

'Defendable decision-making in retrofit – why slowing down the process can improve long-term outcomes' – Procure Plus

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As the Home Upgrade Grant Wave 2 (HUG2) programme comes to a close and the remaining TrustMark lodgements and reconciliations take place, the sector can take a well-earned breath.

Nobody can deny that HUG2 was a challenge, with its fair share of obstacles, complex delivery, and a sector still maturing in retrofit capability. But from that challenge comes clarity. It's clear that the most common point of failure in these projects wasn't technology, funding, or ambition – but procurement.

With new funding rounds such as the Warm Homes: Local Grant and Social Housing Fund Wave 3 approaching, it seems that central government has taken on board our feedback and started to shape funding schemes that are more aligned with industry needs.

Now, as a sector, we have the opportunity to demonstrate that we can deliver quality retrofit projects at scale and at value. The pressure to deliver is mounting, but so is the potential to make a lasting impact.

If we're serious about achieving retrofit success, we have to carry forward the most valuable insight from HUG2: investing time upfront to lay solid foundations is what unlocks real momentum down the line.

Procurement is where success begins

Most retrofit projects that miss the mark have one thing in common, and that's a procurement process that was either rushed or not clearly thought through with sufficient detail. If scopes are fuzzy, timelines too ambitious, or delivery assumptions made too early, it's no surprise when issues crop up. Cost overruns, contract hiccups, and unhappy residents aren't just bad luck, they're signs that the groundwork needed more attention.

But this isn't just about ticking boxes, it's about setting everyone up for success. Contractors do their best work when they know what's expected, and clients get better results when they understand the kind of support and collaboration that's needed. Proper planning prevents poor performance - especially when it comes to procurement.

Slowing down to get it right

One of the most successful HUG2 projects Procure Plus has been involved in recently came very late in the programme window. The client approached us with the need to mobilise quickly, but rather than rushing to tender, we advised a short but focused pause.

Together, we looked closely at who the client was, who their residents were, the regional market, the contractor landscape and the internal resources they could commit. While this took extra time and work to pull together, the result was worth it.

With this additional knowledge, we defined a delivery model, tender documentation, and evaluation approach that gave everyone clarity. Most importantly, the project was audit-ready, supported by strong governance, clear documentation, and a contractor who delivered as expected. Resident feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Installations were well-managed, communication was clear, and disruption was minimal.

Building confidence through better planning

What made that project work wasn't complicated or groundbreaking. It came down to good procurement basics, like clear scope, strong partnerships, and realistic planning. But in the retrofit industry, where the stakes are high and residents are directly affected, these simple things really matter.

The market has come a long way since retrofit funding first started. There are more contractors, and quality is getting better. But none of that replaces the need to plan properly from day one. The sector will only feel confident if projects are set up to succeed, not just in spending the money right but in delivering good homes and real value for everyone.

Supporting landlords to deliver with confidence

At Procure Plus, we've helped deliver retrofit procurement on dozens of projects. Because we were set up by housing associations and run as a not-for-profit, we get the pressures landlords face - both commercial and social - and we're here to help make things easier.

We work side by side with landlords to shape procurement that's not just compliant, but practical and focused on real outcomes. That means helping define delivery models, getting internal teams aligned, and streamlining the tender process so the right contractors are in place when they're needed. With new funding rounds on the horizon, this is the moment to pause, plan, and approach procurement with

purpose.