

# NHMF Service Provider Forum Delivers Critical Insights on Decarbonisation and Social Value Challenges

The NHMF Service Provider Forum's recent event on May 22nd, 2025, proved to be an informative gathering that tackled two of the most pressing issues facing the social housing sector today: decarbonisation and social value. With a diverse audience of housing providers, contractors, and specialists, the forum delivered invaluable insights into the complex challenges and innovative solutions shaping the industry's future.

## Decarbonisation: The Scale of the Challenge

The event's first session starkly illustrated the monumental task ahead for the sector's net-zero ambitions. Jesse Meeks from UCEM revealed that while the UK currently retrofits only 500-2,000 homes per week nationally, achieving net zero by 2050 requires upgrading over 20,000 homes weekly. With approximately 60% of social homes still below EPC C standard, the urgency couldn't be clearer.

Patrick Flynn from Sovereign Network Group outlined their ambitious £9.4 Billion, 10-year investment plan, including retrofitting 15,000 properties to B+ standard. However, the sector faces significant headwinds, with External Wall Insulation costs tripling from £12,000 to £35,000+ per property, driven primarily by labour shortages and market saturation.

The discussion highlighted how government funding cycles, while helpful, create administrative burdens and cash flow challenges that don't align with housing associations' 30-year planning horizons. Innovation emerged as a key theme, with Steve Gapik of Soltherm explaining how their system of off-site manufacturing can reduce installation time from five weeks to one week while addressing the skills shortages.

## Social Value: The Sector's New "Hot Potato"

The afternoon session tackled social value – described memorably as the housing sector's new "hot potato." This perfectly captured how organisations recognise the importance of social value but struggle with effective implementation and delivery.

Matthew Grenier from HACT introduced the "Gold Loop" framework, emphasising that effective social value must be community-needs driven, strategically integrated, and collaboratively delivered. The Procurement Act 2025's shift from "Most Economically Advantageous Tender" to "Most Advantageous Tender" signals the sector's evolution to broader value considerations.

Kelly Thomas from MTVH shared the client perspective, highlighting how social value commitments often become disconnected from delivery teams. Her emphasis on genuine partnership over hierarchical client-supplier relationships resonated strongly with

attendees, as did her advocacy for focusing on real lasting impact rather than inflated monetary valuations.

## Client Expectations and Service Provider Solutions

Throughout both sessions, housing providers clearly articulated their expectations: they need partners who understand the complexity of blended funding, can navigate administrative requirements, and deliver genuine community impact. The consensus emerged that successful service providers must take on more of the bureaucratic burden while maintaining focus on quality delivery and measurable outcomes.

## Constructive Panel Discussions

Each session concluded with Melissa Woodall, Chair of the NHMF Service Provider Forum, leading candid panel discussions based on questions submitted by members. These exchanges proved invaluable, creating space for honest dialogue about delivery challenges, funding complexities, and practical solutions.

The discussions reinforced that while government support accelerates progress, the sector must drive transformation through innovation, skills development, and genuine partnership working to achieve the scale and pace required for 2050 targets.

## Resources and Next Steps

NHMF Service Provider Forum members should watch for the comprehensive one-page summaries of both sessions, providing executive-level insights into the key themes and takeaways from these critical discussions.

For those interested in joining this vital conversation or becoming a member of the NHMF Service Provider Forum, please visit our website to learn more about how you can contribute to shaping the future of social housing maintenance and improvement.

