

DRAFT

gentoo

**Great homes
Strong communities
Inspired people**
for Sunderland

Customer engagement strategy

**For building safety in high-rise
residential buildings**



www.gentoo-group.com

Introduction

The Building Safety Act 2022

Following the Grenfell Tower fire in June 2017 and a government inquiry into the fire, the government introduced the Building Safety Act 2022.

This is a new regulatory system for managing high-rise residential buildings. These are buildings that are 7 storeys or more, or over 18 metres high. The act defines two major risks: the spread of fire and structural failure.

The Building Safety Act 2022 established an independent Building Safety Regulator. The regulator is part of the Health and Safety Executive and oversees the safety and standards of all high-rise residential buildings.

What it means for customers living in high-rise residential buildings

We are responsible for 25 high-rise residential buildings. Customers living in these buildings will have more say in how their building and their homes are kept safe. They will be able to raise concerns to nominated people who we are legally required to listen to them.

If a customer feels we are not listening to their concerns, they can raise them with the Building Safety Regulator.

Contact

The named accountable person for our 25 high-rise residential buildings is:

Gentoo Group

Emperor House
2 Emperor Way
Doxford International
Business Park
Sunderland
SR3 3XR

The named contact for our 25 high-rise residential buildings is:

Stacey Thwaites

Emperor House
2 Emperor Way
Doxford International
Business Park
Sunderland
SR3 3XR

E: fireandbuildingsafety@gentoo.com
T: **07801 532 594**

Aims

Our customer engagement strategy aims to empower customers who live in our high-rise residential buildings. It allows customers to play a vital role in making sure that:

- their building is safe
- their building remains safe
- they and their neighbours feel safe in their homes

How we will do this

Understand the needs of customers who live in our high-rise residential buildings



Listen to customers and understand their concerns



Identify the best way to communicate with customers as individuals



Consult with customers about decisions that affect the safety of their building



Empower customers to have their say and raise building safety concerns



Provide ways for customers to get involved in how their buildings are managed



To ensure this strategy remains effective, it will be reviewed:

- at least every two years
- following any incident we need to report to the building safety regulator
- following any significant material alteration to a high-rise residential building

Objectives

Any time we communicate with customers about building safety, our objectives are to:

Inform

By providing customers with information that they need to know about their building or any planned work



Educate

To help customers understand more about safety in their building, the reasons why particular work is happening or why something is not permitted



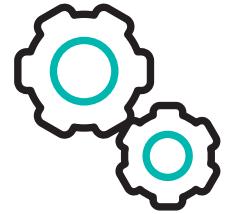
Reassure

By providing reminders and reassurances of the safety measures in place should there be an emergency



Change behaviour

To raise awareness of the responsibilities of customers and their neighbours to keep everyone living in the building safe



Roles and responsibilities

We have many teams responsible for different elements of building safety.

Building Safety Team

Responsible for putting this strategy into place for all of our 25 high-rise residential buildings.

Property Services and Asset Management Teams

Responsible for repairs and improvements in flats and communal areas.

Housing Team

Responsible for all other questions about flats, buildings, neighbourhoods and their tenancies.

Customers who live in our high-rise residential buildings

Responsible for co-operating with us on building safety matters and helping to keep the building safe, including raising building safety concerns. We consider our 'customers' to be anyone living in any high-rise residential building, regardless of whether they are a social housing customer or leaseholder.

Building Safety Regulator

Responsible for leading and putting in place the new regulatory framework for high-rise residential buildings.

Building safety customer group

Our building safety customer group discusses and consults on building safety matters in our high-rise residential buildings. This is a voluntary group, made up of customers who live in our buildings or their nominated representatives.

The group work together with us on all matters affecting building safety in our high-rise residential buildings. We build professional working relationships with our group members and engage with them in an open and transparent way.

We look to this group to challenge decisions that affect building safety and how effectively we communicate and engage with them.

We are accountable to this group for all the decisions we make that affect building safety.

Any customer who lives in one of our high-rise residential buildings is welcome to join the group. They can join by either:

- emailing **fireandbuildingsafety@gentogroup.com**
- speaking to their Neighbourhood Co-ordinator

A complete list of Neighbourhood Co-ordinators is available from **www.gentogroup.com/neighbourhood-coordinators**



Understanding our customers' engagement and communication needs

To have meaningful and effective engagement and communication with our customers, we must understand and respect our customers' needs and preferences.

We will work with our customers to understand their needs and preferences so we can avoid creating any barriers that prevent effective engagement and communication.

Use existing information

We will use any existing information we have to identify communication and engagement needs and preferences. This includes things like a preferred language or large print documents.

Ask customers

We will use surveys, workshops and drop-in sessions to ask customers how they want to communicate with us. And how they want us to communicate with them.

Be easy to contact

We will give customers a named person and their contact details so customers can speak to someone directly about building safety matters.

Talk to other organisations

We will work with partners to understand any specific needs our customers may have and how they can support us. This includes local policing teams and the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service.

Welcome customers to their new home

We will meet with new customers when they move into the building to understand their engagement and communication needs and preferences.

Get feedback

We will regularly ask customers for feedback on previous engagement and communication activities.

How we will engage and communicate with customers

Communication structure

We will use lots of different ways to regularly engage with customers on building safety matters. We will target our communication methods to their needs and make sure it is accessible.

1 Customer engagement strategy for building safety in high-rise residential buildings

This strategy outlines our approach to engaging and communicating with customers.

2 Engagement and communication plans for each building

25 individual plans for each of our 25 high-rise residential buildings. They will outline to customers upcoming work in their building, past work in their building, the results of recent inspections and planned work happening on high-rise residential buildings in the nearby area.

3 Building safety notice boards

A notice board in each high-rise residential building to display relevant and current building safety information.

4 Other communication methods

A variety of other methods will be used to communicate important building safety messages when necessary.

These included:

- newsletters
- regular, planned drop-in building safety sessions
- targeted building safety workshops to share specific information
- intercom messages
- our website
- letters, emails and information provided in preferred languages
- joint visits with important partners like the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service

How we will engage and communicate with customers

Planned building safety work

We will communicate with customers to make sure they are aware of any building safety work planned in their building.

We will work together with customers during the planning stage and get their views on the proposed work and listen to their concerns and feedback.

We will continue to engage with customers for the duration of the work and provide regular opportunities for feedback throughout the work and following completion.

Customers should still expect to receive any project specific communication from Gentoo or our appointed contractors where non-building safety work is being carried out, for example decoration or replacement bathrooms and kitchens.

Customers new to the building

We will provide a building safety induction to all new customers when they move in to one of our high-rise residential buildings. This will help customers feel safe from the moment they move in and make sure they know how to raise any building safety concerns.

The building safety induction will include:

- a named person and their contact details so customers can speak to someone directly about building safety matters
- the measures inside flats to keep customers safe
- the measures in the building's communal areas to keep customers safe
- how we will engage with customers on building safety
- how to report any building safety concerns
- how to get involved with decisions that affect the safety of the building
- what to do if there is a fire in the building
- identifying any extra support customers may need to prevent a fire or to evacuate safely in a fire

Engagement and communication plans for each building

We will work with customers who live in each of our high-rise residential buildings to develop a specific engagement and communication plan

for their building. To make sure we are as effective as possible, each plan will include at least the following:



the ways we will communicate on building safety with customers who live in the building



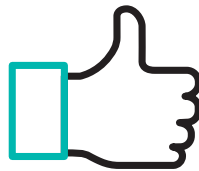
the building safety issues we want to understand our customer's views on



the type of information we will regularly communicate and how we will do this



any specific building safety initiatives or improvement works planned in each building



the information customers need to know to help keep their building safe



measures inside flats and in the building's communal areas to keep customers safe



what customers need to do if there is a fire



what customers need to do if they feel at greater risk from building safety risks or would not be able to leave the building safely in a fire



how to raise building safety concerns and get more involved in how building safety is managed

Working with customers at greater risk from fire

Our aim is to make sure all our customers who live in our high-rise residential buildings feel safe in their home.

We provide extra support to customer who feel they may be at greater risk from fire. This includes older people, people with disabilities, and people with visual and hearing impairments.

We will identify customers who may be at greater risk from fire:

- when they become a new customer and move into their home
- through ongoing communication described in each building-specific communication plan

- following a fire or other incident in a customer's flat
- when a customer, their family or support worker tells us

Customers who are at greater risk from fire

We will complete a person-centred fire risk assessment. This helps us to provide practical recommendations to reduce the customer's risk from fire as much as possible. These may include:



vibrating devices connected to the fire alarm, like pillow pads



reviewing and altering the automatic fire detection in a flat



installing automatic suppression systems, like sprinklers



referring customers to one of our specialist teams or an external agency

Each person-centred fire risk assessment will include a summary of how the customer will evacuate their flat and the building. We will get the customer's consent to share this with the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service.

Providing information to customers

We will make sure we provide customers in each high-rise residential building the information they need to help them understand the measures that keep their building safe.

Customers are entitled to request further and more detailed information about the safety measures in their building.

We will provide information in a format that is easy to understand and will make reasonable adjustments for customers who may have additional needs. This includes things like a preferred language or large print documents.

Information we will provide

We will provide information about:

- the roles, responsibilities and contact details for people who are responsible for safely managing their building
- the measures to prevent and reduce building safety risks
- how customers can reduce the risks of fire in their flat, like not storing flammable materials
- how customers can report a fire risk and raise any building safety concerns
- how customers can tell us if they may be at greater risk from fire and may not be able to safely leave the building in an emergency
- what customers should do if there is a fire in the building
- the results of regular fire and building safety checks
- the outcome of regular fire and building safety checks
- the roles and responsibilities of our customers

Information we will provide on request

We know that some customers may want more detailed information so they can better understand the safety features of their building.

A customer can request:

- the fire strategy for the building
- the fire risk assessment for the building
- the fire risk assessment of the external walls of the building
- structural assessments
- details on how we manage building safety measures in the building, like how often fire safety systems and lifts are maintained
- details of measures in the building to prevent building safety risks from happening, like fire spreading from one area to another
- information about any planned or historical changes to the building relevant to building safety

Providing information to customers

How we will provide additional information

Where possible, we will provide requested information in the customer's preferred method. But we will always try to provide this digitally first.

We will work with customers requesting the information to provide it in an understandable way. This will include allowing customers to nominate an advocate, representative, carer or paid carer who can request more information for them.

We are committed to making building safety information open and accessible to customers wherever we can.

However, we may not be able to share information where we do not have permission to share it or where sharing it could compromise:

- the safety of the building
- the safety of other customers
- customers' privacy

Within 20 working days, we will provide:

- the requested information
- a timescale of when we will provide the requested information
- the reason why we cannot provide the requested information



Consulting about building safety

Where building safety work is taking place, we will always consult with customers on:

- why the work is happening
- when it will be happening
- the expected duration of the work
- areas of the building which will be impacted by the work

We value our customers' views and feedback as part of making decisions about building safety. We will always use this information to make the correct decisions and make sure customers continue to feel safe in their home and building.

We will be open, honest and transparent when we consult with customers on building safety matters, in a way that is accessible and appropriate to them. We will consult by:



using our building safety customer group to talk about decisions affecting building safety in our high-rise residential buildings



completing postal, verbal and digital surveys with customers affected by decisions on building safety



holding workshops and drop-in sessions to talk about any proposed changes



providing opportunities for customers to get involved in how we manage building safety

Considering consultation results

We will consider all responses we receive during a consultation, and take into account the comments, views and opinions raised. The length of each consultation will vary and be appropriate to the size of the work being carried out.

We want to be transparent about our consultations and will make reasonable

adjustments to any program of work where we are able and it is reasonable to do so. Where adjustments can not be made following a consultation, we will be clear with our reasons why.

Consultation responses and results will be collected and stored in line with Gentoo's Data Protection Policy.

Customer duties

Our customers who live in high-rise residential buildings have a vital role in keeping themselves and their neighbours safe.

We will support customers to stay safe, but they must:

- avoid behaviour that could cause a building safety risk
- avoid tampering with safety features in their flat or communal areas
- know what information they must provide us with so we can assess or manage building safety risks

This includes allowing us access to their home so that we can complete our legally required duties when needed. This includes:

- fire alarm and sprinkler maintenance
- fire door inspections
- electrical safety checks



Building safety concerns

We are here to listen, learn and, where needed, act on concerns raised by customers who live in our high-rise residential buildings.

We will make sure it is easy for customers to raise concerns informally and formally so we can investigate them quickly.

Raising building safety concerns

We encourage customers to raise any building safety concerns so we can investigate and resolve their concerns by:

- contacting our Building Safety Team or their Neighbourhood Co-ordinator, who will raise their concern with the Building Safety Team

A complete list of Neighbourhood Co-ordinators is available from **www.gentoo.com/neighbourhood-coordinators**

To contact the Building Safety Team, customers can:

- call **0191 525 5000** and select **option 5**
- email **fireandbuildingsafety@gentoo.com**
- send a letter to the team

The team's address is:

Building Safety Team
Gentoo Group
Emperor House
2 Emperor Way
Doxford International Business Park
Sunderland
SR3 3XR

How we will handle concerns

We will handle building safety concerns in a structured way.

Assign it to a member of the Building Safety Team

They will contact the customer within 1 working day to acknowledge that we received and logged their concern and we are investigating it.

Contact the customer

Where needed, we will contact the customer to clarify information or request further information to help us properly investigate their concern.

Reply within 10 working days

If we cannot reply within 10 working days, we will agree a date with the customer.

Where a customer raises an urgent concern that risks the health and safety of them, their neighbours or the building, we will investigate it, reply and act as soon as possible.

Building safety complaints

If a customer would like to raise a formal building safety related complaint they can:

- email **feedback@gentoogroup.com**
- fill in a complaints form on our website, visit **www.gentoogroup.com/complaints**
- send us a message on Facebook or Twitter with details of the complaint
- send a letter to the team

The team's address is:

Customer Voice Team
Gentoo Group
Emperor House
2 Emperor Way
Doxford International Business Park
Sunderland
SR3 3XR

Or;

Contact the Building Safety Regulator directly:

- telephone **0300 790 6787** (Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 5pm, except on Wednesdays when they are open from 10am to 5pm)
- fill in the form on their website, **www.gov.uk/guidance/contact-the-building-safety-regulator**

Interacting with regulatory bodies on building safety

We will be open and transparent with our customers on enforcement actions taken by regulatory bodies on building safety matters. This includes the Building Safety Regulator and Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service.

We will display all required building safety information in each building, so it is clear and easy to understand.

We will use each building's engagement and communication plan to engage with customers on any other building safety matters brought to our attention by any regulatory body.

We will provide clear updates on any actions we need to take to improve building safety and the progress we are making with these.

Making sure our engagement is effective

This strategy aims to give our customers a voice on how building safety is managed in each building. It also makes us accountable for building safety decisions that we make.

Reviewing our effectiveness

We will regularly review this strategy to make sure it is effective and meets the needs of everyone who lives in our high-rise residential buildings.

To do this, we will:

- listen to customers' feedback
- act on customers' feedback
- listen and respond to feedback and challenge from our building safety customer group

- review building safety concerns raised by customers and how we handled them
- measure participation rates in engagement activities

Getting feedback to improve effectiveness

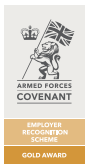
Where we find that engagement with customers is less effective, we will request feedback so we can improve it.

We will continue to listen to and work with our customers to make sure they feel safe in their homes.

Version history

Version	Review and amendment details	Date:	Revised by:
1.0	First version	4 October 2023	Stacey Thwaites

Notes



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Gentoo Group Limited is a charitable community benefit society, registration number 7302