



## Gentoo Allocations Policy

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## Introduction and scope

This is Gentoo's allocations policy. It has been developed to improve access to housing in Sunderland and to allocate properties in an open and transparent way offering as much choice as possible for applicants.

Gentoo is the largest social landlord within the City and responsible for the management of almost 30,000 properties.

In developing this policy, Gentoo has worked closely with Sunderland City Council who have statutory (or legal) duties for housing in Sunderland and associated responsibilities which come with this. For example, the responsibility for the prevention of homelessness and assistance for those who are homeless lies with Sunderland City Council.

The scope of this policy covers:

Gentoo Group	X
Gentoo Homes	

It applies to:

General Needs rented properties	X
Supported Housing	X
Sheltered Housing	X
Leasehold/Shared ownership	
Temporary Accommodation	X
Stock owned but not managed by the Group	
Communal Areas, including those relating to Leasehold/Shared Ownership properties	

Commercial Property (offices, depots etc)	
Stock managed by Gentoo on behalf of a third party	
Garages and outbuildings	
Remote plant (district heating, electrical pumps etc)	
Curtilage	

## .Links to Strategy and the Business Plan

Our vision and values set the direction and shape the culture of our organisation.

Gentoo's **vision** is:

Great Homes – Strong Communities – Inspired People

Our vision The Group's **values** are:

- Do the right thing
- Make a difference
- Keep learning
- Work together
- Give all you've got

The Group's Board and Executive Team have refreshed Gentoo's strategic aims, centred on the following **themes**:

- Place
- People
- Perform
- Partner
- Pride

These "5P's" have been developed to articulate the delivery of our vision via the following strategic **aims**:

- Provide homes and services that enable our tenants and communities to succeed (**Place**)
- Invest in people and communities to help realise opportunities and release potential (**People**)
- Be well governed and financially resilient, operating efficiently and responsibly, investing wisely to fulfil our social purpose (**Perform**)

The above aims will be supported by the following **enablers**:

- Work with others to influence and generate sustainable change (**Partner**)
- Harness the collective passion and energy of our people to support the city's plan (**Pride**)

Gentoo's policies support the delivery of the Group's Vision, Values and Strategy..

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

As a Housing Association, we have a statutory responsibility to comply with all relevant regulation and legislation in relation to allocations. Our Regulator, sets out the Tenancy Standard which we must meet. Failure to properly discharge these responsibilities could lead to a serious detriment or other judgement from the Regulator if we breach the Standards in place at the time.

The Director of Housing is accountable for ensuring this policy has regard to all legislation, regulation and best practice and for ensuring implementation of this policy effectively.

The Director of Housing is accountable for adequate resourcing and having effective processes in place to implement this policy.

The Heads of Operations are responsible for the day to day delivery of this policy.

## **Definitions**

In this policy:

‘tenants’ are those who have signed a tenancy agreement.

‘prospective tenants’ are those who are currently on our waiting list and wish to live in one of our social or affordable rent properties.

Where the term ‘residents’ is used this refers to not only tenants but also to occupants of a tenant’s household.

‘City’ means within the Local Authority area of Sunderland

## 1. Our Policy

- 1.1 We recognise that the way homes are allocated is a matter of real importance to people. The demand for social housing in Sunderland far outstrips supply and therefore our policy seeks to allocate homes in a way which meets people's needs, offers choice and makes the best possible use of housing stock, while promoting the development of balanced and sustainable communities. We will ensure that properties are allocated in line with legislation, Gentoo's charitable objectives and the Regulatory Standards.
- 1.2 As part of the Group's Vision of 'Great Homes – Strong Communities – Inspired People', we aim to provide customers with a good quality home in an area that they want to be in, which meets their household needs and which they can afford.
- 1.3 All applications will be dealt with sensitively and in line with the Data Protection Legislation (as amended and updated from time to time).
- 1.4 We are committed to the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion throughout the organisation and aim to:
- meet the needs and choices of people from all backgrounds
  - ensure that our services are relevant, responsive and sensitive to the needs of our existing and future customers
  - ensure that all sections of the community in which we work have equal access to our services.

This policy will ensure that customers are treated as individuals and with fairness and respect. An Equality Assessment has been completed on this policy.

- 1.5 Gentoo operates a banding system for lettings. This incorporates our nominations agreements with Sunderland City Council, South Tyneside Council, Durham County Council, Northumberland County Council and Middlesbrough Council under which we assist them in discharging their statutory and contractual housing duties (see Section 8). Some properties may be directly

let to customers in exceptional circumstances (See Section 9). All other properties are advertised through Gentoo's banding system (See Section 10).

1.6 Gentoo will offer accommodation to those who it is appropriate for us to house as a charity. Gentoo's constitution allows for the provision of housing to:

- persons in necessitous circumstances upon terms appropriate to their means and
- elderly, disabled or chronically sick persons in need of re-housing

(See Section 20 for further details).

1.7 To minimise delays to prospective tenants and costs incurred by existing tenants, all properties will be let as quickly and efficiently as possible. Gentoo report lettings performance on a regular basis to the Board (See Section 28).

1.8 Gentoo will not let properties to Board and Committee Members, their relatives and Gentoo employees except in line with the highest standards of probity and governance and in line with the Rules, ensuring any conflicts are dealt with in accordance with the law and good governance.

1.9 All applicants are required to disclose as part of the Allocation process, any relationship with any Board Member, Committee Member or employee and any letting made to an applicant with any such relationship will be subject to independent scrutiny in order to verify its probity. A record of such disclosures is maintained.

## **2. Our service**

2.1 The policy sets out the framework by which Gentoo will let properties throughout Sunderland to create balanced and sustainable communities.

2.2 All customers must complete an application form to join Gentoo's housing register. Assistance will be provided to those who may need help in completing the form, or who have language or literacy difficulties. People with a disability or severe medical conditions will be offered a home visit where appropriate.



- 2.3 An applicant can register alone, jointly with a partner or with another adult who wishes to live with them, including family members. The register operates as an open housing register which means that anyone aged 16 years or over can apply, subject to the results of an eligibility assessment and 2.5 and 3.1 below.
- 2.4 We welcome applicants who live outside of the Sunderland area.
- 2.5 All qualifying applicants will be permitted to access the register, however as Gentoo is a charity, we must house people who are in the greatest need. Some people who have the financial means to obtain alternative suitable accommodation may not be eligible for social housing accommodation with Gentoo. Therefore a financial assessment based on the applicant(s) income and any savings/equity will take place before a formal offer of property is made. If it is found that the applicant(s) could financially afford to purchase or rent similar properties in the area at a market rent then we may not be able to make them a formal offer of social housing.
- 2.6 Existing Gentoo tenants are not eligible to apply for access to the register within the first 2 years of their tenancy. If there is a priority need for housing within this timescale this will be assessed before allowing Gentoo tenants to join the register (see section 4).

### **3. How applicants apply for housing**

- 3.1 Application forms will be available to all eligible applicants on line on our website at [www.gentoo.org.uk](http://www.gentoo.org.uk), hard copies are also available from our local offices upon request. Customers will only be able to access Gentoo's housing register if they are:
- Deemed to be eligible or qualifying persons as set out in Section 18.
  - Those aged 16 and 17 will not be disqualified from registering for a tenancy; however a person cannot legally hold a tenancy until they are 18 years old. Therefore any tenancy granted to a 16 or 17 year old will be an equitable tenancy held in trust. This means that a Guardian or Guarantor will need to sign for the tenancy and hold that tenancy on behalf of the young person until they reach 18 years of age.

3.2 The application form will require the customer to supply information in respect of:

- Themselves and those they wish to share a home with
- Their housing history
- Their housing needs – property guides providing information on supply and demand for properties can be found on Gentoo’s website and at Gentoo’s offices
- Any support needs - including disabilities
- Their financial circumstances, this includes income and details of any equity in any property or savings
- Offending history/criminal convictions
- Immigration status
- Details of any family connection with employees, Board and Committee Members.

The information supplied coupled with appropriate additional enquiries and information, will be used to determine whether the applicant is eligible, or whether their application needs to be suspended (See Section 19).

3.3 Customers will be placed in a band, which is appropriate to their current circumstances and need, as set out in Appendix 1. The Scheme has four bands into which all registered applications will be categorised. The different bands distinguish between applicants who need to move from an area that is being developed or renewed by Gentoo, those who have an urgent or statutory need to move, those with a recognised priority need, and those who have general need and wish to move due to choice or are an out of city applicant.

3.4 The Bands are as follows:

- Band 1+: (Gentoo) Renewal
- Band 1: Statutory or Urgent Housing Need
- Band 2: Priority Housing Need
- Band 3: General Needs

3.5 We will review an applicant's band status on a regular basis to assess whether circumstances have changed and ensure they are effectively accessing the register. The minimum frequencies within which reviews will be carried out are detailed below:

- **Band 1+: Renewal Area** – Priority given for 12 weeks. A review will be carried out at the end of the 12 week period.
- **Band 1: Urgent Housing Need** – Priority given for 12 weeks. A review will be carried out at the end of the 12 week period. If the applicant refuses 3 offers which are deemed to be reasonable after reviewing suitability, their priority status for housing may be removed and the application will be placed into Band 3 only (General Needs). However, where the priority is awarded by Sunderland City Council, under the nominations agreement, the applicant will receive one reasonable offer and then priority status may be removed. Applicants have a right to request a review of the decision to refuse to extend band status.
- **Band 2: Priority Housing Need** – Priority given for 12 weeks. A review will be carried out at the end of the 12 week period. If the applicant refuses 3 offers which are deemed to be reasonable after reviewing suitability, their priority status for housing may be removed and the application will be placed into Band 3 only (General Needs). However, where the priority is awarded by Sunderland City Council, under the nominations agreement, the applicant will receive 3 reasonable offers and then priority status may be removed. Applicants have a right to request a review of the decision to refuse to extend band status.
- **Band 3: General Needs – All other applicants**, including all out of city applicants, will be placed into this Band. A review of the register will be carried out annually.

- 3.6 For applicants in Bands 1+, 1 and 2 who have not engaged in the bidding process, Gentoo may introduce supported bidding (see Section 5.2) and offer the applicant extra support with the process.
- 3.7 Where there are joint access arrangements to children, only the parent with primary care of a child should qualify for a family home. Primary care is based on individual merits, but takes into account:
- Receipt of Child Benefit
  - Court Orders
  - Percentage of time spent caring for child(ren)
  - Regularity and permanence of arrangement.

When a customer does not have primary care of dependent child, but shares care, either as a result of a court order or an informal arrangement, we will consider their circumstances on a case by case basis.

- 3.8 If an applicant says there is a mobility and/or disability, we may carry out an assessment to see how well the person is managing in their current accommodation. We may need an occupational therapist or support co ordinator's (Wellbeing) advice to ensure the best use of accommodation to meet the person's needs. If we need to take account of medical advice, we may require the person to provide evidence from health or social care professionals who have direct knowledge of their condition. Further details regarding this can be found in Appendix 3.
- 3.9 Customers are required to inform Gentoo if they have any changes in their circumstances, which may affect their application.

- 3.10 Where an applicant, or a third party acting for the applicant, knowingly or recklessly provides false information which leads to the granting of a tenancy, Gentoo can seek possession of the property under Ground 17 of Schedule 2 to the Housing Act 1988. Where Gentoo has provided a tenancy working with a Local Authority (for example, via nominations), that local housing authority may take legal action (Section 171 of the Housing Act 1996). Anyone found guilty of such an offence may be fined up to £5,000 and could lose the tenancy if they have been re-housed as a result of providing false information or deliberately withholding information.

## **4. Registration**

- 4.1 Eligible customers are always required to complete a registration form. Having received an application, it will be checked for eligibility (see Section 18) and unless the application is deemed as ineligible or requires additional investigation (e.g. confirmation of immigration status) it will be registered within 24 hours if submitted via a paper application form or immediately if customer(s) complete online. Once an application is registered, the customer will be sent a letter or email confirming their date of registration, which Band they have been placed into and where a paper based application form has been completed, customers will also be sent a registration user name and password which will allow them to place a bid for properties online. Following successful registration customers can bid for properties via the on-line lettings system.

Where a customer has indicated a priority need for housing we will begin the assessment process to see if the customer meets the criteria for a priority band and carry out the applicable evidence checks, for example mobility assessment.

Following assessment the priority band decision will be communicated to the customer who has the right to request a review of the decision (see Section 21).

4.2 Registrations will be reviewed on a regular basis (see section 3.5). Customers will be contacted to enquire if they wish to remain on the register. If they fail to reply, they will be removed from the register and advised in writing of this action.

## **5. Supporting vulnerable applicants**

5.1 Gentoo recognises that some applicants may experience difficulty in initially participating in the register, and engaging on a long term basis, until an appropriate outcome is reached. We will support applicants who experience such difficulties.

5.2 Supported bidding is the name of the process by which Gentoo staff will match properties to suitable applicants and place bids on behalf of an applicant. Supported bidding will only be used in the following circumstances:

- For vulnerable applicants who need extra support in the bidding process.
- Where an applicant has been assessed and placed into the Urgent, Priority or Renewal bands and fails to engage in the bidding process, a review of their circumstances will be carried out and supported bidding may be introduced.

5.3 To ensure this objective is achieved, partnership arrangements will be developed and maintained with statutory and non-statutory agencies that support, advise and advocate for this client group within the community. Family members and close friends may also support the applicant. Gentoo will assist by adding supported bids specified by other agencies or the customer.

## **6. Labelling the property**

6.1 A property label will be attached to each property advert. The label gives information on the accommodation and the type of customer that would be best suited to the property. This takes into consideration factors including the type of property and the surrounding community. Information may include:

- The minimum and maximum number of people who could be accommodated in the property.
- Any age restrictions for example, 60 years+ for a bungalow, or children in upper flats or flats with communal area
- Any pet ownership restrictions.
- Any adaptations (for example walk-in shower) which will make the property suitable for someone with specific needs or requirements.
- Any local lettings criteria.

## **7. Reflecting housing need**

7.1 Customers will assess their own housing requirements and become actively involved in identifying a property that suits them. We will provide consistent and realistic advice about housing options to all people seeking a new home.

## **8. Nominations**

- 8.1 Gentoo has in place a nominations agreement with Sunderland City Council, South Tyneside Council, Durham County Council, Northumberland County Council and Middlesbrough Council. This means that a proportion of our void (empty) properties will be let to applicants referred from the relevant Council's waiting list, together with people deemed to be homeless or in statutory housing need. Those applicants will be placed in the appropriate Band (See Section 3.4 and Appendix 1) and can then express an interest in properties.

## **9. Exceptional circumstances**

- 9.1 All properties managed by Gentoo will be advertised unless a property needs to be used for exceptional circumstances. Under exceptional circumstances Gentoo may deem it necessary to act outside of the allocations scheme. This will be to address an unforeseen need or situation that cannot be resolved reasonably within the banding criteria. For example, a fire, flood, major incident or extra care allocation. A Head of Operations or above will approve any exceptional circumstances. Where this occurs, records will be kept of why the allocation took place.

## **10. Advertising**

- 10.1 Void properties will be advertised by Gentoo on a weekly basis. Within each weekly advert cycle, an applicant can make a maximum of 5 bids.
- 10.2 At the end of the advertising cycle, Gentoo will prepare for each property a list of customers who have made a bid for that property. The table below shows how we will create each list to identify the successful applicant.



Band	Listed by:
1+: Gentoo Renewal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Matching the property label criteria</li> <li>• Date and time accepted into the Renewal band</li> <li>• Date and time application was received</li> </ul>
1: Urgent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Matching the property label criteria</li> <li>• Date and time accepted into the Urgent band</li> <li>• Date and time application was received</li> </ul>
2: Priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Matching the property label criteria</li> <li>• Date and time accepted into the Priority band</li> <li>• Date and time application was received</li> </ul>
3: General Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Matching the property label criteria</li> <li>• Date and time application was received</li> </ul>

In the exceptional instances where the date and time the application is received is the same for one or more customers the deciding factor on the allocation shortlist will be the application number (earliest would secure the property).

- 10.3 Following the shortlist process, customers will be invited to a viewing based on shortlist/ranking order. Where the customer is vulnerable, Gentoo will contact them to arrange a viewing if required. Where the customer fails to attend a viewing, they may be bypassed on the property shortlist. Gentoo reserve the right to hold 'block' viewings, and will inform the customer if this is the case. All viewings will be carried out in accordance with safe systems of work.
- 10.4 After the viewing, an initial offer is made to the customer who is highest ranking, subject to offer checks. The customer will have 48 hours to decide if they wish to accept the initial offer. Where the customer fails to respond within this timeframe, they may be bypassed on the property shortlist. If the initial offer is refused, the next ranked customer in descending order on the list will be offered the property, subject to checks as above. This process will continue until the list is exhausted.

10.5 If the initial offer is accepted, checks will be completed before any formal offer is made. Applicants will be checked to ensure that they are still eligible, qualify for an offer (See Section 23), meet Gentoo's charitable objectives (See Section 20), and would not be bypassed on a property shortlist (See above and Section 23.3). Before any formal offer of property is made, a home visit to the applicant may be made and checks made about their current conduct in their present accommodation, housing history, financial circumstances and potential support requirements. Where home visits are not practical, references or further information will be requested if appropriate. The applicant will also be required to provide evidence of their identity, income and any other relevant circumstances as outlined above and in Section 22, Section 23 and Section 24.

## **11. Local Lettings Policy**

11.1 On occasion, areas and/or types of properties can cause us some housing management difficulties due to high turnover and lack of demand. To help with these situations Gentoo have introduced Local Lettings Policies (LLPs) to assist us with the sustainability of those areas and/or make best use of specialist stock. Local lettings allow us to create bespoke property labels which can help us to attract for example specific customer demographics or create demand based on the criteria set within the specific policy.

11.2 All local lettings policies will be devised to take into account:

- Gentoo's charitable objectives
- Different types of accommodation and demand within each area
- Best use of housing stock
- Not unduly disrupt Gentoo's ability to meet the housing need of Sunderland
- Be fair, not unlawfully discriminate and meet the requirements of the appropriate Regulator.

11.3 Gentoo's area management teams and Community Engagement Forums have approved Local Lettings policies and they are subject to Gentoo governance process.

## **12. Extra Care housing and Supported Housing Schemes**

12.1 The term 'Accommodation with Care or Support' refers to housing specifically designed for people with a care and/or support need which enables them to live independently in their own home, with access to care or support tailored to meet their needs.

Due to the special nature of this type of accommodation, Extra Care and Supported Housing Schemes will be let via the exceptional circumstances route (see Section 9), and we will work in conjunction with Sunderland City Council to allocate these properties.

This does not include sheltered housing or accommodation used to prevent homelessness.

## **13. New build properties**

13.1 New build properties will be prioritised by date of registration and label criteria only and are not subject to banding priority. This means that new build properties will be open to all eligible applicants, allowing us to maximise the opportunity for meeting housing needs that the additional supply of new housing in the City offers. It is also more likely to encourage churn of existing stock, thereby increasing stock availability.

## **14. Armed Forces**

14.1 Gentoo has signed up to the Armed Forces Covenant. This means we will work with Sunderland City Council and the applicant to support those leaving HM Forces to find suitable accommodation.

## **15. Owner occupiers and private rented tenants**

- 15.1 Our register is open to customers from all tenures. However, Gentoo is a Charity, therefore we are normally only able to help people who are in the greatest need. As a result, some applicants who have the financial means to obtain suitable alternative accommodation may not be eligible for social housing accommodation with Gentoo.
- 15.2 A financial assessment will be completed by Gentoo before any formal offer is made. This assessment will cover income, outgoings and any equity and savings levels. It will take into account the local housing market. If the applicant could financially afford to purchase, or pay market rent on, a similar property in the area suitable for their housing needs, Gentoo may not be able to make a formal offer of social housing accommodation to them. However, we will provide advice with regards to suitable alternative accommodation.

## **16. Applicants moving to take up an employment opportunity ('keyworkers')**

- 16.1 Gentoo recognise the importance of attracting key workers into the city; our Policy allows us to provide some degree of priority to help essential workers moving to the area to find permanent, secure accommodation. Keyworkers are defined as those people that provide essential services necessary for the continued economic growth in Sunderland, and those who fill skill shortages within the city. An applicant will have received an offer of key worker employment within the city. Gentoo will require the provision of appropriate written evidence/proof from the employer.

## **17. Children in upper flats/apartments or flats/apartments with an internal communal area**

17.1 Existing Gentoo tenants with a child or children, living in an upper flat/apartment or flat/apartment with an internal communal area may be awarded a priority banding (see Appendix 1).

## **18. Eligible applicants**

18.1 Gentoo will apply the criteria set out in the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and any associated Regulations or other relevant legislation in determining who is eligible for addition to the register. Once accepted as an eligible applicant, eligibility will be checked again at the offer stage.

## **19. Suspension**

19.1 Gentoo has in place a Suspension Policy, which means we may suspend an applicant from the register for a pre-defined period of time, after which it is subject to review. During this time, they will not be able to bid for a property.

19.2 We may suspend an applicant in the following circumstances:

- Unacceptable behaviour, which would justify possession proceedings
- Breach of tenancy agreement or covenant
- If further investigation is required to process an application.

19.3 Where an applicant is suspended Gentoo will write to the customer informing them of the suspension, reasons for our decision, and how they may resolve the situation. The customer has the right to request a review of the decision.

## **20. Charitable Objectives**

- 20.1 As set out in Section 1.6 Gentoo can normally only offer housing to particular groups. Because circumstances can change over time, the test as to whether Gentoo can offer an applicant a property based on our charitable objectives, will be conducted at the point of initial offer.
- 20.2 In exceptional circumstances, and with reference to our Rules, the law and good governance, Gentoo may offer accommodation to applicants who do not meet our charitable objectives, where this does not prejudice our status as a charity.

## **21. Applicant's right to information and review**

- 21.1 An applicant has the right to request that Gentoo provide them with such general information that will allow them to assess:
- How the application is likely to be treated under the policy
  - Whether the housing appropriate to their needs is likely to be made available and if so, how long it is likely to be before such accommodation may be offered.
- 21.2 An applicant has a right, on request, to be informed of any decision about the facts of their case which has been or is likely to be taken into account in considering whether to make an application.
- 21.3 Applicants have a right to ask for a review of any notified decision, including:
- Eligibility
  - Suspension
  - Bypass
  - Cancellation of application – for example following review.

- 21.4 Applicants also have the right to ask for a review of any decision about the facts of their case which has been, or is likely to be, taken into account when considering whether to make an allocation to them.
- 21.5 When a response to a request for general information (Section 21.1), or a review request of any of the decisions in section 21.3 is made, the applicant will be sent a written notification/acknowledgement within 7 days of the request to their last provided correspondence address, or where no address is provided, the letter will be available for collection at a Gentoo housing office (this will be classed as Gentoo having notified the applicant).
- 21.6 Written notification will not be sent when an applicant has been correctly bypassed:
- For the same reason and have already been written to
  - Where applicant has failed to attend a viewing or respond to an offer of property
  - For a reason that was set out in the property advert or Local Lettings Policies.
- 21.7 Written notifications will outline what decision has been made and why and inform the applicant they have a right to review. The review request must be made in writing to the address in the notification within 21 days of the notification being issued. Review requests received outside of this timescale may be accepted in exceptional circumstances only. Applicants can designate a representative to deal with the review on their behalf, it is recommended that applicants outline what decision they wish to be reviewed, why and provide any supporting information.

21.8 Upon receipt of the review request, the applicant will be written to and notified:

- That he or she or their representative may make representations in writing to Gentoo in connection with the review;
- Of the procedure to be followed in connection with the review; and
- The timescales in which a decision may be made.

Gentoo will aim to complete a review within 8 weeks of making the request. The reviewing officer may request further information to enable a decision to be made.

21.9 The review will be decided by an officer who was not involved in the original decision, (Head of Operations/Service or higher). The review will result in written notification within 7 days explaining the outcome of the review, and if the decision is upheld, the reasons for it.

21.10 In the case of reviews regarding bypassing, the property will not be held pending the outcome of the review. If the review subsequently finds that an applicant was incorrectly bypassed, they may be offered a direct allocation of a Suitable alternative property as deemed appropriate by Gentoo through the exceptional circumstances route.

21.11 Applicants also have the opportunity to complain about the service provided by Gentoo. Further information can be found in Gentoo's Complaints Policy.



## **22. Cancellations**

22.1 An application will be cancelled if:

- In the opinion of Gentoo, they've been found to submit false statements or omit relevant information about their circumstances
- They have been re-housed into non-temporary accommodation via social housing provider, private landlord or local authority
- They are assigned a tenancy
- They are granted a succession of a tenancy
- They purchase, or part purchase, their own property e.g. Right to Buy, Shared Ownership
- They have carried out a mutual exchange
- The sole applicant has died
- They fail to respond to a Register review
- The applicant makes a request to cancel their application.

## **23. Offering accommodation**

23.1 Gentoo will make an informal offer of accommodation subject to checks, unless the applicant has indicated that they are not interested in a property.

23.2 Gentoo will complete the following checks:

- Needs assessment – does the applicant need social housing, taking into account income, equity and the local housing market.
- Affordability check – can the applicant afford the property offered
- Landlord or mortgage references
- Police check, where appropriate
- Debt to Gentoo – this includes rent arrears, former tenant arrears, rechargeable repairs and/or court costs

- Streetwise (Gentoo's ASB case management system), where appropriate
- Overall review of application form
- Property inspection where appropriate

23.3 Should any of the above checks lead the Gentoo member of staff to believe the applicant would be unsuitable to be a tenant, they will not be formally offered the property. Gentoo reserves the right to withdraw an offer of property based on the financial assessment and will not allocate properties to those who cannot afford the property offered.

23.4 The customer will be informed in writing and will have the right to review the decision (see Section 21). The property will not be held while the review is taking place.

23.5 Where an offer is withdrawn, Gentoo will provide the applicant with the appropriate advice and assistance.

## **24. Sign up**

24.1 When customers sign their tenancy agreement, they will be required to provide or complete:

- Payment of a minimum of one week's rent
- Housing Benefit/Universal Credit application and any associated information required
- Confirmation of identity.
- Proof of Right to Rent in the UK

- 24.2 Where the customer fails to provide or complete the above, Gentoo will be unable to proceed with the signing of the tenancy agreement and the applicant may be bypassed for that property.
- 24.3 Gentoo will ensure that all customers are provided with a welcome pack which provides information and advice about Gentoo services, contact details and other helpful information about their new home.
- 24.4 During the sign up discussion, the member of staff will go through the Tenancy Agreement and Tenant Handbook with the customer in detail to make them fully aware of their rights and responsibilities and answer any questions they may have. (This may be in electronic format).
- 24.5 Contact will be made with the tenant within the first three weeks of the tenancy. This contact will be to check that the customer has settled in, ensure there are no issues with the tenancy and gain customer feedback and satisfaction on the allocations process. (Visits should be made where appropriate)

## **25. Type of Tenancy**

- 25.1 The type of tenancy offered will be decided in conjunction with the Tenancy Policy and Neighbourhood Management Policy. The Tenancy Agreement will clearly state which tenancy type the customer has been granted.

## **26. Partnership Working**

- 26.1 Gentoo will:
- Provide and share information with Sunderland City Council (SCC), South Tyneside Council, Durham County Council, Northumberland County Council, Middlesbrough Council and other agencies to enable them to fulfil their strategic housing role and statutory duties
  - Co-operate with all local authority partners in helping fulfil their statutory housing duties, including those relating to homelessness, homelessness

prevention and priorities relating to safeguarding and protecting vulnerable people

- Endeavour to ensure that priority in lettings is given to those in greatest housing need in accordance with current legislation, regulatory guidance and our charitable objectives
- Participate in any scheme which promotes inter-regional mobility
- Provide basic housing advice and information to customers with housing problems and inform them where more detailed advice and information can be obtained from.
- Where appropriate, enter into partnership arrangements with a variety of external agencies to ensure that vulnerable customers engage and actively participate in the register.

## **27. Implementation**

- 27.1 This policy requires Board approval for any reviews resulting in any update. The Director of Housing is accountable for the implementation and review of this policy.
- 27.2 Gentoo will let properties in line with the highest standards of probity and governance and in line with the Rules of the organisation.
- 27.3 Under the Delegated Authority, contained within the Standing Orders of Gentoo, it is the responsibility of all employees to ensure that their work is carried out in accordance with this policy and any procedures relating to it.
- 27.4 Gentoo is committed to the highest standards of customer care and will apply this policy in accordance with the standards published and the Gentoo approach to customer care.

## **28. Monitoring and Review**

28.1 Monitoring reports will be provided to all Board Members on a 6 monthly basis (See Appendix 2 KPI Template). These reports will consist of performance information as required by the Regulator and any other reports that the Board feel may improve the service.

28.2 Gentoo will:

- Record and monitor details of all lettings to ensure fair treatment of all applicants regardless of age, gender, race or disability in line with the continuous recording of the lettings system (CORE)
- Undertake research to monitor the success of its lettings by contacting all new customers, to obtain satisfaction feedback on the allocations process
- Carry out termination interviews where possible with customers who have indicated that they wish to terminate their tenancy
- Undertake continual demand analysis to inform the development of allocation strategies
- Provide periodic performance information to the Regulatory Body and any local authority partners (where required)
- Publish service standards and performance targets annually to customers
- Where relevant information is available, Gentoo will benchmark its performance against other similar organisations to make sure the highest standards of service delivery.

28.3 Together with Tenants' Commitments can be found in Appendix 2.

## **29. Policy Review**

- 29.1 This policy will be reviewed every 3 years or in line with business needs. It will be subject to audit in line with the agreed Audit Plan, or in line with business needs.
- 29.2 This policy will be analysed for any equality impacts at every review.

## **30. Risk**

- 30.1 All risks that fall within the scope of this policy and its service areas have been identified and are contained within the Gentoo operational risk plans.

## **31. Escalation**

- 31.1 Where the Board has concerns about significant issues in any area of compliance with allocations it must escalate these concerns to the Director of Housing
- 31.2 Where a member of staff has concerns about significant issues in any area of compliance with allocations, they must escalate these concerns through their line management structure, ultimately to Executive Team.
- 31.3 Where a member of staff continues to have concerns about significant issues in any area of compliance with allocations, they should refer to the Group Whistleblowing Policy and Toolkit for further guidance

## **32. Legislation, regulation and other documents**

32.1 The Director of Housing will ensure this policy has regard to all legislation, regulation and best practice, including but not limited to:

- Regulator of Social Housing Tenancy Standard
- Homelessness Act
- Charities Acts
- Data Protection legislation
- Housing Act 1996
- Anti-social behaviour Act 2014
- Children's Act 1989
- Children Leaving Care Act 2000
- Equality Act 2010
- Statutory Code of Practice on Racial Equality in Housing – England
- Under-occupation Policy
- Tenancy Policy
- Tenancy Management Policy
- Suspensions Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy and Plans
- Void Management Policy
- Right to Rent

## **33. Records**

33.1 All records and documents relating to allocations will be stored in the relevant document management system. Application information and details are stored within the on-line application system.

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## Appendix 1 – Allocation Bands

Allocation bands			
Band 1+	Band 1	Band 2	Band 3
Applicants living in renewal area	Statutory or Urgent Social Housing Need - applicants who have an immediate need to move	High housing need - applicants who have a priority housing need	General Need - Open to all applicants
Living in a Gentoo renewal area	Accepted homeless households where Sunderland City Council need to discharge their full statutory duty - (this will include applicants who are statutory overcrowded and who are living in property unfit for occupation)	Applicants assessed by Sunderland City Council as being at risk of homelessness	Applicants with no or low level housing need
	Gentoo tenants or a member of their household who are unable to cope in their present home due to mobility and/or disability issues (rating A or G or equivalent)	Gentoo applicants who need to move for a Welfare reason - moving on from supported accommodation i.e. Core, Holmewood.	All out of city applicants
	Gentoo tenants who are experiencing severe harassment and have been assessed as being at risk if not rehoused	Applicants assessed as under occupying a house by 2 or more bedrooms (Gentoo tenants only)	
	Gentoo customers who are experiencing domestic abuse and have been assessed as being in immediate risk if not rehoused	Applicants assessed as overcrowded by 2 more bedrooms (Gentoo tenants only)	
	Applicants leaving HM Forces who are homeless and owed a duty	Applicants with children under 16 years of age who are living in an upper flat/apartment or a flat/apartment with an internal communal area (Gentoo tenants only)	
	Applicants eligible to succeed or assign to a Gentoo tenancy and who have a need or expressed a wish to move to alternative accommodation	Applicants with a mobility and/or disability need which can be eased or improved by rehousing	
		Applicants assessed as needing to move to take up a permanent employment opportunity	
		Applicants who need to move to avoid financial hardship	
We will have the discretion to directly allocate outside the bands for emergencies and those at serious risk or detrimental to health and wellbeing - i.e. fire, flood,			

## Appendix 2 – KPIs

Patch	KPIs																							
	CT Net arrears as % of Rent Debit		CT HB Recovery as % of Rent Debit		Total CT arrears as % of Rent Debit		Former Tenant Arrears as % Rent Debit		FT HB Recovery as % Rent Debit		Total FT Arrears as % Rent Debit		Total Arrears as % Rent Debit		Rent Collected as % of Rent Due				Garage Arrears		Rent Debit			
	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Receipts	HB	Rent Coll	Rent Due	Target	Actual		
CI																								
NH																								
SH																								
HN																								
WN																								
RSL																								

## Together with Tenants' Commitments

Description:

We will:

<p><b>Allocations -</b> Tenants and residents can expect their homes to be good quality, well maintained, safe and well managed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide you with support, advice and guidance to help you find a new home that suits your needs</li> <li>• Provide you with information specific to your new home</li> </ul>
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### **Appendix 3 - Housing Needs Assessments - Mobility/Disability Ratings**

**Mobility/Disability Rating A** – Highest Priority and re housing identified as being in urgent need. This rating means that the service user will qualify for Band 1 priority from Gentoo for 12 weeks (subject to review after 12 weeks as per Allocation Policy). Gentoo, Customers, or the Local Authority will apply for suitable property via on-line allocations system.

The service user may be totally wheelchair dependent or have very limited mobility and wheelchair used most of the time, indoors and out. This rating may also be used for a person(s) with a degenerative condition (e.g. MND, MS, Huntingdon's), which could indicate that specialist/alternative housing may be necessary in the near future.

An A rating would indicate that a person will need specialist/alternative housing which is either suitable for wheelchair access or appears to have the potential for adaption. Such accommodation will usually need to be level access/ground floor level (e.g. bungalow or Ground Floor flat), although depending on the size/needs of the family, a two storey property may be necessary. Again, a two storey property will need to be "wheelchair adapted" or have potential for adaption with e.g. ramping, through ceiling lift, stair lift, level access showering facilities, widened doors and accessible kitchen depending on assessed need.

An A rating could also be awarded where there is an imminent risk of their health deteriorating as a result of the unsuitability of their accommodation or the unsuitability is such that daily living is seriously affected and a change of accommodation could reasonably be expected to alleviate the problem.

This rating can also be awarded to service users if they require immediate hospital discharge and they are not able to return to their current home in the long term.

**Note: Occupational Therapist Report (OT) and/or Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) is required for Rating A to be awarded and medical evidence may also be required from medical professional(s).**

**Mobility/Disability Rating B** – Re housing identified as being in high need. This means the service user will qualify for Band 2 priority from Gentoo for 12 weeks (subject to review after 12 weeks as per Allocation Policy). Gentoo, customers or the Local Authority will apply for suitable property via on-line allocations system.

A rating of B would indicate that the service user has very limited mobility and may need a wheelchair for outdoor use. Service users in this category will not generally require a fully adapted property and may manage one or two steps at access, although any property may need to have potential for adaption in the future. Service users living in a two storey property that are unable to or have great difficulty negotiating stairs/steps and where a stair lift or external adaptations (e.g. ramping) would not be feasible or appropriate may also qualify for a B rating.

A B rating may also be awarded in situations where rehousing is assessed as being high priority for health reasons (present property or environment may have significant implications for health and adaptations may not be possible/appropriate) but where the person may not require “wheelchair” standard housing. Examples of this could be where a person may have severe breathing difficulties (e.g. COPD, emphysema) and the existing heating system (e.g. ducted air) is exacerbating their condition.

Another example could be where the service user’s mental health is being significantly impacted by their current living arrangements and a rehousing could reasonably be expected to ease and/or improve their health and wellbeing.

**Note: Occupational Therapist Report/Housing Needs Assessment is required for Rating B to be awarded and medical evidence may also be required from medical professional(s).**

### **Mobility/Disability Rating C**

A service user given a rating of C will tend to have limited mobility on level surfaces but will not be dependent on a wheelchair either indoors or outdoors. Such a person

will be unable to negotiate stairs even with assistance, although the existing property will have potential for adaption with a stair lift if necessary.

**Note: No housing priority will be awarded for this rating**

### **Mobility/Disability Rating D**

A service user given a rating of D will tend to have some problems with mobility but will not require a wheelchair at all. The person may be able to manage a few steps or stairs but may have difficulty negotiating a full flight of stairs without a high level of assistance. The property will have the potential for adaption with a stair lift if necessary.

**Note: No housing priority will be awarded for this rating**

### **Mobility/Disability Rating E**

A service user given a rating of E may have restricted mobility but does not require a wheelchair at all. Such a person will be able to manage a full flight of stairs independently, possibly with some difficulty and we would therefore look to provide minor adaptations to assist with mobility.

**Note: No housing priority will be awarded for this rating**

### **Mobility/Disability Rating G**

This is a “catch all” rating, which is most often used for children with mobility and/or disability issues. This rating covers situations where the person or child urgently needs more suitable accommodation for health reasons, which may not be covered by the other categories.

This category is highest priority along with A and will qualify the person for Band 1 priority from Gentoo for 12 weeks (subject to review after 12 weeks as per Allocation Policy). Gentoo, customers or the Local Authority will apply for suitable property via on-line allocations system.

**Note: Occupational Therapist Report / Housing Needs Assessment is required for Rating G to be awarded and medical evidence may also be required from medical professional(s).**