

Customer engagement strategy

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



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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 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) 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.

Legally, we must also provide these customers with an engagement strategy specifically for building safety.

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@gentoogroup.com
T: **0191 525 5050**

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



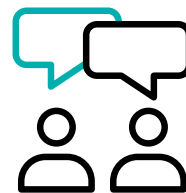
Listen to customers and understand their concerns



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:

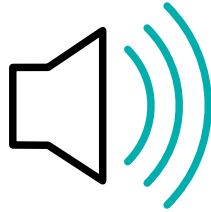
- at least every two years
- following any incident we need to report to the building safety regulator
- following any significant material alteration to a high-rise residential building

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.



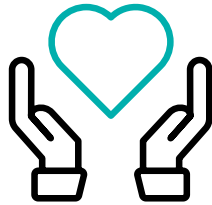
Educate

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



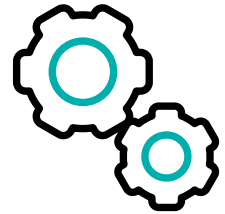
Reassure

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.

Fire and 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.

High Rise 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@gentoogroup.com**
- speaking to their Neighbourhood Co-ordinator
- speaking to the Fire and Building Safety Team on **0191 525 5050**

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

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
- any essential fire or building safety related work or repairs

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.

Gentoo will:

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 Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service.

Welcome customers to their new home

We will meet with new customers when they start a new tenancy to understand their engagement and communication needs and preferences.

Get feedback

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

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

Individual plans for each of our 25 high-rise residential buildings which will be displayed on a noticeboard in each building.

They will display:

- current fire and building safety information
- upcoming and past work in the building
- results from recent inspections

3 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 Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service
- home visits

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:

Staying in touch



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

Building servicing plan



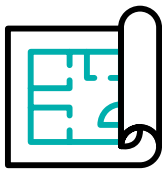
Information on the routine maintenance and servicing that takes place in the building.

Reporting incidents and complaints



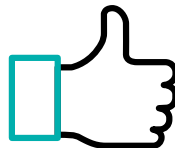
Information about mandatory occurrence reporting and how to report a building safety incident or complaint.

Key contact details



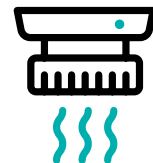
The names and contact details of the key people at Gentoo who help keep the building safe.

Key risks identified in your building



The actions raised from the most recent fire risk assessment and the building safety case.

Fire safety



What customers need to do if there is a fire and information on how we can support them if they are at greater risk from a fire.

Completed and upcoming work in your building



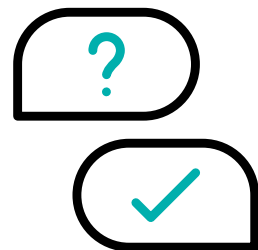
Any specific building safety initiatives or improvement work planned in the building.

Providing you with information



The type of information we will regularly communicate and how we will do this.

Get involved

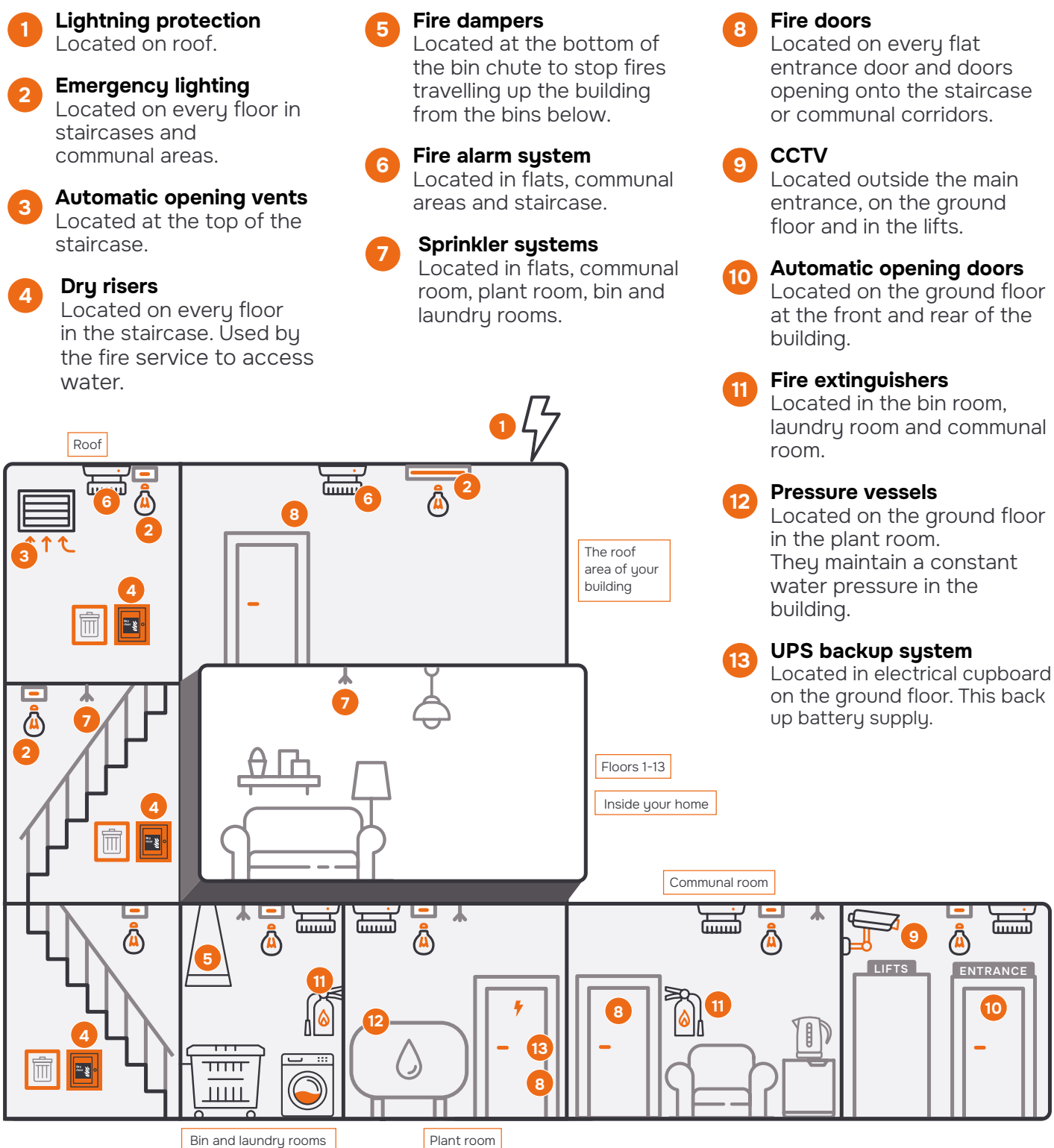


The building safety issues we want to understand our customer's views on and how to get involved.

Engagement and communication plans for each building

Each building's engagement and communication plan will be supported by a 'Keeping you safe' graphic.

This graphic displays the measures inside flats and in each building's communal areas to keep customers safe. This is personalised to each building, an example is below:



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

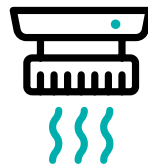
- through ongoing communication described in each building-specific communication plan
- following a fire or other incident in a customer's flat
- when a customer, their family or support worker tells us

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 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
- any mandatory occurrence investigations and reports

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, Gentoo will always consult with residents on:

■ **why the work is happening**

- Gentoo will provide residents with a clear explanation as to why the work is required. This will include the scope of the work and what the final result of the work will be (for example, installation of new sprinkler system or replacement of fire door to a certified door set) and the reasons this work is required

■ **when it will be happening**

- Gentoo will provide residents with the days and times work will be happening and will also be specific regarding days and times noisy or disruptive work will be completed

■ **the expected duration of the work**

- Gentoo will provide residents with the total length of the works and be clear how any delays or extensions to the duration will be communicated. If the work is taking longer than the expected duration, Gentoo will provide residents with a reason this has happened.

■ **the areas of the building which will be impacted**

- Gentoo will be specific in the area of the building work will be taking place including the floor number(s)

- Gentoo will also be specific in explaining to residents if areas of the building will be available and any temporary measures which may need to be implemented (for example alternative escape routes if a fire door is broken and requires repair)

■ **how to mitigate disruption to residents and other relevant persons**

- Gentoo will specifically ask residents for ideas and suggestions on how it can minimise the impact any works have on residents in the building
- Any adjustments that can be made will be communicated to residents in writing. This may include adjustments to the times when noisy works can take place where shift workers or home workers are in the building, creation of respite areas or using alternative equipment to minimise noise vibrations

■ **the key contacts and project leads**

- As part of the consultation, residents will always be given contact details for a Gentoo colleague who is involved in the project. This is to ensure their concerns or questions can be heard and addressed ahead of any works starting and throughout the duration

Consulting about building safety

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.



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. These responses will be assessed by members of the Fire and Building Safety Team and colleagues involved in the planning and delivery of the works which often includes dedicated Resident Liaison Officers. Depending on the complexity of the work, the responses may also be discussed with the Building Safety Customer Group for feedback.

Gentoo has a Customer Committee which has delegated powers and responsibility from the Group Board. This committee may also be asked to provide scrutiny and challenge when assessing consultation responses for complex building safety decisions.

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.

Results from consultations and how feedback has been taken into account during decision making is fed back to residents and relevant stakeholders in a variety of ways depending on the complexity and impact of the decision.

This includes through regular project updates, planned drop in sessions, notices on the foyer noticeboard and bespoke leaflets, letters, texts and emails.

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

Building safety questions

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

We will make sure it is easy for customers to ask us questions on building safety and will answer these openly and honestly.

Asking a building safety question

We encourage any customer with questions about building safety to contact the Fire and Building Safety Team, or their Neighbourhood Co-ordinator.

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

To contact the Fire and Building Safety Team, customers can:

- call **0191 525 5050**
- email **fireandbuildingsafety@gentoogroup.com**
- send a letter to the team

The team's address is:

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

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 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

Measuring participation and engagement:

- for digital engagement through open rates and click through rates on emails, page visits for website pages and view rates for animations and videos
- for traditional communication such as letters and leaflets through obtaining customer feedback during planned drop in sessions, and workshops

Getting feedback to improve effectiveness

The effectiveness of engagement is reviewed regularly but as a minimum once per year. Where we find that engagement with customers is less effective, we will proactively request feedback from residents to improve this and find more effective ways to engage with them.

The methods of communication currently used in each high-rise residential building are included in the foyer noticeboard for residents to see.

Version history

Version	Review and amendment details	Date:	Revised by:
1.0	First version	7 May 2024	Stacey Thwaites
2.0	Updated information on engagement and communication plans for individual buildings and telephone number	8 October 2024	Stacey Thwaites
3.0	Updated information on how we will consult with customers on planned and emergency building safety work	2 July 2025	Stacey Thwaites

Updates to the strategy

Gentoo will always consult with residents on significant amendments or updates to this strategy.

We will do this by:

- utilising our Building Safety Customer Group to talk about decisions
- holding workshops and drop-in sessions
- residents completing postal, verbal and digital survey accompanying a letter or email

Consultation responses are considered by Gentoo and feedback provided to residents in a suitable format dependent upon the type of feedback and the residents needs.

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www.gentoogroup.com



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