of 5.

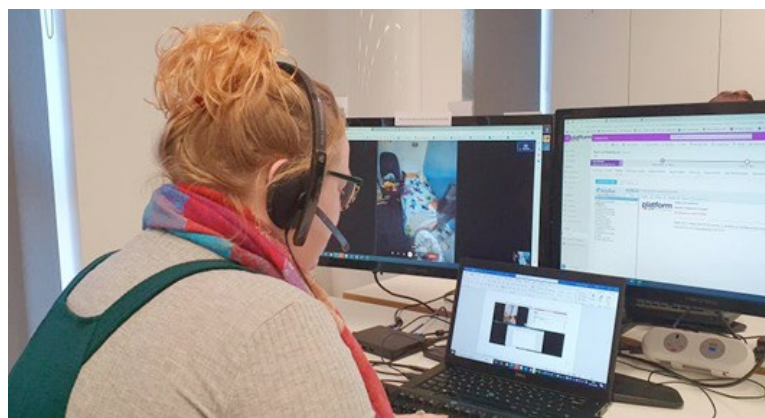
Thank you to everyone who used this new technology during the trial period and a particular thanks to our involved customers who also independently tested it.

We are delighted to report that after evaluating the successful trial results, that the Chatbot and Live Chat will be launched in April on our website: www.platformhg.com.

Michael Bruce, Director of Platform Hub and Income Management said:

"We are delighted with the positive results of our recent video chat integration and Chatbot and Live Chat trials, which have enabled us to quickly and accurately deal with customer enquiries."

"In today's age of digital transformation, technology is continually evolving so that customer service isn't limited to phone calls and emails only. This technology - and more in the pipeline - will fit in seamlessly alongside our traditional contact methods, helping us to deliver against our promise to make it simpler for customers to use our services and offer them more choice."



Getting in touch - did you know?

- If you want to report a non-urgent repair or have a general housing enquiry, you can do this via the YourPlatform customer portal, or on our website: www.platformhg.com/contact-us.
- You can select the call back option if you are put on hold and one of our advisors will return your call within 60 minutes.

2023 rent changes

We wrote to you in February confirming what your new rent will be from April 2023, along with any service charges payable.

As a not-for-profit social housing landlord, the costs of providing our services are covered by the rent we receive. We re-invest all rental income into maintaining and improving our homes, building new ones and supporting our customers and communities.

You can find out more in the 'How we spend every pound' section of our 2021-22 customer annual report, which you can view on our website: www.platformhg.com.

Social rents are set out in the Rent Standard, published by the government's Regulator for Social Housing and are reviewed annually. This is to ensure that rents are fair, wherever you live, and remain below that of similar privately rented homes.

Increases are linked to inflation and the government's formula based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) + 1 per cent.

For example, the CPI + 1 per cent is 11.1 per cent. However, the Government has capped the rent increase element of your charges at 7 per cent. Other service charges such as alarms, ground maintenance, electricity and gas may be charged at a higher or lower rate.

Why is my rent increasing?

Social rents are linked to inflation, which continues to increase due to higher energy and fuel costs and prices in shops, leading to rent increases across the country. This year the government has capped rent increases at 7 per cent.

We know that times are hard and household budgets are stretched so our decision to increase rents by 7 per cent is not one we have taken lightly. We have tried to strike a balance between keeping rents affordable and making sure that we can continue to maintain and improve the quality of our homes, build new ones and support our customers and communities.

What do I need to do now?

Universal Credit

If you claim Universal Credit, please review your online DWP journal 'to do' list as Universal Credit will send you a request to update your housing costs after the rent increase date in April. **Please only complete your journal 'to do' during the week of the 3 April and not before.**

Failure to report this change when your new rent comes into effect may result in Housing Costs being assessed incorrectly.

Housing Benefit

If you claim Housing Benefit, and it is paid directly to Platform, you do not need to tell your local council about the changes to your rent, as we will inform them of this change. If you receive Housing Benefit directly and then pay it to us, you will need to notify your local council of the change in your rent.

Direct Debit

If you pay via direct debit you do not need to do anything. You will soon receive a letter from allpay confirming the new amount to be collected.

Standing Order

If you pay via standing order you will need to contact your bank or building society and ask them to start paying the new amount from April 2023.

Further information

Please visit our website: www.platformhg.com/paying-your-rent to view further information, along with a frequently asked questions and answers section.

Do you need help and support?

We can offer you help to manage your money, energy bills advice and career coaching, along with our Wellbeing Fund which every Platform customer can apply for.

Please go to pages 5 and 6 of this magazine to find out more or head over to our website: www.platformhg.com and take a look at our Help and Support section.





Stay Nimble and find a new job

Are you looking for work and need some help building confidence or getting started?

Platform has partnered with Stay Nimble so that our customers can get **FREE** support with all sorts of work-related challenges.

You will get to talk to a qualified coach, consider your career options, gain confidence and find direction.

What do Stay Nimble offer?

- 6 hours of coaching with a dedicated career coach who is registered with the Career Development Institute.
- Lifetime free access to the Stay Nimble platform.
- Online tools that will assess your strengths and skills and match them to a wide range of jobs and careers.
- Help with career researching and job searching.
- Guidance with CV writing
- A community of like-minded people who will inspire and encourage you to reach your full potential.

How do I find out more?

You can find out more on our website: www.platformhg.com/career-coaching or by calling us on **0333 200 7304**.

Talk to us – we're here to help

If you're struggling with your finances, we're here to help. Our **Successful Tenancies Team** advisors can assist with all aspects of money, budgeting, grants and benefits advice including:

- A full benefits check to see what you might be entitled to
- Advice and guidance on Universal Credit
- Help applying for benefits
- Budgeting tips to help manage your money
- Referrals to specialist debt teams and energy support

Since April 2022, the team has helped **4,336 customers** to access **£75,621.62** in additional grants and **£1.16 million** in housing related benefit claims.

You can find out more and complete an online referral form by visiting our website: www.platformhg.com/money-benefits-advice-job-support or calling **0333 200 7304**.

The **Successful Tenancies Team**



Platform's Wellbeing Fund

Are you struggling and finding it hard to manage your household bills?

You can apply for Wellbeing Funding to help you cover the cost of food, essential items such as school uniforms, energy and utility costs as well as help to bridge the gap between making a benefit application and your first payment.

Between April 2022 and March 2023, our Wellbeing Fund has supported our customers.

Wellbeing Fund
emerge better



3,602	customers given supermarket vouchers for food.
2,841	customers helped with energy costs.
1,168	customers supported with white goods and furniture.

Here's what some of them said:

A previously homeless customer signed up for a new home in Matlock. They had a few items of furniture from their family and employer and made an application for essential funding to buy white goods.

"I would like to thank you and everyone on your team for the wonderful washing machine and cooker that I received a few weeks ago. I am so incredibly grateful as they have made life so much easier; I am no longer living on microwave meals and soup."

"Keep up the fantastic work that you do for people like me in difficult situations. Thank you so very much."

A customer that was struggling to buy food with the rise in energy prices and regularly using foodbanks, made an application for essential funding to buy food.

"I am so grateful for the Tesco voucher as I can afford to buy food and have the heating on over Christmas for my family. You all are amazing people for the time and help you have given me and my family, who are so grateful for all your help. Thank you."

A customer that was struggling to buy food and other items, due to the ongoing cost of living crisis, made an application for essential funding to buy food and toiletries.

"I received my shopping voucher nearly three weeks ago and I can't begin to thank you enough. It has really helped us out. I managed to do a big shop of things desperately needed - food and toiletries - and have been topping up since with it. Thank you so much."

How can I apply for Wellbeing Funding?

Every single Platform customer is eligible for support from our Wellbeing Fund, so if you think it could help you, please make an online application on our website:

www.platformhg.com/platform-wellbeing-fund.

Alternatively, you can speak to a member of our team by calling **0333 200 7304** and they can submit an application on your behalf.



Have your say

Tenant Satisfaction Measures

Feedback from our customers is hugely important to us and to the housing sector as a whole. That's why the Regulator for Social Housing is introducing Tenant Satisfaction Measures, TSMs for short, in a bid to hold housing providers to account for their actions and give customers greater visibility of their performance.

What are Tenant Satisfaction Measures?

TSMs are measures, **22** in total, that all housing associations must report on in a bid to drive up standards for customers and give them a better understanding of how we are performing as a landlord and service provider. The measures will give you, our customers, improved visibility and ability to hold us to account when things don't go right. Results from all housing providers will be visible for everyone to view online, compare and question.

The 22 satisfaction measures are split into 2 parts. 10 performance measures, that we will collect through management performance information and 12 customer perception survey measures that will have to be collected through surveying our customers directly – this is where you come in! It's a chance to have your say.

The TSMs cover the following key areas:

- Overall satisfaction.
- Keeping properties in good order.
- Maintaining building safety.
- Safety checks.
- Respectful and helpful engagement.
- Effective handling of complaints.
- Responsible neighbourhood management.

When is this happening?

From April 2023 all housing providers must start to collect data around the 22 satisfaction measures, that includes a customer perception satisfaction survey; and from summer 2024, this information must be reported to the Regulator for Social Housing to be made public.

How can I have my say?

We'll be working with partner IFF Research who will be contacting a sample of customers each year, either by telephone or via email, to give you the chance to have your say.

Just 10 minutes of your time will make a real difference to our services by providing us with the vital feedback we need to make improvements. Alongside this perception survey we will continue to talk to you and survey you when you have an interaction with us – including repairs, your experience as a new customer, gas servicing, ASB and new homes.

What will happen to my answers?

All survey responses will be fed back to us to be used to improve the services that we provide.

For more information

If you would like to find out more, please contact our Platform Hub team on **0333 200 7304**, or you can read more on about the TSMs on the Regulator for Social Housing website:

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/regulator-of-social-housing.



Delivering kindness to our customers and communities

Each year, Platform's Christmas Kindness Campaign offers vital support to our customers and communities.

During our latest kindness campaign, we donated nearly **£31,000** to more than **55** charities, community groups and schools, including local foodbanks, domestic abuse charities, Schools and Youth Groups, The Salvation Army, and many more.

The funding was primarily used by the organisations to offer vital support, purchase essential food supplies, and buy presents for children of families who were struggling during the festive season.

To ensure that funding continues to reach our most vulnerable customers, we use internal and external data to identify key local areas of hardship, where we have a large number of homes and customers.

You can find out more in the news area of our website: www.platformhgh.com/news.



Platform retains top regulatory rating

We're proud to share with you that, after a recent reassessment, we have retained our **G1 governance** and **V1 financial viability** rating from the Regulator for Social Housing which are the highest possible achievable grades.

This reaffirmation means that for the second year running we've performed at the highest level for both governance and viability, giving you the peace of mind that your home is in safe hands.

Governance G1

The provider meets the requirements on governance as set out in the Governance and Viability Standard.

Viability V1

The provider meets the requirements on viability set out in the Governance and Financial Viability Standard and has the capacity to mitigate its exposures effectively.

Elizabeth Froude, Platform's Chief Executive was thrilled and said:

"We're pleased that the Regulator for Social Housing has affirmed our rating. It confirms to us, and others, that Platform Housing Group is a financially solid business with a strong social focus."

"We're continuing to invest in our existing homes, improve energy efficiency and build more new affordable homes in our communities."

People make Platform – Partner with us

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI for short) is very important to us. Our approach is to focus on acknowledging diversity, learning about it and celebrating it as a strength throughout the communities we work in.

By truly embracing the differences within our communities we can offer our customers better customer service.

It's our aim to create positive change for our customers and we've been working hard within our localities to support some of the amazing projects and charities who do just that, every day.

Within the last 12 months our EDI grants have supported **16 community projects** reaching over **2,600 people**.



The types of projects we've supported have included:

Music, cuisine and coffee morning events to support community cohesion

Children's activity clubs

PRIDE events across our localities

Dementia awareness events & respite care events for families

Hate Crime Awareness events

Like to get involved?

If you'd like to get involved with us, support any of the projects/charities we support or know of any groups who may benefit from our help, then please do get in contact with us by emailing: info@platformhg.com.

This year our EDI team are particularly focusing upon LGBT History Month, Neurodiversity, Dementia and Mental Health Awareness, PRIDE events and Hate Crime Awareness to name a few.

Come and join the team

It's a great time to join Platform.
As one of the largest housing associations in the Midlands, owning more than 47,000 homes we have vacancies across our counties and a variety of different roles.



As an inclusive employer we're really proud of our supportive environment, offering excellent terms and conditions, family friendly policies and the chance to work for an organisation whose passion about the delivery of social housing is at the heart of everything we do.

Generous holiday allowance

Training and development opportunities

Family friendly policies

Health cash plan

Remote working widely available (where role permits)

It's a great time to join us.

Visit: www.platformmg.com/join-our-team.

Making meter reading easier

Some of our customers live in homes that have access to communal facilities and pay a percentage of the energy costs associated with these spaces.

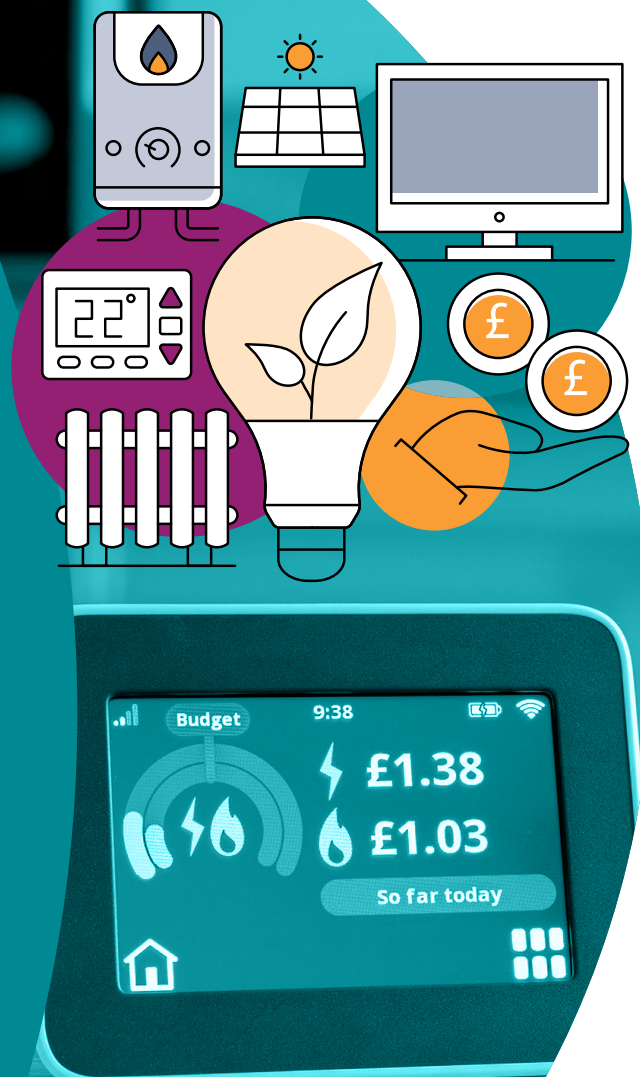
Following a review, to ensure the accuracy of energy metre readings we're working with Total Gas and Power to install automated smart meters into all communal areas starting in March this year.

By having automatic smart meters it will:

- Generate meter readings automatically (no need to wait for someone to do it manually).
- Reduce the stress associated with estimated readings.

Installing the meters is quick and easy and access to communal areas shouldn't be affected. If there is a need to cut the power, Total Gas and Power will arrange an alternative date to return so we can inform all customers of any interruption to the supply to communal areas.

Please contact our Platform Hub on **0333 200 7304** if you'd like more information.



Shared Owner's start new life

Across our areas, we help people afford their own home through shared ownership.

A young couple in East Leake celebrated getting their first home by getting engaged on the day they moved in!

Liam Hainsley and his partner Sophie moved into their new home at our Kestrel Fields development in November last year. They purchased the home through shared ownership with Platform and we also played a small part in Liam popping the question.

"The day was quite hectic so Clare from the sales department had to help out a bit."

Liam explained.

"She was brilliant - I rang ahead to tell her we were coming to the house and that I was planning on proposing, so she arranged for balloons and flowers to be put in the kitchen. After we received the keys, I walked Sophie into the house and when she walked into the kitchen, I asked the question, to which she said yes!"

Liam and Sophie live in their 2 bedroom house where they own a percentage that they pay a mortgage on and then pay a rent to Platform on the remaining share. As they progress, they'll be able to increase the share they own, potentially up to 100 per cent.



If you are interested in shared ownership head over to www.platformhomeownership.com to find out more.



Future Homes Today

We are continuing to push forward with new development sites that will bring high quality, sustainable homes to customers.

In Kirton, Lincolnshire we're already building homes to the Future Homes Standard set for 2025.

Six of the homes are built from panels that have already been constructed in the factory, which the team signed just before they left to mark the occasion. We are using more environmentally friendly methods of construction combined with greener heating technology which will benefit residents in the long term as we look to the future of housing.

Charity donation

In November, we donated **£5,000** to Hope Hospice after meeting one of their patrons by chance at a site event in Oxfordshire.

We're developing **200** homes in the village of Carterton and at the event, the former landowner Anthony Watts struck up a conversation with our Group Chief Executive Elizabeth Froude. The donation was made shortly after the event, and we were delighted to offer our support.



Smarter Homes

Exploring new ways of using technology to improve our services.

As well as video calls to help with repairs, we're testing new smart thermostats that could help measure energy usage and other things like humidity and heat storage in homes.

Although we only started testing these new thermostats at the beginning of 2023, we're already seeing some great results that will enable us to understand how we can help customers live most efficiently in their homes.



Technology for our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation (TAPPI)

In 2021, Harling Court Retirement Village in Ledbury, Herefordshire was selected as a test site for a national innovative project, aimed at improving the way technology is used in housing and care for older people.

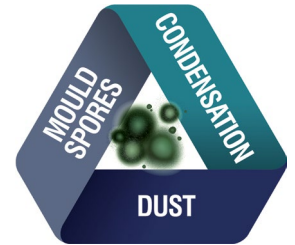
The project is run by the TEC Services Association on behalf of the government and Dunhill Medical Trust as the sponsors.

Harling Court is a small extra care/retirement village offering **41 homes** for rent along with a range of community facilities. Applicants must be aged over 60 and have a health, care and/or support need. Built in 1991, it's representative of many retirement/extra care settings across the country, with limited integration of technology and due for major investment/modernisation.

The project aims to develop technologies to reduce our intervention, for example, a reduction in the amount of emergency calls and increased access to self-service home management areas as well as reducing isolation and improving overall wellbeing.



New ways to report **Damp and Condensation Mould**



We understand that mould and condensation problems in your home can be concerning. By working together, we believe that we can successfully tackle these issues.

We are introducing a new way of reporting damp and condensation mould – a new, better, more efficient way for you and for us.

We have created new help guides and tips on what damp and condensation looks like, how it is caused, and leaflets on how you can tackle it in various examples around the home.

We would also like to assure you that we will be contacting all customers who have previously reported any damp and mould concerns in their home. Even if you have told us before, we want to know if the problem remains so that we can investigate what is continuing to cause the damp and condensation mould and find an appropriate solution.

There may be obstacles or reasons that may be preventing you from following the guidance information, these may include fuel poverty, physical disability, or property design. Please get in touch with us and we will investigate how we can help. We have teams of experts in all areas so will look for solutions according to needs.



How do I report my damp and condensation mould concerns?

Online

The new online reporting form is the best way for you to report any damp and/or condensation mould concerns you may have. Please go to the Your Platform customer portal and complete the new, short reporting form.

You will need to log into your account on the portal to be able to submit the form, which can be found on the 'Repairs and Maintenance' page.

If you do not have a Your Platform account, it's easy to register – you just need your tenancy reference number, which can be found on any letters we have sent you. You can find out more on page 24.

By phone

If you are unable to report through the Your Platform portal, then please call our Contact Centre on **0333 200 7304**, which is open from 08:30am – 5:00pm Monday to Friday.

If you have a smart phone or tablet, we may invite you to a video chat call. It's a great service as it enables us to accurately assess damp and condensation mould in your home in real time and enables our property operatives to see any issues prior to visiting you. It also means that we can offer immediate advice and act quickly.

Platform believe that by introducing these new processes and ways of reporting, we will be able to identify and deal with damp and condensation mould promptly and efficiently.

Further advice and guidance

You can find out more about our new approach, along with a whole range of guidance leaflets on our website: www.platformhg.com/damp-and-condensation-mould.

Neighbourhood Walkabouts



Why not come along and join us on a neighbourhood walkabout and have a say in how you would like your area improved?

Walkabouts give you the chance to meet with your neighbourhood officer, local council, police and other community partners to walk around your neighbourhood, including communal areas and gardens, highlighting any issues or concerns you may have.

The walkabout is looking out for anything that makes your neighbourhood look untidy or unsafe and any issues are recorded. An action plan is then created to solve the problems identified, who is responsible and the resolution timescales.

Below is a list of the walkabouts booked for April 2023, which have been broken down into localities:

Witham Neighbourhood Walkabouts

Date	Location	Time
04/04/2023	Elliot's End, Scraftoft, Leicestershire, LE7 9FX	2.00pm
06/04/2023	Willoughby Road, Alford, LN13 9LF	10.00am
12/04/2023	Marshall's Rise/Brewster's Qtr/Colonial Qtr/Gainsborough, DN21 2BG	10.00am
12/04/2023	Porthouse Drive, Spalding, PE11 3LY	10.00am
13/04/2023	Farndon Court, Market Harborough, LN16 9BN	11.00am
13/04/2023	Alcorn Green, Boston, PE21 0NA	2.00pm
17/04/2023	Hammond Court, Mablethorpe, LN12 2EL	10.00am
17/04/2023	The Square, Toynton All Saints, Spilsby, PE23 5AG	11.00am
20/04/2023	Northbank, Market Harborough, LE16 9BT	11.00am
20/04/2023	Queens Estate, Skegness, PE24 4HE	2.00pm
21/04/2023	Kings Close, Oakham, LN15 6RD	10:30am
21/04/2023	Donata House, George Street, Lutterworth, Leicestershire, LE17 4EQ	10.00am
21/04/2023	Regent Court, Regent Street, Lutterworth, Leicestershire, LE17 4BB	1.00pm
21/04/2023	Ladywood Court, Off Dunley Way, Lutterworth, Leicestershire, LE17	4.00pm
21/04/2023	Vicarage Close, Billesdon, Leicestershire, LE7 9AN	2.00pm
25/04/2023	Hodson Green, Horncastle, LN9 5DE	10.00am
26/04/2023	Rowland Way, Skegness meet at 47 Rolland Way, PE25 2BQ	10:30am
27/04/2023	Home Close, Kibworth Beauchamp, Leicestershire, LE8 0JT	11.00am
27/04/2023	Edwin Court, Market Harborough, Leicestershire, LE16 8FF	2.00pm
28/04/2023	Harveys Lane, off Monks Dyke Road, Louth, LN11 8BP	10:30am

Tame Neighbourhood Walkabouts

Date	Location	Time
04/04/2023	Gateway Court, Matlock DE4 3TP	11:00am
06/04/2023	Shakespeare Court, Ashbourne DE6 1FG	10:00am
06/04/2023	Malthouse Court, Ashbourne DE6 1DN	11:05am
18/04/2023	Hallam Fields Road, Birstall Meadow Road, Nine Leys Square, Dawes Meadow Road, Tithe Close, Birstall LE4 3LX	10:00am
19/04/2023	Holly Court, Measham DE12 7JU. Meet in car park	11:00am
20/04/2023	Wortley Court, Bradwell S33 9LB	10:00am
20/04/2023	Bradwell Head Road, Bradwell S33 9HD	11:00am
20/04/2023	Foxford Close, Solihull B36 9TQ	10:00am
20/04/2023	Parkside Court, Lichfield WS13 7FG	10:00am
21/04/2023	Baskerville Road/Weft Way, Nuneaton CV11 6QE	10:00am
26/04/2023	St Marys' View, Ogle Street, Hucknall NG15 7AZ	10:00am
26/04/2023	Westbourne Court, Lichfield Road, Walsall, West Midlands, WS4 2DD	10:00am

Severn Neighbourhood Walkabouts

Date	Location	Time
03/04/2023	Goldthorn Court, Kidderminster DY11 7BP	10:00am
04/04/2023	Cherwell & Portesfield, Tolladine Worcester WR4 9BN	11:00am
04/04/2023	Back Lane South/Moor St Worcester WR1 3DE	11:00am
13/04/2023	Dent Close, Worcester WR15 1AJ	12:30pm
14/04/2023	Bays Meadow, Droitwich WR9 8JU	11:00am
19/04/2023	Ramsons Close, Malvern WR14 2UX	10:00am
19/04/2023	Chawson Pleck area, Droitwich WR9 8TB	10:00am
19/04/2023	The Leys Cradley WR13 5NU	10:30am
19/04/2023	Vesta & Blockhouse, Worcester WR1 2BL	10:00am
19/04/2023	Old Market Close, Ross on Wye HR9 7QB	2:30pm
20/04/2023	Pardoe Drive, Pershore WR10 1RJ	10:00am
20/04/2023	Kirkham Gardens, Bromyard HR7 4EA	2:00pm
24/04/2023	Chedworth/Rodborough/Snowshill, Warndon Worcester WR4 9YL	1:30pm
25/04/2023	Drake Avenue, Dines Green, Worcester WR2 5RH	10:00am
27/04/2023	Ullswater & Ennerdale Close, Warndon Worcester WR4 9DN	1:30pm
27/04/2023	Duke of Edinburgh Way, Malvern WR14 1AZ	10:00am

If your neighbourhood is not listed above, please visit our website to view the 2023-24 walkabout schedules, which also include meeting place details: www.platformmhg.com.

Platform secure grant to help fund community warm spaces

A warm welcome will be offered to customers across our communities, thanks to **£10,000** grant funding, secured from the EEM Trust cost of living fund.

This funding, along with **£20,000** from our Wellbeing Fund and Community Chest Funding, is being used to help fund existing and new community warm spaces.

Over 50 existing warm spaces, across all of our geographical areas, will receive a share of the **£30,000** funding which will enable them to hold more sessions, stay open a little longer or offer more food. The funding will also provide warm packs that people can take away with them to help them keep a little warmer at home.

We have also launched a **new warm hub** in our Community Room, Clarke Way, Skegness. The hub is open every Thursday between 10am and 12 noon – so please pop along to receive a warm welcome from our local community champions.

Funding has been allocated to groups and organisations taking into consideration the number of homes we have in the area, where customers are experiencing high levels of hardship and fuel poverty, along with homes that have low EPC ratings.

What are warm spaces and how can I find one near me?

The warm spaces initiative is the ongoing community response to the cost of living crisis and lots of local councils and community organisations are getting involved to provide a warm welcome to everyone who might need it this winter.

Warm spaces are where local people can:

- Sit and be warm.
- Study or work on their laptop (with access to free Wi-fi)
- Have a free hot drink.
- Be with company.
- Access advice or information/signposting to advice on debt, bills, benefits and food.

You can visit the websites listed below to find out what's available in your local area.

- www.warmspaces.org/space
- www.warmwelcome.uk

You can also visit your local authority website to find out more, as most local councils are creating their own list of warm places for their communities.

If you're not sure who your local authority is, you can find out by typing in your postcode on the government website: www.gov.uk/find-local-council.



warm hub
funding

We are working hard to make sure you **stay safe**

As your landlord we have important legal duties and obligations. Most of these responsibilities involve safeguarding you, your home and family.

By law, we must carry out safety checks and it's an important condition of your tenancy that you give us access to your home to carry out these vital checks.

A key part of this is making sure we do an annual gas safety check on all of our homes that have a gas connection. This check is very important and can help save lives.

It makes sure that the gas appliances, fittings, and flues in your home are safe. This includes things like central heating, boilers and gas fires.

Why is servicing my gas boiler important?

There are lots of reasons why you need to get your boiler serviced, as outlined below. The most important one is to keep your loved ones safe from harm.

- Getting your boiler serviced regularly will help to keep it running safely. A well-maintained boiler uses energy more efficiently.
- A faulty boiler can be incredibly dangerous – every year, there are around 60 deaths from accidental carbon monoxide poisoning in England and Wales.
- During your boiler service, a Platform Gas Safe registered engineer will check for leaks and issues, giving you peace of mind.
- Servicing may seem like an inconvenience, but it could help to save you money overall.
- During your service, our engineer will carry out a host of checks to make sure that your boiler is working efficiently.

What else do you look at?

We will also be checking fire alarms and carbon dioxide (CO₂) detectors to ensure they are working correctly.

In homes where there is no carbon monoxide detector we will be fitting them to ensure that we meet the revised Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (Amendment) Regulations 2022.

If you feel that any installed detectors in your home are faulty, report these to us immediately via the Your Platform customer portal or by calling 0333 200 7304.

Why is it important that I give you access to my home for a gas safety check?

Every year people are killed because of faulty gas fires or appliances in the home. You can't see, smell or taste carbon monoxide but it can kill within minutes.

There is no charge to you for the gas servicing and safety check, which is a quick and simple process.

What can I do to help?

It's vitally important that you let us in to your home to do this essential work as the safety check and service will help to keep you, your family and neighbours safe.

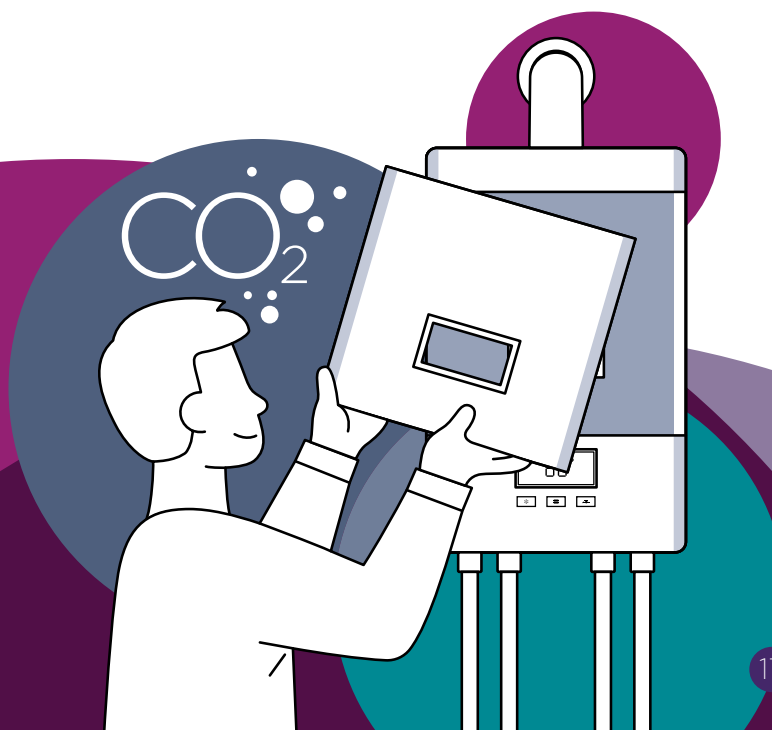
If you need to change your gas safety check appointment, please let us know. You can do this online at www.platformhg.com/change-your-annual-gas-service or via the YourPlatform customer portal.

Your appointment can then be offered to another customer, who may be waiting for a repair to be carried out.

If you think your home is due its annual gas safety inspection and you have not heard from us, please get in touch by completing our online website enquiry form: www.platformhg.com/general-enquiries.

What should I do if I smell gas?

If you smell gas or think there might be a gas leak, **call the free 24-hour national gas emergency number immediately on 0800 111 999.**



New and improved services

We are always on the look out for technologies that can help us deliver new and improved services. Below are a number of new products and technologies we have put in place to help deliver gas safety and servicing.

New technology results in an increase in first time gas appointments

We've seen a significant increase in first-time gas safety check appointments thanks to a powerful new digital solution, which automates the process of booking, confirming and rescheduling gas appointments with customers.

This new technology is ensuring that we continue to help keep you safe and is also enabling us to reduce the cost of missed appointments; money that could be spent carrying out home improvements or delivering other repairs.

Prior to this, gas appointments were booked with customers by either letter or text message and if you needed to rearrange an appointment, you would need to contact us.

In just four months, the rate of no-access appointments, which is when a customer is not at home to let our gas operative in, has reduced by **24 per cent**, a figure that we believe will continue to rise in the coming months.

Success of video trial results in new contract

We recently trialled new video technology which enabled us to offer a live video solution to identify gas problems within a customer's home.

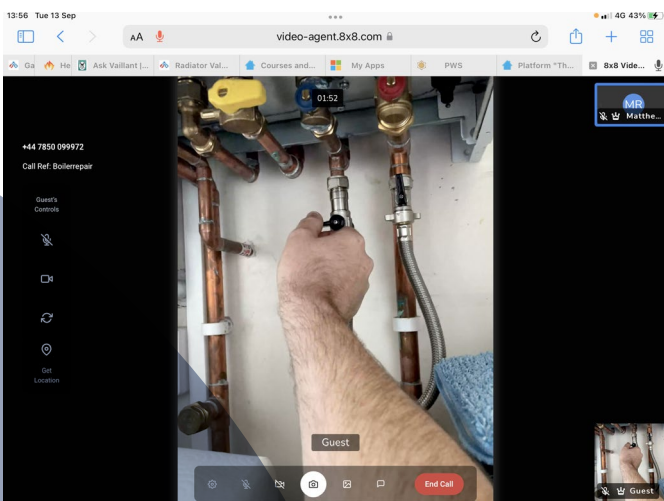
The trial allowed Property Care operatives to conduct two way video calls with customers so that repairs could either be seen prior to a visit or fixed remotely. Viewing the problem prior to a visit, also had the added benefit of ensuring that our operatives had the correct materials to repair the problem on arrival.

How does it work?

If you report a gas repair, an SMS (text message) can be sent to you by a Property Care operative; a simple click on the link included starts the video call with no need to download any software or set up an account. The operative can then talk you through your issue and take pictures from your camera which are automatically saved into our system. Importantly, the images can be interpreted in real time enabling the operative to talk a customer through a remote repair, if appropriate.

The results from the trial were encouraging with **39 per cent of calls** resulting in a remote repair and **26 per cent of calls** reducing the need for an initial inspection; heating was the largest remote fix area.

Following this successful trial with our communications partner, 8x8 we have now entered into a new 12-month contract with them. This will ensure that we can continue to offer an improved customer experience and a reduction in the number of home visits needed. It will also lead to more availability of our operatives so that they can carry out jobs which require a physical presence and a reduction in their travel time, which will have a positive impact on our carbon footprint.



New gas app

In August 2022, we launched a new Capped Gas app, which we have developed internally to ensure that it meets all of our legal requirements to help keep you and your family safe.

What does the new Capped Gas app do?

The new app flags homes where the gas supply has been capped off. It then sends a message to our neighbourhood teams who contact the customer to understand why their gas supply has been capped, and to ultimately work with you to ensure that you have a working heating and hot water system.

In the majority of cases, the gas has been capped off as we had not been able to access the home to carry out a gas safety check. However, in some cases, we have found that this call has led to us raising a safeguarding concern, providing further relevant support and working with our partners who are able to offer more specialist help.

Since going live, we have also further developed the app so that neighbourhood officers can schedule and book an appointment for the gas to be turned back on.

Is the new app helping?

The new app has been live for approximately 6 months and during this time, we are already starting to see some great results:

475	capped gas cases logged.
341	capped gas cases have been resolved and closed.
282	customers have had their gas uncapped.

Let us in and you could win!



Let us in to do your annual gas safety check the first time we ask and you could win £150 of High Street vouchers.

All eligible customers that allow us first time access will automatically be entered into the quarterly prize draw.



Tips on keeping warm and saving energy around the home

- The recommended temperature for sitting rooms and bathrooms is 18 - 21°C.
- Turning your thermostat down a single degree can save on your heating bill.
- Big furniture close to radiators can stop heat reaching the room, so move them an inch or two away for better air circulation.
- If you have thermostatic radiator valves use them in the rooms that you are using and turn them down or off in rooms you are not using.
- All rooms should be heated occasionally to avoid the risk of condensation and mould growth forming.
- Curtains and blinds help keep the heat in, close them as soon as it starts to get dark.
- Using draught excluders at doors keeps the heat in the room.
- Unplug your devices – your phone, tablet or TV still use energy on standby.

Feeling chilly?

- Put on an extra layer of clothing - an extra jumper or a pair of socks can make all the difference and save you money.
- Use a higher tog duvet on your bed to avoid using heating overnight.
- Why not try a hot water bottle? Use leftover water from the kettle when making a hot drink to fill it up.
- Get some extra blankets and keep them near to the bed to put on if you feel cold during the night.

Platform Communities Connected

Our Autumn Communities Connected programme was a great success with **109 community events** taking place across our communities.

Over **3,000 customers and partners** along with **225 colleagues and Board members**, all committed to creating stronger, healthier and thriving communities were brought together during our two-week programme of events.

To say thank you to everyone involved, we created a brief video highlighting some of the great work that took place, which can be viewed on our YouTube channel using this link: [click here](#).

Coming soon

On the back of this success, our Community Engagement Team is working with local communities and partners to develop a programme of activities for 2023, which will start on 1st May. Please keep an eye on our website: www.platformhg.com and our Facebook account - [@PlatformHousing](#) to see when we will be in your area.



Community Heroes Awards

Platform's annual Community Heroes Awards recognise our customers who make a real difference, whether as an individual or as part of a community group.

There are a range of awards up for grabs including, Communities Together, Customer Involvement, Digital, Environmental, Young Person and Going the Extra Mile awards.

If you'd like to find out who this year's Community Heroes Awards winners are and hear some of these unsung hero's stories, please join us online at:

**12 noon - Wednesday 26th
April 2023**

The event will be online, so if you'd like to get involved, please complete our online form here - <https://forms.office.com/e/z6D1jZgWY3> - and we will be in touch with further details.



100-year-old customer shares her secret to a long life as she marks her special birthday

To mark **Carolie Howells' milestone 100th birthday**, her family and the independent living team at **Epperstone Court, Nottingham** gave her a party like no other – attended by over 75 guests, live entertainment and a moving speech given by her son, **Adrian**.

Born in Otley, Yorkshire, Carolie made Nottingham her home after she got married and went on to have three children, Kay, Adrian and Colin.

She finished grammar school at the age of 16, just as the Second World War broke out in 1939. Her first job was working at a wool merchants before going on to be a civil servant for many years. After retirement and well into her eighties, Carolie volunteered in local charity shops.

Lorraine DeCosta, Platform's Independent Living Scheme Officer, explained:

"In honour of Carolie's birthday, her family pulled out all the stops with entertainment, delicious food, and a beautiful celebration cake."

"Carolie always has a ready smile and is a very active member of our lovely community here at Epperstone Court. We were honoured to be part of her birthday celebrations and view her letter from our new King marking the special occasion – something that she was very proud of."

When asked about her secret to living to such an incredible age, Carolie said:

"I've always taken life as it comes, made the most of life – good or bad – and always been kind."

Carolie moved into Epperstone Court over 10 years ago; a home she refers to as nice and comfy, with friendly neighbours, a great garden and plenty of activities to keep her mind and body active.

Further information

If you are interested in living in one of our Retirement Living Communities you can visit our website and click on **'Find a Home'** to learn more: www.platformhg.com.

Carolie is pictured during her birthday celebrations with Platform's Independent Living Scheme Officer, Lorraine DeCosta.



New for this year - Community Conversation Roadshows

Our Customer and Community Engagement Team will soon be hitting the road and they'll be bringing other colleagues and teams with them.

This spring marks the launch of our new **Community Conversation Roadshows** which we will be rolling out across our localities. The sessions will give you the opportunity to:

- Talk to us about the issues that matter to you.
- Find out more about how you can get involved in shaping our services.
- Hear from colleagues in our Community Safety, Neighbourhoods, Successful Tenancies and Gas Safety teams who will offer guidance and share future plans.

The Roadshow sessions will be tailored to each area and will initially be rolled out at key community hubs across our geography, with more locations being added as the year rolls on.

We will also be hosting online conversations for customers who are not able to or would prefer not to attend a roadshow in person.

So, please keep your eyes peeled for more news on when Community Conversations Roadshows will be coming to a venue near you, on our website: www.platformhg.com or our Facebook account - [@PlatformHousing](https://www.facebook.com/PlatformHousing).

Supporting our customers and communities



Customer groups, local charities, clubs and other not-for-profit organisations can apply for Community Chest Funding to support projects that benefit our customers and communities.

Since April 2022, we have received **124 applications**, which are assessed by members of our Customer Experience Panel, including customers that live in our homes.

Awards totalling **£140,000** have been made during this time and below are some of the great projects our Community Chest Funding has supported:



Alford Town Football Club, Alford, Lincolnshire

£3,000 funding for young players team coats.

"We are very grateful for the generous grant which has enabled us to provide good quality winter coats for general use, including school, for approximately 130 children aged 6 -15 years old, currently playing for our teams.

"This has ensured that all of these children will be well wrapped up against the cold and rain during the winter, at a time when families are struggling with the steep rises in the cost of living."



What Makes You Beautiful Makes You Happy, Malvern, Worcestershire

£1,500 funding for fun, family day out.

"We would like to thank Platform Housing Group for their Community Chest Funding, which enabled us to organise a coach trip to Legoland, something that many of the children and families that we support wouldn't ordinarily be able to do."



Binbrook Residents Group, Binbrook, Lincolnshire

£2,000 funding to set up a local Warm Community Hub.

"We are very excited about the Community Chest funding which has enabled us to work with other groups in Binbrook village to set up our Warm Welcome Community Hub in the High Street.

"Our weekly session is attended by around 30 local people, who can have hot soup or toasties, hot drinks and enjoy the company of others, while keeping nice and warm."



Toynton All Saints Primary School, Spilsbury, Lincolnshire

£700 funding for new playground friendship bench, and school library books.

“As a school we feel fortunate to have received Community Chest funding to buy a new friendship bench for our playground, a set of class dictionaries and some new French books for our library to further develop the curriculum we offer.”



Broughton Astley Parish Council, Leicestershire

£2,000 funding towards two new community defibrillators.

“We are delighted that the two new defibrillators have now been installed in a decommissioned telephone kiosk and at a local recreation ground. Both are now working fully and registered with the ambulance service.”



Worcester TheatreMakers, Worcestershire

£2,580 funding to provide 16 funded places for local children aged between 5 and 16 years old.

“The financial support from Platform has made a huge difference to our fundraising campaign. We’re excited about reaching out to local families, ensuring their children don’t miss out on the joyful drama experiences we love providing.”



Freedom Leisure, Matlock, Derbyshire

£2,925 funding to deliver free seated exercise classes.

“Our mission at Arc Leisure Matlock is simple - to improve lives through leisure. The support provided by Platform Housing Group has enabled us to deliver this through the provision of chair-based exercise classes at Underhall.”

“The impact of this work goes beyond supporting residents with their physical health, providing them with the opportunity to come together to socialise and improve their mental well-being.”

How to apply

If you’re a charity, club or not-for-profit organisation, you can apply to our **Community Chest** for funding to bring about positive changes for Platform customers and communities.

The quickest and simplest way to apply is by completing our online website application form – www.platformhg.com/platform-community-chest.

Your Platform – Access our Services 24/7

Your Platform is a self-service customer portal which enables you to manage your tenancy, conveniently at a time that suits you.

By registering to use Your Platform, you will be able to:

- Check your rent balance and recent transactions.
- Make a payment.
- Change a direct debit.
- Report a repair.
- Update personal information.

More than **12,000 customers** are already taking advantage of this great service which is available 24/7.

To get started simply head over to our website: www.your.platformhmg.com/register-tenancy/ and register. To do this you will need:

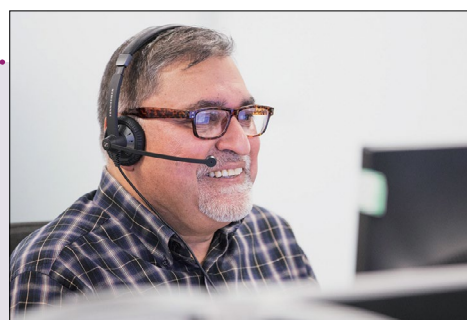
- Your tenancy reference number – which can be found on any letter from us.
- Your date of birth.
- Your email address.

Platform Housing Group Website

From March you'll notice a change to our website.

Following consultation with our involved customers and reviewing data of usage, we have built a new website that reflects what information our existing customers and potential customers are looking for.

Our aim is that it is user friendly, clear, intuitive and gives you the information you want within a few clicks.



You can still register and access the Your Platform customer portal to manage your tenancy account and report repairs, find useful information about managing your home, along with a great new help and support section.

Why not visit www.platformhmg.com and take a look!

Get Involved and share your views!

Becoming an involved customer is your chance to improve services and make a positive difference by sharing your feedback and experiences.

It can also be a great way to meet new people, gain valuable volunteering experience and boost your work-related skills.

We understand that life can get really busy, so whether you can just spare a few hours of your time or would like to play a more active role, there is something for everyone.

By taking part in focus groups, surveys, mystery shopping and giving your views on the documents and letters that we send to customers, you'll make sure that we always put customers at the heart of the decisions we make and deliver what we say we will.

If you have more time to give on a regular basis, you can apply to join our **Customer Experience or Scrutiny Panels**.

We are currently working with some of our involved customers on a co-creation project to review

customer fire safety information. Ideally, we also want to speak to customers who live in blocks of flats to seek their views on communal area fire safety by taking part in quick online surveys or attending informal focus group sessions.

You can find out more, let us know that you are interested in sharing your views on the above co-creation fire safety project or register to become an involved member by completing our online website form: www.platformhmg.com/get-involved and we will be in touch.



Working together to tackle **Anti-Social Behaviour**

We understand that Anti-Social Behaviour (often referred to as ASB) can have a big impact on your health, sense of security and the way that you feel about your home.

Our dedicated Community Safety Team work with our local Neighbourhood Officers, police, local council and other community partners to resolve any ASB issues as quickly as possible.

In some instances, when an acceptable solution cannot be found, we may need to take Court Action against the perpetrator.

Case 1 – Persistent high levels of ASB

Outcome - Eviction

We take the decision to evict a customer very seriously as someone losing their home is obviously not a positive outcome.

When we have utilised and exhausted all other available options to manage ASB, including injunctions and exclusion orders, eviction can sometimes be the only remaining option we can take to protect our customers and communities.

The perpetrator in this eviction case repeatedly demonstrated a high level of serious ASB, including verbal abuse towards their own family, our colleagues, and other professionals from partner agencies. Sadly, most of the verbal abuse, inappropriate behaviour and aggressive threats of violence were directed at neighbours, which was causing a significant negative impact on their health and wellbeing.

Other sanctions including a Criminal Behaviour Order and a suspended prison sentence for various criminal offences had been tried and failed.

Our Community Safety Officer worked closely with the police and the local community to gather the extensive amount of evidence needed to obtain an eviction, including video footage and witness statements. Obtaining the possession order was only possible due to the courage of residents who provided information and gave evidence in court.

Throughout this difficult case, our Neighbourhood and Community Safety Officers engaged with a range of partner agencies to also ensure that relevant support was in place for the perpetrator, who had registered disabilities. This included the completion of a risk assessment and the preparation of a Public Sector Equality Duty statement in line with the equality act. A mental health assessment concluded that the ASB was not as a result of any health issues.



Case 2 – ASB

Outcome - Civil Injunction, Suspended Prison Sentence and Possession Order

We received a number of complaints from customers, living in an apartment building, about a neighbour that was causing a disturbance by playing loud music, smoking cannabis, and having large numbers of visitors coming and going from their property in the early hours of the morning. When asked by neighbours to be more considerate, the perpetrator became verbally abusive and threatening.

Our Neighbourhood Officer and police visited to discuss the complaints and made referrals for the perpetrator to drug and alcohol support agencies. However, the ASB increased, and they failed to engage with any support offered.

Warning letters, further visits and an acceptable behaviour contract were also issued, but the ASB continued, with increased verbal abuse.

Although several customers made reports of ongoing ASB to us, the police and local council, they did not want to be witnesses in any legal action due to fear of reprisals. However, one courageous customer who was very vulnerable due to physical and mental health illnesses agreed to support our application for a legal sanction.

Sadly, due to the ongoing ASB, this customer suffered a decline in their mental and physical health and felt they could no longer be a witness. Fortunately, this customer's mother and registered carer, agreed to be a witness, as she visited three times a day and had seen a lot of the reported incidents.

At court, a 2-year Civil Injunction Order to prohibit the perpetrator's behaviour was obtained. After a few weeks, this injunction order was being breached on a regular basis, so we returned to court. The case was adjourned three times as the perpetrator did not attend. The court, therefore issued a bench warrant for their arrest, and they were brought before the court, and issued with a 15-day suspended prison sentence.

The ASB continued to escalate, causing several customers to make requests to move out of their homes. At this point we applied back to the court to obtain a Possession Order.

Again, the customer's mother attended court and gave further witness evidence on the impact that the ASB was now having on her own mental health and wellbeing. Our application was also supported by the local police and the District Council's Community Safety Team.

Throughout this case the witnesses were supported by our Community Safety Officer, who visited, called regularly and also made referrals for counselling support.

Both of these cases highlight how customers and our colleagues can work together to tackle ASB.

Report it!

If you are experiencing ASB, you can report it to us online on our website:

www.platformhg.com/report-anti-social-behaviour.

You will also find information about ASB, including details of the kind of behaviour that is treated as ASB, advice to help you try and resolve a problem and sources of specialist support.

If you are in immediate danger, call the police on **999**.



Repairs update: On the right path

As previously explained, due to the pandemic, it has been a challenging time for our repairs teams over the last two years.

Although we still have some work to do, we'd like to share some good news with you and reassure you that we are on the right path to ensuring that our repairs service returns to business as usual, as quickly as possible.

Customer Satisfaction

We are pleased to report that customer satisfaction rates remain consistent, with our average, year-to-date, satisfaction rate at **88.4 per cent**.

There is a slight difference in the satisfaction levels across our three localities with Witham at **89.5 per cent**, Tame at **87.1 per cent** and Severn at **88.4 per cent**, so we are continuing to work hard to ensure that we deliver a consistent level of service for all of our customers irrespective of where they live.

Time to complete a repair

Currently our average time to complete a repair is **29.98** days, a figure that has been reducing, as it was 61 days in April 2022 and 39 days in December, and we believe that it will continue to reduce over the coming months.

Our right first time for jobs is currently at **88.5 per cent**, **3.5 per cent** higher than our **85 per cent** year-end target.

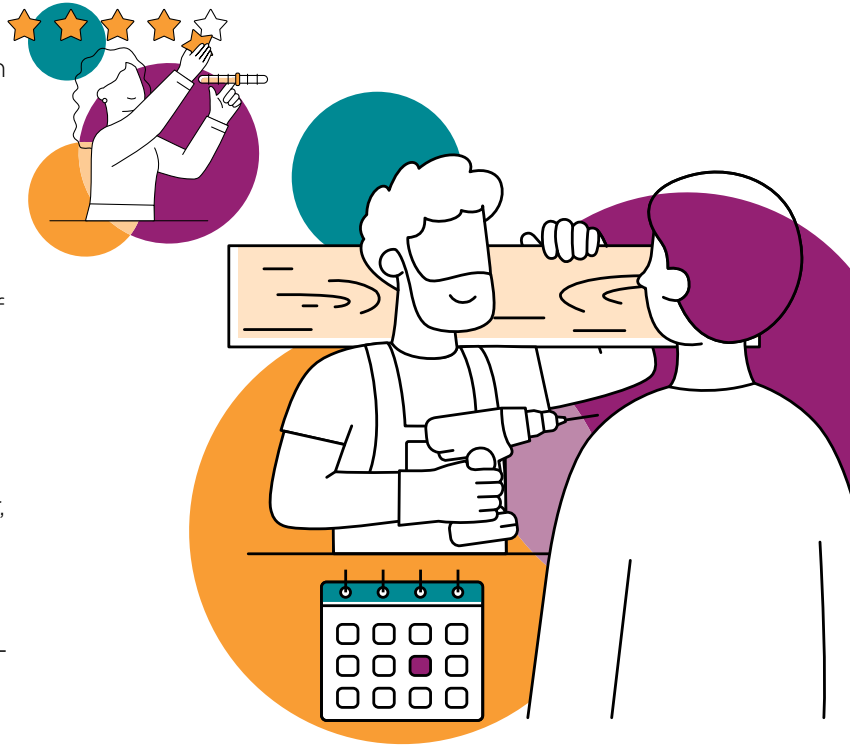
Completed repairs

On average we are carrying out **1,955 repairs** per week, although we have seen this number increase to **2,333** for the last seven weeks - indicating that the work we are doing to drive up the number and quality of repairs being completed is delivering great results.

This work has included ensuring that all of our operatives have the correct tools and supplies needed to complete jobs during their first visit to your home.

We are also making sure that larger, more complex jobs are being categorised correctly, which is enabling our operatives to concentrate on carrying out quick turnaround responsive repairs.

It also means that the number of repairs each of our operatives can complete in a day will continue to increase. Categorising repair jobs correctly will also reduce the time needed to complete a repair, so jobs will be carried out much quicker for our customers.



Reducing CO₂ emissions

Looking after 47,000 homes, means that we have a large fleet of vans. By partnering with a company called Lightfoot, we are implementing a new vehicle management system across our Property Care teams.

Our operatives have been given guidance on how to maximise the efficiency of their vehicles so that they can achieve the highest number of miles per gallon (mpg), which will lead to cost savings.

The introduction of 40 new electrical vehicles to our fleet in April/May will also help us to drive down the level of CO₂ emissions our vehicles release, into the environment, reducing Platform's carbon footprint.