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Rent Communication Task and Finish Session
held on Thursday 18 January 2024
in the Training Room, Akeler House, Sunderland SR3 3XR

PRESENT	IN ATTENDANCE
Brenda (BN) David (DW) Michelle (MW) John (JD) Angela (AD) Doreen (DR) David (DB) Emma (EN) Stephanie (SC)	Lewis Walmsley – Customer Engagement Lead Sam Hickman – Communications Business Partner

PARA		ACTION
	1. Introduction to Session	
1	LW advised all customers will receive correspondence regarding the rent increase in March / April 2024. This is for the upcoming 24/25 financial year. The aim of the session is to gather opinions on how the information was presented in 23/24 financial year and what changes Gentoo can look at making. LW explained why there will be a rent increase and although the decision would not have been taking lightly by Group Board, it is necessary to the success of Gentoo delivering on its aims and objectives.	
	2. Review of Documentation	
2	LW advised prior to the meeting, all members should have received a copy of the relevant documentation to review. It was agreed to provide all members 10 minutes to review the information again and we would then discuss each document individually. <u>Leaflet & Rent Letter</u> LW advised the leaflet, which was created last year, would cost Gentoo roughly £5,000 to recreate. LW asked members if they thought the leaflet was necessary. EN advised it to be more financially viable to take information from the leaflet and add this onto the rent letter, therefore, all customers receive one piece of correspondence. JD agreed advising the leaflet does not need to be included in the rent correspondence as there is too much information and he believes not all of it is relevant. BN advised customers need to be aware of reasons as to why the rent is increasing. Important examples are provided to reflect this.	

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AD asked what size envelope the documents are sent within and could there be a saving explored by using a smaller sized envelope. It was agreed to look into this ^[1]

JD commented on the number for the Money Matters Team being 0300 and if this was a free number. The same with the 0161 number to pay rent. JD explained customers could be in a worse financial position for doing this. It was agreed to investigate this ^[2]

MW advised not everyone will know what 'Consumer Price Index' means and if this could be simplified. This was agreed for action ^[3]

MW asked about appealing the rent and service charge. LW advised that customers can do, however Gentoo will have completed due diligence to ensure figures were in line with guidelines. BN advised we are governed by what we can charge unlike private landlords.

EN advised all language needs to be amended, therefore everyone understands the documentation.

JD advised to offer a figure comparison so customers gain an understanding on the costs year on year. This was agreed for action. ^[4]

MW & JD praised the Money Matters Team advising the work they do for customers is positive and its good to see this will be included in the documentation.

Service Charge Statement

SH advised Gentoo should put the amount customers have to pay first, then provide the statement. Agreed to action. ^[5]

All members agreed that the overall layout of the document can remain the same.

EN asked why there is a retrofit / CLOX charge and what is it? Agreed to investigate this. ^[6]

LW agreed that we need an explanation on what the asterix (*) is for on the statement. LW advised this could be service charges that Gentoo do not control the cost of. ^[7]

AD asked if a spreadsheet can be given rather than the statement. LW advised if the breakdown is provided, customers know the charges without having to ask.

DR questioned the TV License and what this has to do with Gentoo. BN & SH advised this was for TVs in communal areas. DR asked about the PAT testing charge. SH advised its to ensure electricians in communal areas are kept safe.

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BN advised that she would like to see a breakdown of service charges relevant to the specific customer. LW explained this was the case.

LW asked if there was anything else as 28,000 properties will receive a copy of the documentation, therefore imperative we get this right.

SC advised putting an emphasis on the Money Matters Team and the support they can offer for customers experiencing financial hardship. ^[8]

SC suggested adding a link to 'Entitled to' for money advice, therefore customers can review what they are entitled too. ^[9]

BN asked if we could make customers aware of the Crisis Fund. ^[10]

3. Conclusion

3 LW advised that we will be looking at altering the design of the letters for 25/26 financial year, however due to timescales, we cannot do it this year.

LW thanked all members for attending and advised he looked forward to seeing the new correspondence with all the relevant input from involved members.

Session ended with photo taken.



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ACTION LOG

KEY	
	Action completion overdue
	Action ongoing and date not due
	Action complete

ACTION REF	DETAILS	RESPONSIBILITY	TARGET COMPLETION	STATUS
18/01/24 – [1]	Can we change the size of the envelope we use for the correspondence	Sam Hickman	19/02/24	If we send in a C4 envelope it has to be sent as a large letter rather than standard mail and would cost an additional approx. £5,000. We will continue to send the letter in a C5 envelope.
18/01/24 – [2]	Are the 0300 / 0161 numbers free phone numbers	Sam Hickman	19/02/24	We have added in this line 'Calls will cost the same as a call to a landline and will be included as part of any inclusive minutes on a mobile phone package.'
18/01/24 – [3]	Not everyone knows what Consumer Price Index means	Sam Hickman	19/02/24	We have added in 'The Consumer Price Index measures the change in prices paid by consumers for goods and services.'
18/01/24 – [4]	Can we offer a figure comparison from previous financial year	Sam Hickman	19/02/24	We have included a table demonstrating an increase in costs from 23/24
18/01/24 – [5]	Can we provide a service charge cost before the breakdown	Sam Hickman	19/02/24	The total cost will be on the rent letter. The statement is just a breakdown.
18/01/24 – [6]	What is the retrofit / CLOX charge?	Sam Hickman	19/02/24	Retrofit only affects a handful of customers and relates to the Green Efficiency Programme from years ago. These customers will have received an overview of what it is at sign up. CLOX is not relevant and has therefore been removed from the statement.
18/01/24 – [7]	Can we explain what the asterix means?	Sam Hickman	19/02/24	It says underneath the table 'services not eligible for benefits'
18/01/24 – [8]	Can we put an emphasis on the Money Matters Team?	Sam Hickman	19/02/24	The Money Matters Service is included in the letter. All customers will also receive a Money Matters Leaflet.

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18/01/24 – [9]	Can we add a link to the Entitled to'	Sam Hickman	19/02/24	External links do not work as well as hoped on printed letters. We have a link to this on our website which can be found at https://www.gentooogroup.com/support/managing-your-money/
18/01/24 – [10]	Can we make customers aware of Crisis Fund	Sam Hickman	19/02/24	This is included in the new Money Matters Leaflet