

You & Gentoo

A newsletter for customers

Autumn 2017

gentoo

In this issue:

Important information about fire safety.

Universal Credit May 2018 – are you ready?

HomeHunt – a new way to find a home.

Our customer annual report for 2016-17.

How you can make a difference in your local community.

Remembering Amber Rose Cliff



A memorial plaque has been laid in Rocket Park, Azalea Terrace in Ashbrooke in remembrance of Amber Rose Cliff.

Amber, who was a Neighbourhood Coordinator for Gentoo, sadly passed away from cervical cancer aged just 25; following a brave battle with the disease.

The plaque, which also supports 'Amber's Law', the family's national campaign which calls for a change in the smear test law to allow women under 25 to have the right to choose to have a smear test, is laid in the area Amber managed whilst working at Gentoo.

Funded by Gentoo, the plaque has been supported by Ashbrooke Residents who

sourced and planted three 'Amber' rose trees surrounding it, which will flower deep orange and apricot roses when in bloom. Rigby Taylor, a landscaping company, donated wild flower seeds for the park and Berghaus cleared the land prior to the installation.

Michelle Meldrum, Executive Director (Operations) at Gentoo, said: "Amber was an incredibly talented and bright young lady who is missed by everyone at Gentoo.

"Her passing at such a young age is tragic, but we hope the plaque will be a fitting way to remember Amber and celebrate the positive impact she had on so many people in this community."

Changes to supported housing

Gentoo delivers a range of supported housing services to younger and older customers, as well as those in crisis who need help to maintain their Gentoo tenancy.

Earlier this year we were given notice by Sunderland City Council that the funding they gave us to provide some of these support services would end in July 2017. Without this funding, those services could only be delivered with significant changes being made. Staff consulted with those customers who would be impacted by the withdrawal of this funding, to create a new way of operating - which has now been introduced.

Unfortunately, staff numbers have had to reduce but we continue to provide support services to customers living in our extra care and sheltered schemes, as well as older customers and those with mobility problems who live throughout the City.

By working in a new partnership with Together for Children (the independent body that now delivers children's services on behalf of Sunderland City Council), we have been able to provide a 24/7 supported housing scheme for young people leaving care.

For further information, please email communityteam@gentoogroup.com

Contacting us

Gentoo is always looking at new ways to improve our services. As well as our 24 hour automated payment line, we have now introduced direct dials to your local office so you can speak to your Neighbourhood Team direct. You can pay your rent 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by pressing 1 when you call your local office. You will need to press 2 to report a repair. This new process is designed to ensure your call is answered more promptly.

You can contact your local office on the numbers below:

Athenaeum office 0191 525 5001

Havelock office 0191 525 5002

Southwick office 0191 525 5003

Silksworth office 0191 525 5004

Houghton office 0191 525 5005

Concord office 0191 525 5006

Galleries office 0191 525 5007

Top tip!

If you have our number saved in your mobile phone, replace it with your local office number.

Remember, you can also contact us through our website and keep updated by following us on social media.



Office opening times

If you would prefer to pop into your local office we are now open 9am-4pm Monday – Friday.



Barmston Primary School project

Earlier this year, we were approached by Barmston Primary School about the pupils working on a project to improve the conditions in the Barmston play area in the centre of the village.

After meeting with teachers, we then invited the pupils to visit Gentoo to present their ideas to our neighbourhood staff about what they would like in the play area. They requested three litter bins, planters with flowers in and a litter pick.

The proposals were agreed and an event was held on 11 July 2017. More than 30 children attended, along with their teachers to plant flowers and to carry out a litter pick. We collected more than 30 bags of rubbish from across Barmston village.

Unfortunately, within 48 hours the area was vandalised. The planters were destroyed and all of the plants were stolen. This is not the first time the park has been vandalised. It was so positive



that young people wanted to look after it and they were really proud to have worked on improving the area.

If you do spot vandalism in your area, you can report this to Sunderland City Council's City and Neighbourhood Team by calling **0191 520 5550**.

Direct Debit – an easy way to pay



This may be the best way to pay your rent, especially if your rent doesn't change throughout the year.

Direct Debits can help you to budget and ensure that your rent is paid on time. It is an easy way to pay your rent and as payments are automatic, you won't have to worry about falling behind with payments. However, you will need to ensure you have enough money in your bank or you may be charged.

If you would like to pay by Direct Debit, download a form at **www.gentoogroup.com** or pick one up from your local office where staff will be happy to help.

Let us know what you think for the chance to win!

This year, with the help of our customers, we have reviewed this customer newsletter and we hope you like it! This newsletter provides an update on what's happening in your local area, key updates around our services and an update on how we performed in 2016-17. We are always looking to improve and would love to hear what you think.

Take part in a quick survey by visiting www.gentoogroup.com.

You will automatically be entered into a free prize draw to win shopping vouchers.*



*One entry per person. Closing date 15.12.17. Winners of the £100, £50 and £25 vouchers will be selected at random and notified within 28 days of the closing date. All entrants must be over 16 years old. No cash alternative.



Diversity and inclusion

We believe that inclusive communities are stronger. That's why it's so important to us that our services and local communities feel welcoming and inclusive for everyone, embracing the differences that make each of us unique.

We are currently completing the biggest customer survey we have ever done. It's part of our commitment to knowing you better, developing and tailoring our services, and making sure that we are treating everyone fairly.

This year we have continued our work to build stronger local communities that encourage and embrace diversity. We held a successful International Women's Day event at the Bangladesh Centre, established a Trans Community Group and we have been involved with city-wide celebrations such as Sunderland Pride and the Mini Mela, as well as more

focused work with different groups in local communities. We are passionate about fostering an environment where differences are respected and celebrated.

For more information about our approach to diversity, visit **www.gentoogroup.com**.



We were delighted to be confirmed as a Stonewall Star Performer once again. Using information you gave us as part of our customer survey, we were able to involve lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) customers in our work around domestic abuse in same sex relationships, and in developing our plans to make extra care housing schemes more LGBT friendly.



Doxford Park Community Centre

We have been working in partnership with community volunteers, councillors and The Box Youth Project to clean up the area around the community centre. We've also arranged for our Grounds Maintenance Team to do some weeding and had a 'tidy up' day at the end of April to clear up the rubbish.

Garages to rent from £5.45 per week

We have a number of garages available for rent across the City - these can be used for a car or the storage of goods.

You don't need to be a Gentoo customer to rent a garage. If you, or someone you know, is interested, complete an online application form at **www.gentooigroup.com** or call your local office.

Towards the end of last year, we had 138 empty garages in Washington, reflecting poor value for money. With this in mind, our Washington office consulted with our Local Area Focus Group. This was a way for customers to come together and focus on this specific issue and come up with ideas on how to make improvements.

Some of the ideas raised included displaying 'To-let' signs on empty garages, promoting the use of garages in our offices, developing a section on our website so people can apply online with



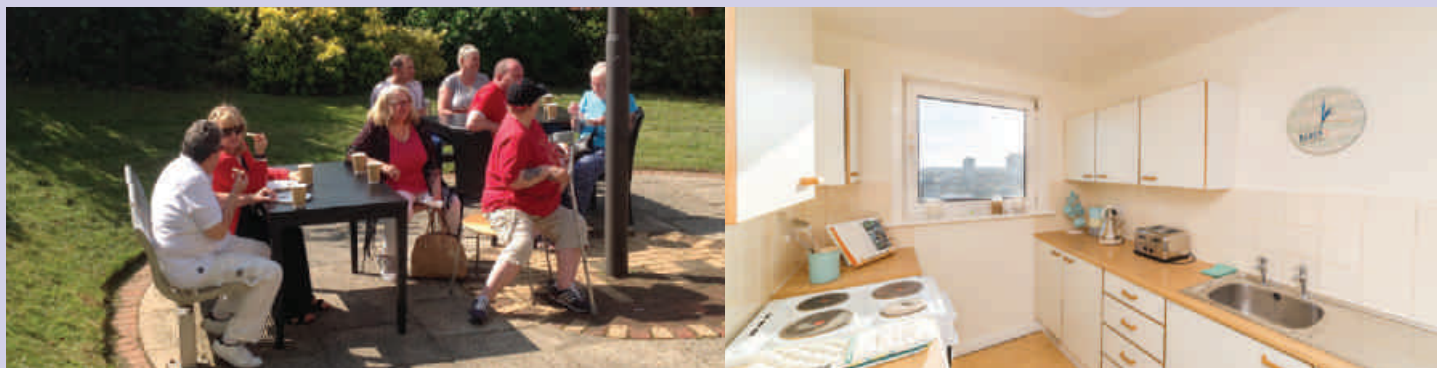
By working with customers we have reduced the number of empty garages by 328%

ease and ensuring communication with customers highlighted the benefits of renting a garage with Gentoo.

Taking on this feedback, we put these actions into place in Washington and Houghton. Since then the number of empty garages has decreased from 138 to 42 in Washington.

This is a great outcome and a fantastic example of working together to help promote the benefits of renting a garage with Gentoo.

Londonderry Tower cafe



In August, we held a cream tea event in the communal garden of Londonderry Tower to celebrate community spirit and promote the Resident Group's cafe. A warm welcome was given to all those who

come along from the three neighbouring tower blocks. They also viewed the newly decorated show flat.

The cafe is open five mornings a week and for Sunday lunch.



City centre
living from
only £86
per week*

We have a range of 1 and 2-bedroom flats available to rent, all within walking distance of Sunderland's City Centre. All benefit from a 24 hour concierge service, with no bond required.

- Fabulous views overlooking the sea and river.
- Great transport links.
- Secure parking.
- Access to computer room, gym, hairdressers and community cafe.
- Use of communal gardens/allotments.
- Opportunity to get involved in coffee mornings, lunch clubs, crafts and bingo.

For further information, or to view our show flat, please contact Jackie Pitt on 0191 525 6021 or email jackie.pitt@gentoogroup.com.

*Applicants must be over the age of 35. No children under 16 or pets. Price correct at time of print.

Get involved and help us to shape our services and build stronger communities

We are committed to involving our customers to help shape our services and make a difference to where you live.

There's a whole range of different ways you can be involved, from attending one of our information and knowledge sessions - giving you the opportunity to learn more about some of our services - to becoming involved in 'Ustoo' - our scrutiny group that delves deeper into some of our services to recommend improvements.

If you prefer to be involved more locally, you can join our Local Area Focus Group or get involved in community initiatives, such as general estate tidy ups, neighbourhood inspections and gardening competitions.

If you would like to give something back to the community we offer a host of volunteering projects, providing you with the opportunity to develop skills, gain experience and give something back.

Becoming an involved customer can mean investing as much or as little time as you wish. You don't even have to leave your house, our website gives you the opportunity to have your say.

For an up-to-date list of information and knowledge sessions, visit **www.gentoogroup.com**.

For more information on ways to get involved, contact the Customer and Community Team on **0191 525 2760** or email **communityteam@gentoogroup.com**.

The smart way to stay in control of your home



We're proud to announce that our 'My Gentoo' portal is now live for all our customers with a tenancy to access.

You can now use your tenancy number to create a 'My Gentoo' account and view your rent statements for either your home or your garage, view your repairs history and also report repairs.

'My Gentoo' not only allows you to view your information when you want to, it also lets you update the information that we hold on you as a customer - such as your contact information.

To create an account, you'll need:

- An email address.
- Your home address.
- Date of birth.
- Your tenancy number.

If you have any questions about 'My Gentoo', or have trouble setting up your account, you can email **mygentoo@gentoogroup.com** and a member of the team will be able to help.

Sunderland is shortlisted to be the next UK City of Culture in 2021!

The City celebrated when it was announced Sunderland had been shortlisted in the competition to become UK City of Culture in 2021. Sunderland is up against Paisley, Coventry, Stoke and Swansea to win the title.

The impact of winning the title would transform the City, as has been seen in the current UK City of Culture, Hull. A recent University of Hull study revealed massive economic and social benefits already being felt in the City.

Since Hull won the title as UK City of Culture in 2013, they have seen £3 billion invested in the City, 1,000,000 visitors to Hull's museums since January, and 83% growth in evening economy. The study also shows 90% of Hull's residents had visited a cultural event so far this year. The title is bringing a feel-good factor and increased confidence to the City.

The Bid Team is urging Wearsiders to get involved and help secure the UK City of Culture prize for Sunderland, so we can see the same positive impacts here over the next few years. Here are a few ways to get involved:

- Follow Sunderland 2021 on social media! Either like their Facebook page or follow them on Twitter **@Sunderland2021**.
- Use the hashtag **#Sunderland2021** online to shout about why you love Sunderland and why it deserves to be UK City of Culture in 2021.
- Pick up your free poster/flyer/badge from your local Gentoo office and display them proudly across your communities!





Beverley Court is a 'Ray' of sunshine

Gentoo customer John Reay is a ray of sunshine for Beverley Court residents, after organising a free fun day for all the family to enjoy.

Joanne Coulson, Community Partnerships Coordinator, was approached by John who asked about organising a fun day during the school holidays for Beverley Court residents.



Gentoo provided support to plan the event and awarded a £500 Aspire Grant to help pay for the entertainment and insurance.

John contacted local businesses and partners to provide a range of activities and refreshments, including:

- Greggs who donated food.
- The Foundation of Light who brought inflatable target goals.
- Washington Community Clothing Meet who brought a selection of clothes for free.
- Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service who came and did chip pan fire demonstrations.

In addition, there was a balloon maker, bouncy castles, slush maker, arts and crafts, a ukulele band and a petting zoo.

This free event took place on the 18 August and was attended by more than 200 children and their families.

Joanne Coulson, Community and Partnerships Coordinator, said: "This has all been made possible by John. It's great to see how empowered he was to organise an event that has increased social cohesion and built community spirit. Everything was really well thought through and he was a pleasure to work with. This is a shining example of how Gentoo can support customers to deliver events such as this. By collaboration between partners, business and customers you really can make a difference."

John said: "All the hard work that goes into organising an event like this, was all worthwhile when I saw the smiles on the children's faces, and saw how much fun everyone was having."

Well done to John, his family and all of the volunteers.



Cultures unite to celebrate International Women's Day 2017

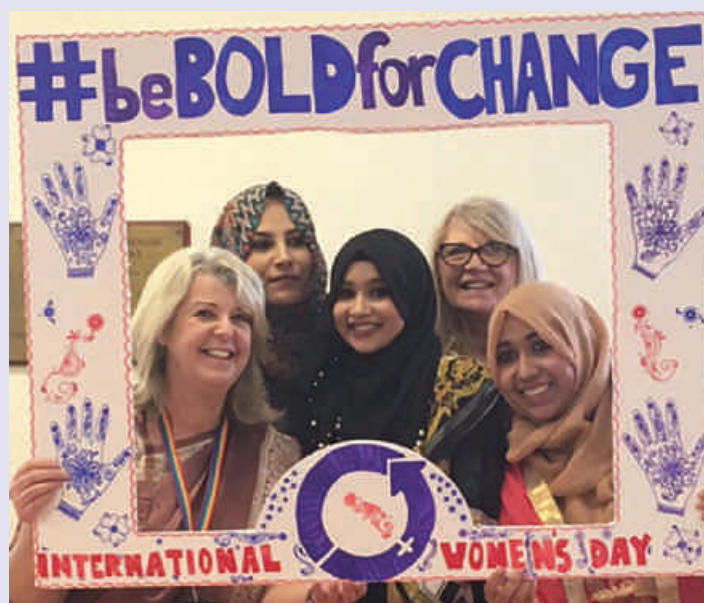
International Women's Day is an annual event where individuals around the world come together to help challenge bias; call for gender-balanced leadership and create flexible inclusive cultures.

This year, the day was celebrated on March 8 and Gentoog marked it with an event at Sunderland Bangladesh International Centre in Hendon. Organised by Community Partnership Coordinator Jackie Pitt, the event brought together women from more than twelve different nationalities including Polish, Bangladeshi, Egyptian and South African.

They were encouraged to participate in both English and Bangladeshi traditions with a range of activities on throughout the day. English activities included jewellery making, manicures and tap dancing lessons as well as a traditional high tea of sandwiches, scones and cakes. Bangladeshi activities included henna tattoos, Bollywood dance and the chance to wear a Bindi as well as sample traditional food of curry, pakora and samosas.

Rehena Sultana, Dementia Support Worker at Sunderland Bangladesh International Centre, said: "Bringing different people from different

communities together in one setting has been really great. It's an event where people can ask questions and learn about other cultures. It's been a really good opportunity to bring women together and it's been a really great turn out."



"I feel International Women's Day is important because it recognises women are important to society and that women do make a difference to society and to everyday life, and it's raising that profile. For other cultures it helps them to learn that women are equal and they have a voice."

To find out more about events like this visit **www.gentoogroup.com**.

Empower Sunderland Community Fund

Local voluntary organisations and community groups can apply for an Empower Sunderland Community Fund grant to deliver projects that have positive outcomes in the Sunderland area, as long as they meet the following criteria:

- Projects which will create alternative energy sources for use in the local community.
- Projects which will deliver a reduction of energy consumption in the local community.
- Projects which will reduce or reverse negative social and/or environmental impacts on the local community.

Completed grant applications are considered by a panel of Gentoogroup customers, staff and partners, and Trustees of Empower Community Solar. There is no financial limit for applications and the panel welcome innovative and creative projects.

To date, the panel have successfully allocated more than £60,000 to projects across Sunderland accessed by up to 7,000 local residents, some of which are:

- Pallion Action Group who have been successfully awarded funds to replace their current lighting with LEDs and also install solar panels on their roof. This will help them save money, reduce their impact on the environment and generate their own electricity on site.
- Oxclose and District Young People's Project who have been successfully awarded funds to replace their boiler which will allow the whole of their

Sulgrave Centre base to re-open and be used by the community, reducing the negative social impacts on the Washington community.

- Grindon United Reformed Church who have been successfully awarded funds to add solar PV to their roof to reduce their impact on the environment and generate their own electricity allowing them to save money and keep their local facility open.

John Whiteoak, Member of GCCP Management Group, said: "Grindon Church Community Project is so grateful for the grant which will enable us to install solar panels on our building. We expect that these will make a significant contribution towards the cost of keeping our project going. We have more than 300 people regularly coming here each week and these solar panels will help us to control our costs and continue to provide a vital facility for people in Sunderland."

More information can be found at **www.gentoogroup.com**.



Do you know what gas smells like?

Smell gas?

Call Northern Gas Networks
on **0800 111 999**

gentoo

Not sure what
gas smells like?
Scratch here...



Together with this newsletter you have received a 'Scratch and Sniff' gas card. This is to remind you what gas smells like, so you can detect a gas leak if you ever needed to.

It is so important to take care of your gas appliances. As your landlord, we have a legal responsibility to ensure that all relevant appliances, fittings and flues are maintained, are in good order and are checked by our Gas Safe registered engineers. If you have any solid fuel appliances, we will check these twice a year.

As well as having your gas appliances checked once a year, you should also look out for warning signs that your appliances are not working correctly, for example lazy yellow or orange flames instead of crisp blue ones. Black marks on or around the appliance and too much condensation in the room are also

signs that there maybe a problem with an appliance.

Badly fitted and poorly serviced gas appliances can cause gas leaks, fires, explosions and carbon monoxide poisoning.

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Every year thousands of people across the UK are diagnosed with carbon monoxide poisoning. It is a highly poisonous gas.

You can't see it, taste it or smell it, but it can kill quickly with no warning.

Signs of carbon monoxide poisoning include:

- Feeling tired and weak.
- Headaches.
- Dizziness.
- Sickness.
- Pains in the chest and stomach.
- Being out of breath.
- Loss of consciousness.

Please remember that failure to allow access to your property will result in court action being taken. If you think your gas safety check is outstanding contact us immediately on **0800 5877 809**.

New repair priorities

Prioritising repairs helps us to respond within an appropriate timescale depending on the nature or urgency of your repair. We prioritise repairs by taking into consideration any customer vulnerabilities, and looking at if the repair has serious implications on the health, safety and wellbeing of customers.

Emergency repairs – 24 hours

This is repair work that presents an **immediate risk** to your health and safety or the fabric of your property. The service is designed to 'make safe' so we may not fully complete the repair unless it is cost effective to do so. If you need to report an emergency repair outside of office opening times, call your local office. Please note this service is strictly for emergency repairs.

Urgent repairs – 7 calendar days

This is repair work that is not an emergency, but needs completing quite quickly in order to prevent damage to your property. This type of repair will help overcome serious inconvenience and prevent possible health and safety risks.

Routine repairs – 28 calendar days

This is repair work that needs attention, but can be carried out at a mutually agreed time. These types of repairs do not pose a threat to your health, safety or risk to the fabric of your home.

Planned repairs – 180 calendar days

These are larger or more complicated repairs that are batched by area and carried out in a planned way. For example, roofing, brickwork, guttering or kitchen replacements. Doing these repairs in this



way ensures we achieve value for money. These type of repairs pose no immediate risk to health and safety or the fabric of your home.

In addition, as a landlord we have a legal responsibility to carry out certain checks in our properties and buildings. For example, annual gas safety checks, electrical safety checks or quarterly fire alarm testing. You must allow us access to your home to carry out these important checks.

If you need to book your gas service or electrical testing appointment please contact **0800 5877 809**.

Grindon communal garden gets a facelift

Karl Atkinson, one of our customers, approached his Neighbourhood Coordinator, Michael Braban, while out on the estate. He had noticed how a couple of his neighbours had made improvements to the communal gardens of the flats in Guernsey Road and Guernsey Square and he asked if he could do the same.

Michael told Karl that we would be more than happy for him to take ownership of a section of the garden and make some improvements. A few days after initially speaking to Karl, Michael was passing by his block and noticed that he was out in the garden. He had already started cutting the grass and digging borders. Michael asked if we could help out in any way by supplying plants, and our Grounds Maintenance Team were more than happy to arrange for the delivery of bedding plants. Karl has continued to tend to the garden and already has plans for future improvements he wants to make.

Michael Braban, Neighbourhood Coordinator, said: "Karl's efforts certainly haven't gone unnoticed. Since he started doing the garden, he has received a number of compliments and positive comments from neighbours and he feels more integrated into his community now as he has got to know more of his neighbours in the surrounding area. He now often gets asked if he can help others with their gardens!"

Thinking about getting Sky or SkyQ installed?

Over recent months, there has been an increase in the number of residents in our blocks subscribing to Sky and SkyQ. In order to avoid delays with your installation and to ensure the ongoing safety of residents, please ensure prior arrangement is made with Gentoo to issue Sky sub-contractors a 'Permit to Work' and access into the building. Failure to follow this procedure has already resulted in residents losing TV reception and fire protection equipment being damaged.



Karl, along with other residents nearby have put a significant amount of time and effort into improving this block and have made a huge impact on residents and the surrounding area.



Local Area Focus Group helps to improve community garden

Central area holds a bi-monthly Local Area Focus Group to discuss issues in the area, increase knowledge of Gento products and services and share information.

One of the issues discussed last year was the unappealing external appearance of the Grindon low rise flats. Customers suggested placing flower and herb-filled tubs to brighten up the entrance areas to the flats.

These have now been introduced and it is really pleasing to see that residents are keeping them watered and tidy. This is really helping to make Grindon a more desirable place to live and is creating community cohesion.

If anyone would like to come along to the next Local Area Focus Group meeting, or would like more information, contact Jackie Pitt, Community Partnership Coordinator, on **0191 525 6021** or **jackie.pitt@gentoogroup.com**.



Dame Dot Residents' Group

If you fancy a cuppa and some company you can be sure of a warm welcome at the Dame Dot coffee and cake get together!

The group started earlier this year after Joyce Goodson and Beryl Cook decided to ask residents to come along and join them for some company and chat over a cuppa. They realised a lot of customers were socially isolated and wanted to get involved in the local community.



One of the first to join them was Hilda Speight who is 92 and has lived in the block since 1981. She finds it difficult to get out alone and loves the opportunity to mix and chat to other customers. Hilda said: "I love it in Dame Dorothy and would never move out because of the lovely people living in the block."



Other customers who drop in and help out are John Rodgers and Edna Green. John helps to set up the room and clear



up afterwards and Edna loves to bake and provides delicious cakes and pies. Everyone contributes a small snack or tea/coffee to keep the group going and they never go short of anything as they decide between themselves what to bring.



Walter Moss and his daughter Anne have also provided all the plants and nurtured the pleasant outdoor seating area. The group love to use the area on warmer days.

New faces are always welcome so if you live in the area and want to pop in they are based in the residents lounge at Dame Dorothy Crescent, Monkwearmouth. The group meet on Monday's and Thursday's at 2pm.

Ryhope Terraces and Avenues Community Group



We have been supporting the Ryhope Terraces and Avenues Community Group. They are a group of local residents from Ryhope that have been working together since June 2015 with the aim of providing affordable family activities during school holidays and weekends for every age group. They consulted with local residents to find out the needs of the community and based their activities around this feedback.

The project continues to be needed as there are limited opportunities for families with children in Ryhope. The activities are varied and can range from a bus trip to Scarborough to discos, Easter egg hunts and arts and craft sessions. These events bring the community together and encourage people to be active. They also want to make people proud of the community they live in and regularly organise litter picks to do this.

Angela Sinclair, Community Partnership Coordinator, continues to support them in order to help to develop and sustain the group. This ranges from assisting them with funding bids, enabling them to run their activities and introducing them to other partners.

Five of the group are so committed to making a difference as volunteers that they have been trained as Gentoog community volunteers and they have supported us in various activities across the city such as gardening at Grace House.

The group now has 15 volunteers and they are very keen to recruit more.



To find out more contact Angela Sinclair, Community Partnership Coordinator, on **0191 525 5947** or email **angela.sinclair@gentoogroup.com**.

My Gentoo journey

One of our customers who was a victim of domestic abuse wanted to tell their story. This is about the support they received from Gentoo and how, by becoming a volunteer, they are now giving something back.

"I had been married for 45 years and when I was 74 my husband became abusive. I had many dark days. I had lots of friends but really didn't want to put on to them too much. I was told to speak to my Neighbourhood Coordinator, I was then referred to a specialist Victim Support Officer. Without her I don't know what I would have done - she was my shining star. I went to a solicitor for advice and had counselling sessions which were a huge help. It was great to be able to talk to someone. My Victim Support Officer helped me to get my personal possessions and get all of the relevant documents and information I needed for court. With support from my Victim Support Officer and Gentoo I was moved into a new bungalow. It is a lovely house and I am blessed with lovely neighbours and we always look out for each other.

Because of the support I received, I really wanted to give something back. So in 2016 I became a Gentoo volunteer and have never looked back.



I'm now involved in:

- **Befriending** – I visit a lady on a Monday who is lonely. We have fish and chips. We spend an hour together, it makes me feel good and we both love the company.
- **Lunch club** – I help out at my local lunch club, meeting and greeting people, serving tea and coffee and washing up. It's a great way to meet new people.
- **Biddick Academy** – I do reading with local school children to help them to improve.
- **Information and Knowledge** – I take part in these sessions at Gentoo offices. This helps me to learn more about Gentoo and their services.
- **Aspire Panel** – I sit on this panel which helps to decide where money will be allocated to help improve the local community.
- **Washington for U** – This is the Local Area Focus Group where we discuss local issues and raise concerns about our neighbourhood.

I would highly recommend becoming a involved Gentoo customer. I have met so many new people. It keeps me busy and at 76 I feel that I am really helping to make a difference in the community. I really want to empower people to put their life skills to good use and make a difference."

For more information about how you can get involved, contact our Customer and Community Team on **0191 525 2760** or email **communityteam@gentoogroup.com**.

Are you ready for Universal Credit?



You may already know a little bit about Universal Credit. It is a new benefit for people of working age who are sick, unemployed and looking for work, or working but on a low income. It was introduced in Sunderland on 2 November 2015 for single people making new claims.

From May 2018 it will be rolled out to couples and families. It will replace the following six main working-age benefits into one monthly payment:

- Housing Benefit.
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance.
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance.
- Income Support.
- Child Tax Credit.
- Working Tax Credit.

If you are already claiming working-age benefits, carry on as normal until you are notified by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).

Get ready!

- If you are in receipt of Housing Benefit, your rent will no longer be paid to us. You have the responsibility of paying your rent, so make sure you put a payment method in place.
- To receive Universal Credit you need to have a bank, building society, credit union or post office account.
- Get access to the internet as you can only claim and manage your account online.
- Start thinking about monthly, rather than weekly budgeting.
- For budgeting advice, visit money **www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk**.

Important - For new claims, payments can take up to six weeks. Our advice would be to start saving now!

If you are worried about debt, paying your rent, or need help with budgeting, our Money Matters Team can help. Call **0300 123 2004*** or email **moneymatters@gentoogroup.com**.

To find out more about Universal Credit visit **www.gov.uk/universal-credit**.

Top tip! Register with GOV.UK verify. This is a new way for you to prove who you are online, so you can use services on GOV.UK safely.

It gives safer, simpler and faster access to government services like filing your tax or checking the information on your driving licence. You can also use it when applying for Universal Credit. To find out more, visit **www.gov.uk/verify**.

*Calls to 03 numbers will cost the same as calls to a landline number and will be included as part of any inclusive call minutes.

How we performed in 2016-17

It is important for us to keep our customers up-to-date on how we are performing. Every year we produce a Customer Annual Report so our customers can see how we are performing and provide feedback. See below for an update on our housing and neighbourhood services.

Repairs and maintenance



£20.4m

was spent on delivering this service.

35,219

visits were categorised as an emergency.

188,584

repair and safety check visits were made.

89.39%

of repairs were fixed in one visit.



99.99%

of homes held a Gas Safety Certificate.

288

compliments received from customers.

Looking after your neighbourhood



£3.5m

was spent on keeping your estates tidy.

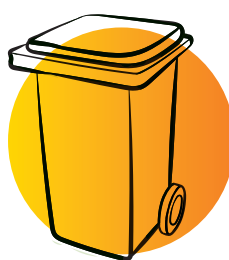
819

gardens in empty properties were cleared and maintained.



90%

of customers were satisfied with our communal cleaning service.



98.2%

of fly tipping was removed within 7 days.

94%

of customers are satisfied with their neighbourhood.

Grassed areas were cut

14 times

Keeping you safe



110

victims of anti-social behaviour (ASB) were supported.

95

customers who cause ASB were supported to change their behaviour.



57

people were referred to mediation to resolve disputes with neighbours.

184

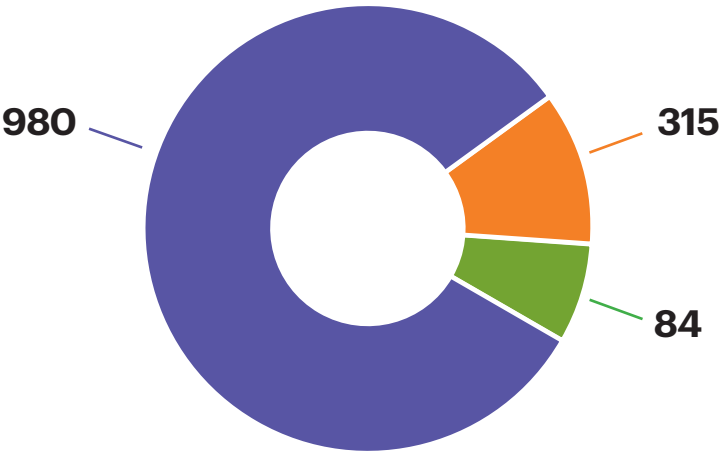
referrals were made to protect vulnerable adults and children.

1,379

tenancy breaches were recorded.

Top breach types;

- Nuisance
- Drugs
- Public Order



- **Category 1**
(Serious cases)
- **Category 2**
(Incidents that could escalate)
- **Category 3**
(Low level)

Letting our homes



2,607

properties were allocated.

45.28

was the average number of days it took to allocate a property.

90%

of customers were satisfied with the lettable standard of our properties.

Paying your rent



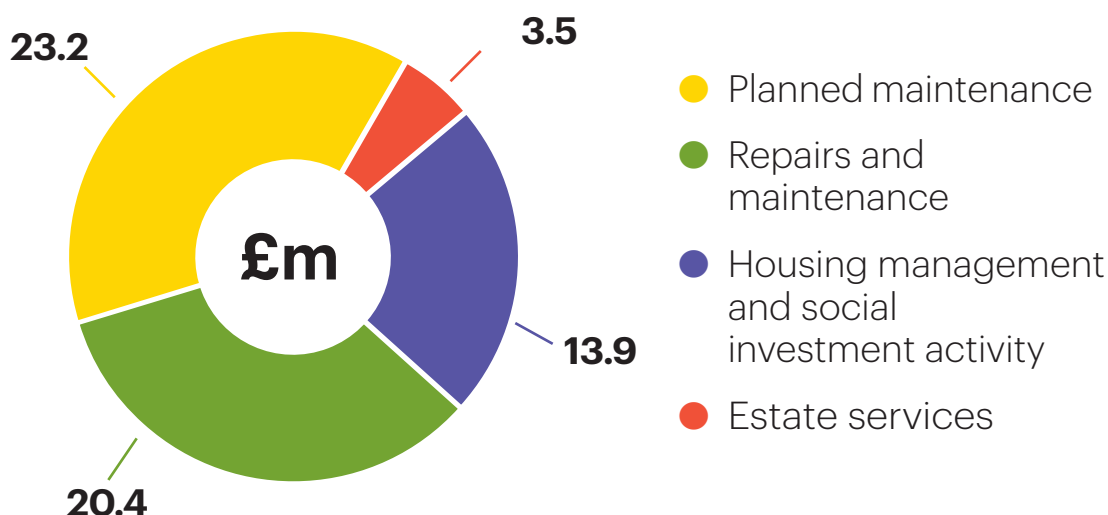
£122.9m

was collected in rent.

100.35%

of rent was collected
as % of rent due.

Key service areas where we spent your rent include:



Did you know?

94% of customers feel their rent provided value for money.*

Managing your money



1,699

customers were referred to our Money Matters Team.

£635,607

worth of debt was identified and consolidated.

£424,295

worth of unclaimed benefits were identified.

Looking after your home



1,495

boilers were replaced.

58

properties received full modernisation.

497

properties received gable end repairs.

1,396

properties were fitted with double glazed windows.

496

roofs were replaced.

Supporting people



204

young people were supported to live independently.

1,803

older people were supported to live well and independently.

Community involvement



£28,118

worth of Aspire Grants were awarded to local community groups.



299

community and staff volunteers have given 2,457 hours of their time to projects that benefitted the community.

Customer care



479

staff compliments were received.

5

formal complaint appeals were received.

82

formal complaints were received across the whole group.

262,738

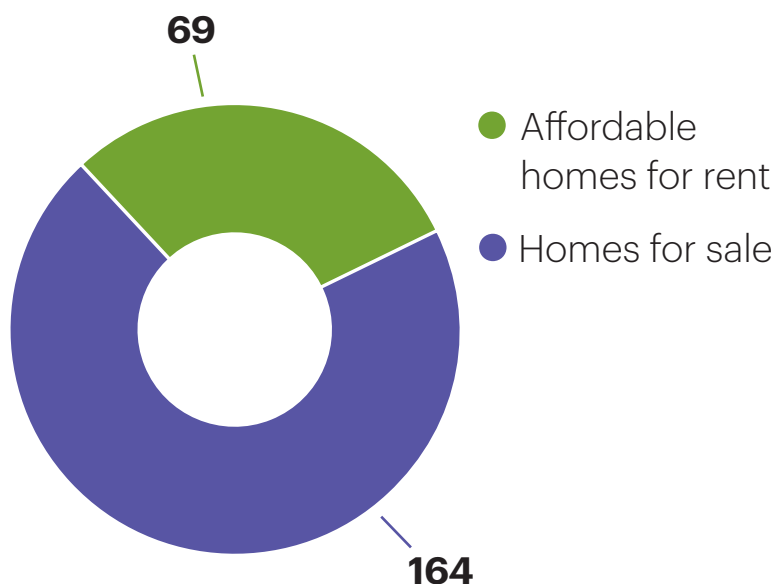
telephone calls were received.

Investing in new homes



233

new homes were built.



Did you know?

96% of customers are satisfied with the overall service provided by Gentoo.*

* HouseMark Star Survey 2016-17

Investing in our homes

This year, we will continue to focus our investment on works to the external areas of our homes. This will include gable wall works, roofing and boundary walls.

We are aware that some of our properties have single glazed windows and that it is a customer aspiration to have double glazing. We are in the process of developing a strategy to escalate the installation of double glazed windows and as a result we will no longer be upgrading windows as a matter of course when we replace boilers or heating systems.



85%

of our homes have had a stock condition survey. This helps us understand the condition of our homes and plan our investment programmes. If you have not had a survey already, we will be in touch soon to arrange this.

In 2016-17:



£23.2m

was spent on improving our homes.

See below for some examples of how this money was spent on planned works in your area.



Central

- **409** 'A' rated boilers were fitted.
- **355** properties were fitted with double glazing.
- **238** roofs were replaced.
- **128** gable walls were rebuilt.



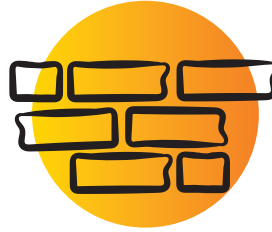
Houghton and Hetton

- **195** 'A' rated boilers were fitted.
- **116** properties were fitted with double glazing.
- **204** roofs were replaced.
- **20** gable walls were rebuilt.



North

- **338** 'A' rated boilers were fitted.
- **287** properties were fitted with double glazing.
- **51** roofs were replaced.
- **210** gable walls were rebuilt.



South

- **419** 'A' rated boilers were fitted.
- **415** properties were fitted with double glazing.
- **3** roofs were replaced.
- **137** gable walls were rebuilt.

Washington



- **160** 'A' rated boilers were fitted.
- **223** properties were fitted with double glazing.
- **2** gable walls were rebuilt.
- Asbestos was removed in **113** properties.

Removal of gas and electric fires

Across the City we have homes that have had gas and electric fires, surrounds and hearths installed as part of a previous investment programme.

Following consultation with customers, we found that customers only use their fire occasionally and some never use it. Installing fires in our homes gives us an ongoing servicing (if gas) and maintenance responsibility when it needs repaired or replacing.

We will now adopt a more efficient approach and will remove gas and electric fires, surrounds and hearths when:

- **Completing heating upgrades. The area will be cleaned and skimmed. The next heating upgrade programme to start is Coach Road Estate in Washington.**
- **Any electric or gas fires that are beyond repair, due to parts being obsolete.**

Affected customers will be given a £250 voucher which they can spend on flooring and redecoration.

We will also be removing these items before empty homes are re-let if they are due a heating upgrade. You will be advised if this is the case before you move in.

Please note we will not remove these in response to one off requests from individual customers.


A member of staff will contact you if you are going to be affected by the changes outlined above.

Our approach to achieving value for money

At Gentoo, we are committed to providing an outstanding level of service, whilst ensuring we consider economy, efficiency and effectiveness in every decision we make.

During 2016-17, we have made a number of changes and improvements to the way we deliver our services.

2016-17 highlights:

- 
- The review of our allocations policy has resulted in efficiency savings of **£233,000**.
 - **£100,000** worth of savings were generated following a review of our gardening service.
 - **1,699** customers were assisted in claiming more than **£400,000** in benefits or grants.
 - Our heating upgrades and window replacements are expected to save customers **£600,000** in energy costs.
 - **£180,000** of funding has been secured from the European Social Fund to support an up-skilling training programme for Repairs and Maintenance staff. This will help reduce repeat visits, completing more repairs on first visit.
 - A 'fixed over the phone' initiative has been introduced to support customers to resolve minor problems, for example to reset your boiler. This prevents the need for a home visit.

Did you know?

94% of customers feel their rent provides value for money and **96%** are satisfied with the overall service provided by Gentoo.

Our 2016-17 Value for Money Self-Assessment articulates our approach and provides further information about how we are achieving value across our business.

To view this online, visit **www.gentoogroup.com**.

Using feedback and complaints to improve our services

Our formal complaint numbers are generally low, but we still see complaints as an opportunity to improve our services. The top three service areas for complaints during 2016-17 are shown in the table below:

Nature of complaint	Number received	Upheld*	Not upheld*
Repairs and Maintenance	33	27	6
Asset Management	11	10	1
Tenancy Management	10	5	5

***Upheld** - We agree with the complaint and recognise that we were at fault. **Not upheld** - Following investigation, we do not feel the complaint is justified.

Repairs and Maintenance

Feedback from customers indicates that their dissatisfaction with this service is around the length of time it takes to fully complete repairs and ongoing issues in relation to damp/condensation.

Outcomes

- We have published new repair categories which describe response times that are applied to different types of repairs. These include a new 7 calendar day repair category and a reduction in the routine repair category timescale from 31 to 28 calendar days.
- We have introduced a dedicated Condensation and Preservation Team to provide advice on how to minimise condensation and carry out any damp works in a planned approach at a mutually agreed time with our customers.

Asset Management

Feedback from customers around Asset Management (how we invest in our properties) related to poor quality of work and our approach to replacing single glazed windows.



Outcomes

We have developed a new robust performance management framework to ensure contractors maintain an excellent level of quality.

Although our single glazed windows are in good condition, we appreciate our customers would benefit from double glazing. We are in the process of developing a strategy to accelerate their installation.

Tenancy Management

Feedback from customers concerning Tenancy Management is related to lack of action with neighbour disputes.

Outcomes

We have revised our Neighbourhood Safety Policy Toolkit and delivered refresher training to staff.

Our local service offer to you

At Gentoo, we continuously monitor and measure our services to make sure the highest standards are maintained. You can find more information on how we have performed during 2016/17 on pages 22 - 27.

It is essential for customers and staff to have those standards clearly explained so that customers know what to expect and staff are aware of the levels of service they should be achieving. Staff and customers have worked together to agree these standards, known as 'Local Service Offers' which are shown below.

Description

Neighbourhood Management - to ensure our neighbourhoods are safe, attractive and well maintained places to live.

We will:

- Provide you with regular information specific to your neighbourhood.
- Ensure all issues affecting the neighbourhood are identified and responded to.

Repairs and Maintenance - to ensure your home is repaired and maintained, giving you a safe place to live.

- Diagnose your repair and respond within an appropriate timescale.
- Provide you with advice, support and guidance to enable you to maintain your home.
- We will carry out the safety checks required by law to keep you and your home safe.





Description

Tenancy Management - to ensure you are aware of your rights and responsibilities in relation to your tenancy and appropriate management of those tenancies.

Income Management - to offer you advice, support and a range of ways to pay in order to maximise collection of rental income and other charges.

We will:

- Provide you with timely information specific to your tenancy.
 - Offer advice and support to help you sustain your tenancy.
 - Be members of, and actively promote, a mutual exchange scheme.
-
- Provide advice, support and guidance to enable you to maximise your income.
 - Take appropriate action to prevent your accounts from falling into arrears.
 - Provide you with timely information in relation to your rent and other accounts.
 - Offer advice, support and guidance on the most appropriate way to pay your rent and other charges.

Our local service offer to you

Description

Customer Service - to provide a personalised, tailored service to our customers.

Neighbourhood Safety - to help our neighbours feel safe and secure by preventing and minimising anti-social behaviour (ASB).

We will:

- Provide a range of ways for customers to access services from Gentoo.
 - Provide regular information on Gentoo products and services.
 - Provide a range of ways for you to give us your feedback and to use your feedback to improve our services.
-
- Offer appropriate support and advice to victims and perpetrators of ASB and domestic abuse.
 - Take relevant action specific to any reports of ASB or domestic abuse received.
 - Provide you with a timely response to any reports of ASB or domestic abuse received.



Description

Asset Management – to provide a good quality home that meets your needs and to ensure your neighbourhood has a long-term sustainable future.

We will:

- Ensure your home has no health and safety hazards.
- Strive to ensure your home meets the Decent Homes Standard.
- Replace major components - kitchens, bathrooms, roofs etc - which are old and in poor condition.

Safety, Support and Crisis - working in partnership, we will enable vulnerable customers to sustain their tenancy and live well in their neighbourhood.

- Provide supported accommodation where necessary.
- Offer advice, support and guidance bespoke to your circumstances.

Allocations - to enable you to find a good quality, affordable home which fulfils your housing requirements based upon need.

- Provide you with support, advice and guidance to help you find a new home that suits your needs.
- Provide you with information specific to your new home.

Community Involvement and Engagement - to provide a diverse range of ways for you to work with us to improve neighbourhoods and Gentoo services.

- Provide a range of opportunities for you to engage with Gentoo.
- Provide advice, support and guidance to empower you to be involved in your community.

Concierge Services - are for those living in our multi-storey or supported accommodation, maintaining your safety and security.

- Provide you with 24 hour monitoring to ensure you feel safe in your home.
- Provide you with 24 hour access to emergency support.

For further information, please contact our Customer Services Team on **0191 525 2760** or email **communityteam@gentoogroup.com**.

Working in partnership to support the Sulgrave Centre



The Sulgrave Centre is a community facility that was built in the 1970s. Oxclose and District Young People's Project (ODYPP) lease the building and their aim is to provide youth activities, which has reduced due to a lack of funding. We work in partnership with ODYPP and 'The Friends of Sulgrave' (a residents' group) to provide support and facilitate a wider range of community activities at the centre.

The residents' group has successfully hosted a number of seasonal parties for children, pie and pea suppers, as well as table top sales and celebrations for the Queen's birthday. They also host a 'community lunch club', which provides a meal once a week to support those who are struggling financially or who are lonely. More than 25 people attend each week. The group also run a weekly 'chat and craft club' and organise courses for the community such as jewellery making, heritage, local history and dancing. It's a great way to meet new people and learn new things.

The group was established in 2015 and raise funds for the centre so they can continue to offer all services and activities. In October 2016, Tolent, based in Gateshead, carried out essential asbestos removal work free of charge. They were supported by staff from Gentoo, who donated their time and services to carry out electrical works and replace ceilings as part of their ongoing commitment to building strong communities. This work was critical to allow them to apply for funding for other improvement works to be completed.

Lucy Malarkey, Deputy Director (Operations), said: "At Gentoo, we are passionate about building strong communities in Sunderland and the Sulgrave Community Centre does just that, by running an array of events and courses to help alleviate isolation and bring together the local community. When we heard the centre needed crucial repairs we were more than happy to assist. We would like to thank Tolent for their asbestos removal services."

The centre has now received an Empower Grant to fit a new boiler and have applied for further funding to replace the kitchen units and appliances. This will support the future of the building and the continued success of the centre in supporting local people.

For further information about activities at the Sulgrave Centre, contact Joanne Coulson, Community and Partnerships Coordinator, on **0191 525 2875** or email **joanne.coulson@gentoogroup.com**.



Washington children cook up a storm at the Sulgrave Centre

Children in Washington have been able to take part in free activities thanks to a £500 Aspire Grant.

Youngsters aged 8-10 years took part in activities, including cookery lessons, where they learned how to make healthy meals.

The activities culminated in a **junior chef challenge**, where the children cooked a meal of meatballs followed by pancakes with healthy toppings for elderly people at the Sulgrave Community Centre.

Ev Ripley-Day, Foundation of Light's Operations Manager for Washington and South Tyneside, said: "Our team were blown away by the cookery skills of the young people we worked with and we had some very positive feedback on the meal from their dinner guests."

Thanks to a £500 Aspire grant.



"Being able to understand what makes a healthy meal and how to cook one is key in helping people avoid obesity and health problems in later life and we're very grateful to Gentoo who have given us the opportunity to teach this to the youngsters in this community."

HomeHunt – A new and improved way to allocate our homes

Following a review of our Allocations policy, we are delighted to announce that our new allocations system, HomeHunt, is now live! This has replaced Choice Based Lettings (CBL).

HomeHunt is a national website that allows you to search and apply for social and affordable housing in your area. To find a home with us you will need to create an account with HomeHunt and complete a Gentoo online application.

As a charitable community benefit society, we need to ensure we prioritise those who have a housing need and disabled and chronically sick people who need rehousing. Following the assessment of your housing application, you will be placed into one of four priority bands depending on your level of need.

All customers who were previously registered with CBL have been asked to re-register. You can do this easily by



logging into HomeHunt with your existing username and password and providing answers to a few additional questions to help us to assess your housing need. For customers who have not re-registered yet, you will need to do so as soon as possible if you wish to stay on the housing register and retain your current date of registration.

To find out more, or to register, visit **www.gentoo-group.com**.

National Fraud Initiative statement

In order to help protect the public funds it receives, Gentoo Group voluntarily take part in the National Fraud Initiative (NFI) data matching exercise carried out by the Cabinet Office. This initiative involves the matching of electronic data within, and between, public and private sector bodies to prevent and detect fraud. The data submitted by the participating bodies is then compared to identify and investigate potential fraudulent activity.

This does not require your consent under the Data Protection Act 1998 but we feel it appropriate to inform you.

Further information on the Government's National Fraud Initiative can be found at: **www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-fraud-initiative**.

Volunteering coffee morning at Athenaeum



We have an enthusiastic group of community volunteers across the City who take part in numerous activities including:

- Reading in schools.
- Litter picks.
- Events.

We are setting up a volunteer coffee morning every Thursday in our Athenaeum office between 10am – 12pm to discuss new ideas for volunteering. It would be lovely to see some new people come along and even if you don't want to volunteer, just come and join us for coffee and biscuits and to meet new friends.



If you would like to become a community volunteer contact Jackie Pitt, Community Partnership Coordinator, on **0191 525 6021** or email **jackie.pitt@gentoogroup.com**.

Credit union rebrands to First For Money



Sunderland-based credit union 'Bridges Community Bank' has re-branded and launched as First For Money.

The new brand encapsulates First for Money's dedication to providing an ethical way to managing savings and loans for both businesses and individuals. Unlike high street banks, First for Money is a

credit union – run by members for the benefit of members. It is a not-for-profit organisation and anyone who lives and works in Tyne and Wear, County Durham and Northumberland is eligible to join.

First For Money continues to offer the range of services it previously offered under the Bridges brand – including its employee payroll scheme, loans at attractive and affordable rates, saving accounts and offers for white goods and furniture.

As a credit union, First For Money is fully covered by the Financial Conduct Authority and the Prudential Regulation Authority.

For more information, please visit **www.firstformoney.co.uk** or call **0191 514 7491 (Sunderland Branch)**.

Fire safety in High Rise tower blocks following Grenfell Tower fire

Following the tragic events at Grenfell Tower earlier this year, we sent samples of aluminium composite material (ACM) cladding, which was installed in small amounts at five tower blocks in Roker, for fire testing. The Building Research Establishment (BRE) was commissioned by the Government to carry out this urgent fire safety testing and we were informed by the BRE that our ACM cladding had failed the combustibility test.

As a precautionary measure, we decided to remove this small amount

of decorative cladding immediately from the five tower blocks. We began removing the cladding on the same day as we received our test results and the cladding was completely removed within 24 hours.

The Government has since issued guidance on the best solution for a fully fire retardant replacement material and we are working closely with Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service and Sunderland City Council's Building Control Department to replace the cladding that was removed.



Ensuring the safety of our customers is a key priority and we take fire safety extremely seriously. In particular, we have a number of systems, processes and policies in place to ensure the safety of residents living in high rise tower blocks, including:

- A robust housing allocation procedure in relation to our high rise blocks, which considers the age and the mobility of customers who are applying for a flat. Part of this includes restricting customers with mobility issues from living above the fourth floor of a high rise block.
- Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans are in place where we know customers could be challenged to reach their 'relative place of safety' in an emergency situation. These are updated on a quarterly basis.
- Close links with Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service who use our high rise blocks for simulated emergency training.
- Fire alarms located in each high rise tower block are linked to Gentoo's Concierge Service and Sunderland City Council's Alarm Receiving Centre.
- The Concierge Service responding to fire alarm activations via an intercom system to establish whether the activation is genuine or a false alarm. If no response is received within 90 seconds, the activation is automatically relayed to Sunderland City Council's Alarm Receiving Centre

which then automatically notifies Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service.

- An annual fire risk assessment for each high rise building. Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service also carry out an annual check on every building.
- An extensive maintenance programme to ensure continued compliance, which includes:

- **Testing control panels and sounders four times per year.**
- **Testing alarms in individual dwellings annually.**
- **Weekly call point testing.**
- **Monthly testing of emergency lighting.**
- **Daily inspections carried out by janitors and housing staff to identify any management issues which may pose a fire risk.**

If you live in a high rise tower block and have any mobility or medical needs, you may need a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP). Let us know as soon as possible if you think you need one.

If you have any queries please email **contactus@gentoogroup.com** or call your local office.



A trip down memory lane

Back in February, Town End Farm Residents' Association, Castletown Community Centre and Albany House took a trip down memory lane.

The residents were treated to an afternoon of entertainment as a way of bringing people together and supporting our older customers, many of whom suffer from dementia and alzheimer's disease.

The Nostalgia event, held at Albany House, is the first of what is hoping to be a regular occasion to help tackle social isolation, and saw the Time Bandits - a dedicated team of historical interpreters - bring the past to life.

Dressed in wartime attire, the Time Bandits gave a demonstration and talked about everything from popular meals to common clothing dating back to the pre-war era.

The residents reminisced as they were taken back to their youth and shown memorabilia, with many of the ladies opting to wear a faux fur stole that was passed around as part of the demonstration.

Community Partnership Coordinator, Ann Donkin, had everyone singing along and even got some of the ladies up on their feet, as she entertained the residents with songs dating the pre-war, to classics from the 50s and 60s.

Social isolation has a huge impact on physical and mental health, and is a common cause of depression. Events like this help reduce the impact social isolation can play on people's health. It is also a positive way of engaging our communities and improving wellbeing.

For more information about other community initiatives, visit **www.gentoogroup.com**.



Lending a helping hand to families in need



Our summer campaign 'Helping Hands' donated more than 2,000 items of food and school uniforms to families in need across Sunderland.

We worked in partnership with the Sunderland Connect Network, Barclays and local schools to lend a hand to local families during the school holidays. Working together, they collected unwanted school uniforms and spare food from staff, parents and the local community. In total, 1,341 items of school uniform and almost 1,000 items of food were donated.

Uniforms were collated from collection bins across seven local schools – Eppleton Primary, Southwick Primary, Hudson Road Primary, Barmston Village Primary, Biddick Academy, Hetton Secondary School, New Penshaw Academy and Willow Fields Community Primary School, where parents donated uniform that their children had outgrown. Gentoo and Barclays also received a number of donations from their staff and the local community.

Uniforms were also given to other local community hubs including; Penshaw Community Centre, Southwick Salvation Army, Easington Lane Community Access Point (ELCAP) and Washington Village Community Centre, where families could come along and pick up much needed school uniforms for their children.

The aim was to help relieve the added cost of new school uniforms which can place a burden on families, with some resorting to payday loans which can lead to further financial strain.

Gentoo and Barclays staff also donated food to the Sunderland Connect Network who then distributed it to food banks across the City.



Make someone smile this Christmas and donate a gift

We are encouraging the local community to donate food, toys, toiletries, selection boxes, clothing, pet treats and other unused gifts. These will be given to local charities and food banks across the city. You can make a donation up until **Friday 8 December**. You can drop these off at any Gentoo office.

Bringing communities together with Aspire Grants



People in Sunderland are benefitting from Gentoo Aspire Grants that help improve local communities.

We offer Aspire Grants to support a range of activities for voluntary and community groups, as well as individuals for a range of community-led causes.

We are committed to making a positive difference to people's lives by bringing communities together.

Recently, 21 nationalities in Sunderland were brought together for a cultural celebration, as Sunderland Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) Network in partnership with the Sunderland City of Culture Bid Team, hosted a Mini Mela to a jam-packed crowd funded by an Aspire Grant.

21 acts, including singers, dancers and DJs, performed at Sunderland Bangladesh International Centre in Hendon, showcasing Sunderland as a multicultural City that's brimming with talent.

The performers included singer Jessica Dale and singer/guitarist Lewis Conlin, who appeared in last year's Genfactor talent competition, along with Olivia Glover, lead singer of Saturn Highway, Genfactor winner 2016.

Kamareswaradas Ramanathas, Chairman of the Sunderland BME Network, said: "The Aspire Grant provided an opportunity for local community members to come together at the Mini Mela.

"I was very pleased to see so many diverse community members celebrate this joyful event, and people have given me feedback and said it was one of the best events they've attended.

"Gentoo is a multicultural organisation in the City and is committed to supporting the local community."

He added: "The grant decisions are made by local people and give good insight to where the money is being spent. They have the whole package of involving the local community, helping turn their ideas into a reality."

An Aspire Grant has also recently facilitated four community groups who operate within Easington Lane Community Access point (ELCAP) to purchase new equipment. They hope that the improved facilities will attract new people to use the centre, reducing social isolation and strengthening the local community.

To celebrate being awarded an Aspire Grant, the groups held a Nostalgia event at the centre recently, inviting local residents of all ages to join them for an afternoon of high tea and 1940s style entertainment.

Launched in 2003, Aspire Grants offer up to £500 and have benefitted many groups and organisations since that time, including art, music and drama clubs, children's and young people's clubs, local football clubs, older people's clubs and resident and community associations.

In 2016-17:

Gentoo awarded 72 grants, worth more than £28,000, to a variety of causes - from community events to youth projects, football clubs and resident associations, including:

- Sunderland BME Network.
- Washington Mind Young People's Project.
- Houghton Bowls Club.
- Easington Lane Community Access Point.
- Young Asian Voices.
- More Than Grandparents.

For further information about how to apply, visit **www.gentooogroup.com**.

Top tips to protect your family and home from fire this Christmas

1. Check your smoke alarm weekly and never remove batteries.
(If you live in sheltered accommodation or a high rise block, please don't do this yourself. The system is fully integrated and will set off the alarms. Gentoo check smoke alarms on your behalf).
2. Never leave cooking unattended and avoid cooking while drunk.
3. Never leave candles unattended. Keep decorations, cards and wrapping paper away from candles, fires, lights and heaters.
4. Ensure you switch off fairy lights and unplug them before you go to bed/leave the house. Check your Christmas tree lights conform to the British Standard (BS EN 60598).
5. Don't overload sockets. Always turn off plugs when they are not in use.
6. Make sure cigarettes are extinguished properly.
7. Never smoke in bed.
8. Check on older relatives and neighbours this Christmas as they are at greater risk from fire.
9. Plan your escape route. Make sure you and your family know the quickest way out in the event of a fire. Consider an alternative route in case your usual one is blocked.
10. **And finally, in the event of a fire call 999.**



If you or someone you know would like this information in large print, on CD or in Braille then please contact your local office.

If you or someone you know would like this information in another language, then please contact your local office. Interpretation services are available.

যদি আপনি বা আপনার জানা-শোনা কেউ এই তথ্য অন্য কোন ভাষায় পেতে চান, তাহলে দয়া করে আমাদের সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ করুন। দোভাষী পরিষেবা পাওয়া যাচ্ছে।
(Bengali)

如果您或您認識的人希望此信息是其它語言，請與我們聯繫。口譯服務可提供。
(Cantonese)

اگر شما و یا شخص دیگری که شما میشناسید مایل هستید این اطلاعات را به زبان دیگری دریافت نمائید، لطفاً با ما تماس حاصل کنید. خدمات ترجمه موجود می باشد.
(Farsi)

如果您或您认识的人想要本信息以另外一种语言版本提供，那么就请与我们取得联系。我们同时还提供口译类服务。
(Mandarin)

Jeśli Państwo, lub jakaś osoba, którą Państwo znają, chcieliby otrzymać te informacje w innym języku, proszę się z nami skontaktować.
Dostępne są także usługi tłumacza ustnego.
(Polish)

www.gentoogroup.com

Gentoo Group Limited, Emperor House,
2 Emperor Way, Doxford International Business Park,
Sunderland, SR3 3XR.



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



Customer
Approved