

You & Gentoo

2019 tenant newsletter and annual report

| Autumn 2019

gentoo

Great homes

Strong communities

Inspired people

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Welcome from our Chair

I am delighted to introduce the 2019 tenant newsletter and annual report as Chair of Gentoo. In January this year, I was extremely happy to welcome Nigel Wilson to the Group as our new Chief Executive. Nigel has brought a wealth of knowledge and experience to Gentoo, with over 30 years' experience in the social housing sector. You can find out more about what he has been up to in his first few months on page 15.

I was delighted that the Regulator of Social Housing upgraded Gentoo from a non-compliant G3 governance rating to a compliant G2 governance rating in September. This reflects the huge amount of work and priority given to rectifying the issues that led to the regulatory downgrade in October 2017. I am extremely proud that Gentoo colleagues have continued to deliver excellent services to our tenants throughout this period, clearly demonstrating our committed and tenant-focused culture. We are now looking forward to completing our journey to G1, the highest level of compliance.

We are continuing to invest in all of our homes. In the last year, we invested £33.7m to improve our properties and we have started some innovative new projects to make our houses safer and more energy efficient.

Earlier this year, we announced that we will invest £417m in Sunderland through our 2019-24 Business Plan. This includes a further £300m of investment in our existing homes and a pledge to invest £117m to create 900 more affordable rented homes in the city.

Our tenants have been involved in a wide range of fantastic projects this year, from creating communal gardens to helping us inspect our homes, and I would like to thank them all for their invaluable contribution to their neighbourhoods.

I hope you enjoy your read!

Keith Loraine OBE Gentoo Group Chair

04 Annual report

Our performance during 2018-19

In the following pages you will find information about how we performed during 2018-19 in relation to our key service areas.

On a quarterly basis, we also report how we are performing against our local service offers. You can find these reports on our website at www.gentooogroup.com.



96%

of tenants surveyed were satisfied with the overall service provided by Gentoo

We collected

£121,268,630

in rent

which equates to

99.6%

of rent due



88%

of tenants surveyed were satisfied with the lettable standard of their property

It took us on average

41.36

days to re-let a home

Delays can be caused by homes requiring major investment work to bring them up to a lettable standard

Repairs and maintenance

176,719

repairs and safety check visits were made



80%

of repairs fixed right first time

73%

of repairs completed within timescale given

95%

of tenants surveyed were satisfied with their recent repair



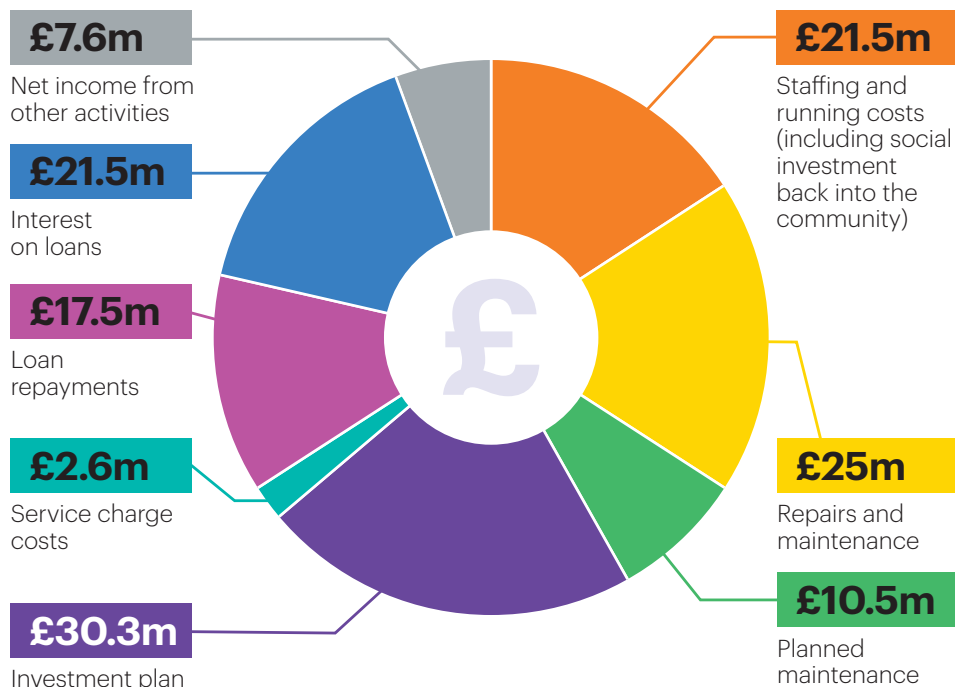
Spend

Responsive (day-to-day)	£6.0m
Void (empty properties)	£4.4m
Support and concierge	£2.7m
Emergency out of hours service	£0.5m
Gas	£4.1m
Plumbing	£1.3m
Electrical	£3.2m
Water hygiene	£0.3m
Overheads	£2.5m
Total cost	£25m

Using money wisely to improve our service

- By introducing a new system to help us with rent collection, we have been able to create a team to support tenants with Universal Credit queries.
- By using an external company to provide our Repairs and Maintenance stores function we will **save £1.1m** over the next five years.
- By building new homes for sale we have been able to **re-invest £3.9m** of the profit into new and existing homes for affordable rent in Sunderland.
- By carefully buying goods and services through our procurement procedures we have managed to **save £2.8m** during 2018-19.
- We introduced an MOT-style gas servicing programme and anticipate **future savings of approximately £300,000** per year.

How we spent your rent



On a quarterly basis we report how we are performing against local service offers. These reports can be found online at www.gentooogroup.com

Did you know?

We deliver a range of support services for our tenants, including:

- **Money Matters** – providing financial advice and support. In 2018-19, we supported tenants to access more than £1 million in benefit claims and gains.
- **Victim Support and Positive Engagement** – supporting vulnerable tenants in times of crisis.
- **Wellbeing** – providing adaptations and advice to older people and families. In 2018-19, the service supported 2,404 tenants.
- **Young Persons' Support Service** – supporting tenants aged 16-25.

Easy ways to pay your rent

Did you know that you can pay your rent in a variety of ways?

- Over the phone
- Set up a Direct Debit
- Set up a Standing Order
- Pop into our Gentoo offices at Athenaeum Buildings in the centre of Sunderland or the Galleries, Washington.

You can also use your payment card to pay your rent at the Post Office or at your local shop (where you see Allpay or Paypoint signs).



You can make a payment over the phone, any day, any hour.

Just call your local office:

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

The huge cost of failing to keep an appointment

Last year we knocked on 23,953 doors and no one answered, which cost Gentoo approximately

£1,197,650

As you will agree, this was a huge waste of staff time and resources which could have been spent elsewhere carrying out repairs, keeping you and your family safe, and investing in homes. Here are some of the most common areas where we couldn't get access.

Gas servicing – out of 42,912 visits, 10,895 tenants didn't answer the door costing Gentoo...

£544,750

24-hour emergency repairs – out of 29,442 visits, 1,612 failed to allow access costing Gentoo...

£80,600

Urgent repairs – out of £16,931 visits, 1,553 failed to allow access costing Gentoo...

£77,650

Routine repairs – out of 67,763 visits, 5,994 failed to allow access costing Gentoo...

£299,700

Planned repairs – out of 4,405 visits, 274 failed to allow access costing Gentoo...

£13,700

Out of hours emergency repairs – out of 10,513 visits, 165 failed to allow access costing Gentoo...

£8,250

It is part of your tenancy agreement that you must allow access at a reasonable time for services such as gas and electrical testing and water hygiene. Failure to do so could result in a breach of your tenancy, court costs and eviction.

So how do we get better at this together?

We will:

- **Confirm** your appointment over the phone
- **Send** you an appointment card
- **Text** you the day before
- **Ring** ahead before the operative arrives

You will:

- **Contact** us ASAP if you can no longer keep your appointment
- **Cancel** your routine repairs online at **www.gentooogroup.com**
- **Call** your local office to cancel your gas servicing, electrical testing or water hygiene appointments
- **Let** us know straight away if you change your phone number or email address

Please remember Gentoo offers a range of different appointment times - early morning and late appointments are available on request. Gas servicing appointments are available on a Saturday morning too.

Complaints performance 2018-19

	2017-18	2018-19
Number of formal complaints received	104	96
% of complaints fixed right first time	83%	88%
Number of stage 2 appeals (where tenants were dissatisfied with original response)	21	12
Number of new Ombudsman cases	2	2

You said, we did

Here are some examples of how we have used your feedback to improve our services.

Complaint themes	Improvements we have made
Ongoing issues in relation to damp and condensation	Dedicated Condensation and Preservation Team provides advice on how to minimise condensation and carries out any damp works.
Poor staff attitude when tenants request services	In some circumstances, staff are not always able to give tenants what they ask for. However, we are providing training to all staff on the importance of delivering excellent customer service at all times.
Replacing single-glazed windows	Our Board has agreed to accelerate the programme and we will fit double-glazed windows to all affected properties by 2023.

The three service areas to receive the most formal complaints were:

Service area	Number received	Themes	Complaint fully/ partially accepted	Complaint declined
Repairs and Maintenance	36	Damp and condensation	34	2
Tenancy Management	16	Staff attitude	7	9
Asset	15	Single-glazed windows	14	1

A big thank you to our scrutiny group, USTOO, for reviewing our complaint handling process. They made some great suggestions for improvement and we are working on those right now. If you would like to take part in future scrutiny reviews, please contact our Customer and Community Team on 0191 525 2760.

Here are the ways you can make a complaint:

By phone

Call your local area office or ring our complaints freephone **0800 169 1213**

In person

Call into any Gentoo office – our staff are happy to help.

Online

Visit the 'Get in touch' page on the Gentoo website at **www.gentooigroup.com**

In writing

To: **The Customer Experience Team,
Gentoo, Emperor House, 2 Emperor Way,
Doxford International Business Park,
Sunderland, SR3 3XR**

If you feel you need support to make a complaint, consider asking a friend or family member or an elected representative (such as your MP or local councillor) to make it on your behalf. We will ask you for your permission before we deal with any other person on your behalf.



10 Great homes

Investing in our homes 2018-19

Last year we invested

£33.7m

in our homes.

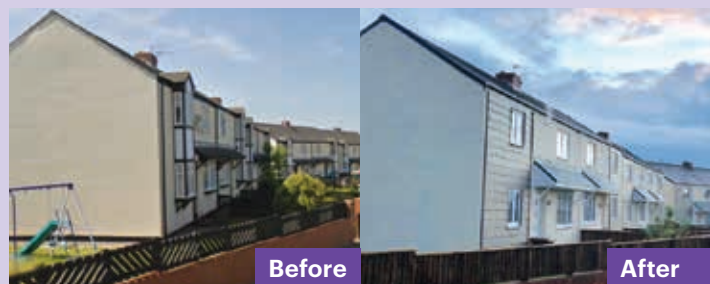


	Boilers	Windows	Gable works	Roofs	Kitchen/bathrooms
Central	769	135	295	65	15
Houghton	110		211	304	15
North	54		283	157	14
South	220		595	11	12
Washington	602	394	58	435	9
Totals	1,755	529	1,442	972	65

We are delivering a number of other projects to improve our homes, including:

Painting: We have started a seven-year programme to paint the exterior of homes and internal communal areas across the city.

Windows and doors: We have started a programme to replace single-glazed windows with double-glazed windows. This will be completed by 2023.



And we've completed the following projects:

North View: We re-rendered and replaced the double-glazed windows, doors and external fencing on ten properties on Easington Lane.

Lumley, Lambton and Londonderry tower blocks: We carried out full structural appraisals of the three blocks in Hendon. We do this every 20 years to help us plan for future improvements.

Lift refurbishment: In April 2019, we began a refurbishment programme to upgrade 16 lifts across the city to improve service and reduce the need for breakdown call outs.

The lifts programme will be completed by March 2021.

Future work

We have committed to invest **£126 million** on planned investment by 2023 including:

Improvement works	Total spend
Boilers	£25.8m
Windows	£19m
Roofs	£34m
Kitchen/bathrooms	£10m
Painting	£10m
Environmental	£6.5m
Fire safety	£12.5m
Other property repairs	£5m

Fire safety in tower blocks

We are investing in excess of £10m between 2018 and 2021 in upgrading and improving fire safety across our homes.

We have completed work to replace external cladding with a mix of new render at Roker Towers. In May 2019, we replaced external cladding at City Green and provided new balconies and glazed screens alongside internal fire safety measures.

The following work has also been carried out this year:

- **1,937** new and refurbished individual flat doors
- **2,614** new and refurbished communal fire doors
- Fire stopping works to prevent potential fires spreading
- Upgraded bin chutes



Keeping your home safe

Fire doors

We take every precaution to keep your home safe from fire. All fire doors are fitted with fire-proof door furniture, and front doors are fitted with a self-closer and fire and smoke seals. To maintain the effectiveness of your doors please **DO NOT**:

- Replace any door furniture (such as letterboxes, handles, door locks, door numbers)
- Wedge doors open
- Replace any fire safety glass
- Remove or disengage the self-closer
- Put any holes in doors (such as decorations)

Bin chutes

Bin chutes are a fast and efficient way to dispose of unwanted waste. Some upgraded bin chutes are slightly smaller in width for safety reasons, so bag your rubbish in smaller bin bags please.

DO NOT

- Leave the rubbish to the side of the chute
- Store unwanted items such as waste packaging in the stairwells or near the bin chutes

If something doesn't look or feel right in your building, please report it to your local office immediately.

If you would like to carry out any improvements to your home, please contact your local Gentoo office.

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Innovative new project in North area

We know only too well that rising energy prices can really stretch the purse strings, especially in the winter months. This is why we are actively introducing more energy-efficient heating systems into our high rise accommodation to improve the hot water and heating supply.

In September, we started to install ground source heating systems in seven high rise towers in the north of the city involving 364 homes on Church Street North, Dame Dorothy Crescent, Devonshire Tower, Dock Street, Eglinton Tower, Victor Street and Zetland Square.

The project, called CORE364, will improve tenant safety by removing the gas supply from each tower to ensure there is no future risk of gas leaks or carbon monoxide poisoning.

We will also be upgrading the electricity systems and installing sprinkler systems, which are proven to reduce the spread of fire.

Our partners for this innovative project are ENGIE and specialist heat pump manufacturer Kensa Heat Pumps.

Key project staff from Gentoo, ENGIE and a tenant representative travelled to Enfield, London, to learn more about an ENGIE award-winning project where they have installed a similar ground source heating system to 400 homes over eight high rise blocks. During the visit, staff talked to project leaders about best practice and lessons learned so they can build this into the project.

Bringing the learning back to Sunderland, we refurbished a vacant flat at Dock Street, installed the new heating system and sprinklers, and invited residents to come along to take a look first hand.



CORE  **364**

If you have any questions regarding these improvements, please contact the Asset Planning Administration Team on 0191 525 2752 or go to **www.gentoo-group.com** to find out more.

Building more affordable housing with profits from Gentoo Homes



Gentoo Homes is the commercial house building arm of Gentoo Group. It is a profit for purpose business that builds around 200 private homes for sale across the North East of England every year.

This means that any profit or surplus it generates from selling houses gets reinvested back into Gentoo to subsidise the Group's affordable homes programme. So the houses that are sold by Gentoo Homes across the North East, help us to build more homes for affordable rent in Sunderland.

Since it was formed, Gentoo Homes has built more than 3,000 homes for local people and has fast become one of the region's most established house builders.

It builds homes from Northumberland to Teesside, as well as a focus on providing homes for people in Sunderland. It currently has a number of key sites across the city, such as Thurcroft in Doxford Park, Bramblewood in Hetton-le-Hole, Meadow View in Houghton-le-Spring, and Highfields Manor and Orchard Quarter in Washington.

It continues to build on its success in Sunderland and recently announced it will be starting on two new exciting developments. Work at Churchfields, which is the final piece in the jigsaw to Gentoo's regeneration of Doxford Park, and at Chester Gate, which is the high-profile redevelopment of Pennywell Estate, has recently begun.

As well as building homes for full market sale, Gentoo Homes has a small number of homes available in Sunderland for shared ownership. Shared ownership is a Government-backed scheme that aims to help people onto the housing ladder. It involves purchasing a proportion of a property, generally 25%, 50% or 75% determined by the purchaser's affordability. Where properties are purchased on a shared basis, the purchaser is required to pay a proportion of rent to Gentoo, who will own the remaining share of the property.

For more information about homes available for sale and shared ownership in Sunderland via Gentoo Homes, visit **gentoohomes.com**.

Investing £417 million in Sunderland

Our ambitious 2019-24 Business Plan will provide great homes and strong communities in Sunderland.

£300 million

to improve our existing homes



£117 million

to create 900 more affordable homes for rent



200

Gentoo Homes properties for sale every year – creating £4 million profit to subsidise our affordable homes



We'll also put tenants at the heart of everything we do by:

Improving our digital offer



Improving services for tenants with complex needs



Strengthening the voice of the tenant in all of our work



Are you looking to buy a new home but only have a low deposit saved or struggling with affordability for a mortgage?

The government backed shared ownership scheme can help get you onto the property ladder by allowing you to buy a share in a selected Gentoo home whilst paying a rental charge on the part you don't own.

Key Facts

- You must be a first time buyer or not a current home owner and with a household income of under £80,000.
- You have the option to purchase a 25%, 50% or 75% share to start with.
- You can buy further shares in your home as your finances and personal circumstances allow.



Offer available at the following developments:

- 1 **Highfields Manor, Washington**
3 and 4 bedroom homes
- 2 **Orchard Quarter, Washington**
2 and 3 bedroom homes
- 3 **Bramblewood, Hetton-le-Hole**
2, 3 and 4 bedroom homes

gentoohomes

Embrace your
art of living

To find out more information visit
gentoohomes.com/sharedownership

15 Strong communities

It's back to the shop floor for our new Chief Executive, Nigel



When Nigel Wilson joined us in January 2019, he made it his priority to meet our tenants and get back to the shop floor to really understand what makes Gentoo tick.

He has attended a number of tenant events and got to know the people living in our communities. Nigel heard first-hand about the services tenants receive and listened to their ideas for improvement.

Nigel has also been exploring our estates and communities. He spent time with the team that manages our three tower blocks in the city centre, went out with our joinery team to fix a tenant's door and saw the fantastic views from our flats at Lakeside.

In May, Nigel visited Holmewood House where we provide supported accommodation for 12 young people. Nigel met some of the young tenants and talked to them about their needs and plans for the future.



And, Nigel toured some of our Gentoo Homes sites to see how we are delivering new homes for sale and affordable rent in Sunderland and the wider region. He explored Cottier Grange in Prudhoe, where we are renovating an old hospital site, and saw how the area is being transformed.

Nigel said: "I've been really impressed with what I've seen in our communities so far. The people of Sunderland are so friendly and have given me a fantastic welcome – I look forward to meeting more of our tenants as soon as I can."

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Together with tenants

Earlier this year, the National Housing Federation launched a four-point plan aimed at improving the way housing associations listen and respond to their tenants.

One element of this plan is a set of draft commitments that the Federation hopes to roll out across the housing sector during 2020.

Gentoo has chosen to be 'early adopters' and work with our tenants/residents and the Federation to help shape the draft commitments. We will also create a set of commitments for Gentoo and our tenants that will form our Together with Tenants Charter.



The tenants and residents involved in our local Community Engagement Forums have done some fantastic work on these projects already. If you would like to be involved or find out more, please contact us.

Aspire – supporting local projects

We offer Aspire grants of up to £500 to support projects and activities in our local communities. Applications are considered by members of our local Community Engagement Forums.

For information on how to apply and the sorts of projects/activities Aspire could fund, go to www.gentoogroup.com/aspire.

USTOO

USTOO is our tenant scrutiny group. It scrutinises the services provided by Gentoo from a tenant's perspective. As an independent group, it carries out robust reviews of the customer-facing services and performance of Gentoo and reports these to the Board and Committees.

In the last year, it carried out two scrutiny reviews; one of the Support Young Persons' Service and one of the complaints procedure.

We are looking for new members so if you would like to be involved in USTOO, please contact Jo Noble, Governance Manager, on **0191 525 2852** or jo.noble@gentoogroup.com.

Rate Your Estate

Between May and September we carry out Rate Your Estate inspections.

These are a great opportunity to get together with other tenants and Gentoo staff to inspect the quality of our estates, including identifying issues such as litter, fly-tipping, parking issues and graffiti.

Want to join? Contact your local office.

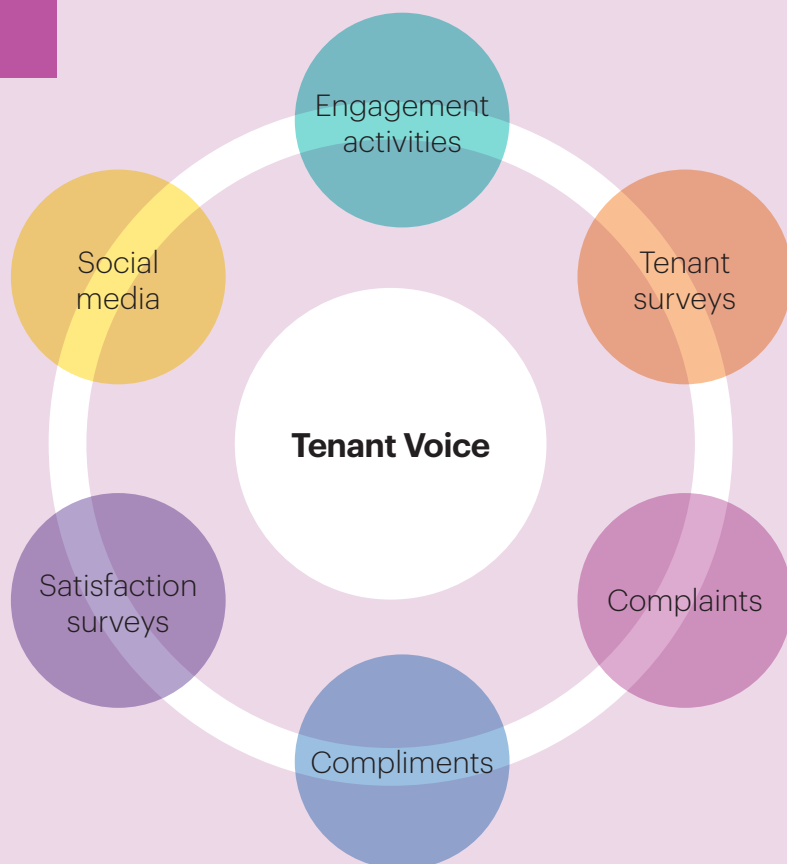
Your voice matters

It's really important to us that we listen to the voices of our tenants and residents. As the ones who receive our services you are best placed to help us improve and develop them.

We listen to our tenants in a range of ways from complaints and compliments, social media and other enquiries, to our tenant surveys.

In addition, we provide a number of engagement opportunities for tenants and residents to be actively involved, from attending meetings and focus groups to help shape and scrutinise our services to coming on estate walkabouts to identify issues.

You'll find more information about some of the activities tenants have been involved in this year in the following pages.



Community Engagement Forums

This year, we launched five new Community Engagement Forums, one held in each of the management areas of the city. The forums meet on a bi-monthly basis and help to provide the local voice to the Group Board and Committees.

The forums share information and discuss topics like management performance, how we are responding to local concerns, and make suggestions to maintain and improve the local neighbourhood. You can learn more about what each forum has been up to and how to join on the following pages.

Did you know?

You can now be actively involved from the comfort of your home. Volunteer to be part of our **Digital Voice** and we will send you short surveys and questions by email to help develop and improve our services.

Did you know?

We have recently set up a Young Persons' Forum to gather the views of our younger tenants. Interested? Please contact us if you would like to get involved.

If you would like to get involved, please contact our Customer and Community Team on 0191 525 2760 or customerandcommunityteam@gentoogroup.com.

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Central update

Hello from the Central Forum. We have been meeting since November 2018 and we're really pleased with the progress we're making so far. Our Chair is David Banks and we meet every two months.

In our meetings, we've been looking at the quality of some of the services Gentoo provides. We identified that the Gentoo website needed improvement and we were subsequently delighted for some of us to be part of a task and finish group, with Gentoo staff, to recommend improvements.

Some of us have been involved in Rate Your Estate inspections. Both Grindon and the East End high rise blocks were inspected to look at cleanliness and litter. They both received 100% ratings which was fantastic!



D'Arcy Court Residents' Group

Since the modernisation of D'Arcy Court, its residents' group has relaunched and is now very active, taking part in everything from Christmas activities to regular raffles and bingo nights. They were recently successful in securing funding to purchase a greenhouse so they can grow and nurture seedlings to plant in the communal garden.

Making neighbourhoods safer

During an estate walkabout with Ashbrooke residents, concerns were raised regarding the safety and security of the rear gardens in the area.

They discussed how we could improve the security so tenants feel safer in their homes.

In response to these concerns, Gentoo sourced funding to provide locks to all rear gates on the estate which has greatly improved the safety and security for tenants.

If you would like to get involved with the residents' group, please contact your local Gentoo Community Partnerships Coordinator Jackie Pitt on 0191 525 6021.

Houghton and Hetton update

Hello from the Houghton and Hetton Forum. We meet every two months and our Chair is John Danell. We are really happy with the progress we're making so far.

We've been involved in the new development at Avenue Vivian, visiting the site and reviewing the site plans. We're pleased to say they look good! We've spent some time looking at the quality and consistency of the properties that become available to rent in this area, and have made suggestions for improvement.

We were shocked to find out about the amount of tenants that aren't in when Gentoo arrives for an appointment to repair something in their home.

This costs Gentoo a lot of money that could be spent elsewhere. We have made some suggestions on how this can be improved – and are pleased to see that information provided on page 7 of this report.



Tackling fly-tipping

Gentoo is working with Sunderland City Council, local councillors and Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service to tackle illegal fly-tipping in the area. Fly-tipping costs a lot of money to clear up and makes our neighbourhoods look unsightly.

Signs have been put up to warn offenders about the fines they will face if caught, and tenants and local councillors are carrying out estate walks to inspect streets and identify further improvements.

Visit from Bridget Phillipson MP

In May, Bridget Phillipson MP spent time with our Victim Support Officers and Positive Engagement Service to see how they help people affected by issues like antisocial behaviour and domestic violence. She also visited our Money Matters team.

Bridget said: "I was thoroughly impressed by the professionalism of staff, and I would like to pay tribute to them for their hard work."



**If you would like to get involved, please contact your local
Gentoo Community Partnerships Coordinator Ann Donkin on 0191 525 5797.**

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North update

Hello from the North Forum. We have been meeting since November 2018 and our Chair is Trish Stoker. We meet every two months and have been involved in lots of activities to improve services for tenants and residents across the area.

We invited Changing Lives to one of our meetings and learned more about how we can work with partners to resolve homelessness and street homelessness.

We've really enjoyed feeding back our comments and ideas on the draft Together with Tenants commitments, and are pleased to see positive progress being made on these.

The innovative CORE364 project is taking place in our area and we've had the opportunity to hear presentations and comment on the plans. We're really looking forward to seeing this project develop.



Supporting local projects

Lots of projects have benefited from Aspire grants this year, including funds to repair the Old Town Hall Trust in Southwick and support for upgraded CCTV and new sensory equipment for the Downhill Centre.

If your community group would like to apply for a small grant, go to www.gentoo.org.uk/aspire for details.



Did you know?

Dame Dorothy Court has a new residents' group and would love you to get involved.

They meet on Mondays and Thursdays, 2pm - 4pm in the main residents' ground floor lounge. Pop along for a cuppa and a chat!

If you would like to get involved, please contact your local
Gentoo Community Partnerships Coordinator Jo Avery on 0191 525 6092.

South update

Hello from the South Forum. We have been meeting since November 2018 and our Chair is James Falade. We meet every two months and are delighted with the work we've done so far.

We have reviewed the local area performance information, and met with staff who deliver services to younger tenants to hear about some of their challenges.

Like all Community Engagement Forums, we have a local budget and have been working with the Gentoo team to assess options about where and how we can put it to good use.

Having a number of tower blocks in our area, we wanted to find out more about the concierge service so we had an informative afternoon seeing the equipment and asking the team lots of questions.



Better view for Foxlair Close

Tenants in the Foxlair Close area of Hall Farm are now looking out at a beautiful planted area after funds from the local budget transformed an open green space with flowers and shrubs.

New CCTV cameras

We have invested in six additional CCTV cameras within the communal areas of our multi-storey blocks in Lakeside Village.

They are linked up directly to our concierge service and have already helped to address issues with customers leaving unwanted items in communal areas.

In some cases, the cameras have identified individuals who have then been charged the cost of removing these items properly.

Please ensure you bag any items correctly if you are using the rubbish chute in your block. If you need to dispose of any unwanted larger items you should contact Sunderland City Council on 0191 520 5550 to arrange a collection.



**If you would like to get involved, please contact your local
Gentoo Community Partnerships Coordinator Angela Sinclair 0191 525 5947.**

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Washington update

Hello from the Washington Forum. We have been meeting since November 2018 and our Chair is Brenda Naisby. We meet every two months and are already making a positive difference in Washington.

One of our key areas of focus so far has been litter, fly-tipping and trolleys. We have been working closely with the Keep Washington Tidy group and Sunderland City Council to tackle these issues. As a result, the council has placed fine notices in hot-spot areas and these already appear to be acting as a deterrent. We have also established a Trolleys Working Group and raised the issue with Sharon Hodgson MP, who is going to look into the issue further.

We have been busy awarding Aspire grants to community projects in the Washington area and we're pleased to see these having an impact.

Reducing empty garages

During the year, Washington has seen a significant reduction in the number of empty garages following a recommendation from the Forum to place 'Garage for rent' boards on them.

Rate Your Estate

Gentoo staff and tenants have completed two Rate Your Estate inspections in Hertburn and Barmston in the past year. As a result, a number of issues were identified and swiftly rectified.

If you would like to get involved, please contact your local Gentoo Community Partnerships Coordinator Billy Broad on 0191 525 5142.

Staying safe from bogus callers



We are aware that scammers can impersonate the organisation and our staff from time to time so we need you to be vigilant and stay safe.

We have also been notified that some of our tenants may have been contacted by a company other than Gentoo offering free health checks for solar panels and claiming that any warranty may be due to expire. Gentoo is fully responsible for the maintenance and warranties of your solar panels so please disregard this letter.

How to stay safe

When answering your door, please always request to see a person's formal ID badge before letting anyone into your home.

If you have any concerns, please contact your local office.

Elmer's Great North Parade is in Sunderland



We're really excited to be involved in Elmer's Great North Parade 2019.

The parade features 50 Elmer the Patchwork Elephant sculptures all in different designs and colours. They are creating a vibrant art trail across Tyne and Wear from August to November to help to raise money for St Oswald's Hospice. There are seven sculptures in Sunderland – from the city centre to the seafront in Roker – so there is plenty to see!

Our sculpture is called Flora and she is based at the Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens. Pop along to see her and look out for lots of free events and activities to get involved in the Elmer fun!

Helping to create a better future for Sunderland



Here at Gentoo, we know that all of our tenants deserve a decent home where they can live healthy and prosperous lives, in a neighbourhood where they feel safe.

We want to provide better housing and stronger communities and we are doing this by contributing to Sunderland's City Plan.

The plan is the council's strategy for addressing the city's key challenges and capitalising on its opportunities to become a more dynamic, vibrant and healthy city.

As part of this work, Nigel Wilson, Gentoo's Group Chief Executive Officer, is chairing the More Homes strand of the City Plan, which will bring empty homes back into use every year to increase the stock of affordable housing in Sunderland.

Through our 2019-24 Business Plan, Gentoo has also committed to invest £300m to improve our existing homes and neighbourhoods, and £117m for 900 more affordable homes for rent across the city.

A further 200 Gentoo Homes properties will be available for sale each year, creating an average of £4m profit per year to subsidise our affordable homes programme.

In recent years, there has been an increasing demand for affordable housing yet our affordable rental housing stock has reduced due to people buying their homes. Gentoo is actively looking for opportunities to buy back former Gentoo properties when they go onto the open market to boost our existing rental stock, which will enable us to provide even more good-quality housing.

Through our work on schemes like Boilers on Prescription and the Warm Homes for Health Study, we know there is a link between health and housing. That is why we are making sure the improvement works on our homes have a positive impact on our tenants.

We believe the City Plan is a great strategy for making Sunderland a dynamic, vibrant and healthy place to live and work. We are proud to call Sunderland our home and are committed to helping it achieve its full potential.

**If you would like to read more about Sunderland's City Plan go to
www.sunderland.gov.uk/city-plan**

25 Inspired people

Schoolgirl wows crowds at the Genfactor grand finale

Through our Genfactor talent competition, we aim to raise the self-esteem and confidence of local young people across the city and help them to achieve their true potential.

This year's winner, 12-year-old Riona Sorianosos said: "My self-esteem really soared to its highest level when I won Genfactor. The whole experience has changed me and increased my confidence. I learned to challenge myself, develop my skills and most importantly believe in myself. I will forever be grateful to the Genfactor team for this amazing opportunity – I am definitely a better Riona because of my Genfactor journey!"

Judges included Lake Poets frontman Martin Longstaff, West End star Brandon Lee Sears, Barry Hyde of The Futureheads, North East singer and 2018 X Factor contestant, Molly Scott, and



performer, producer and principal of Stagecoach Washington, Melanie Hill, who kindly donated a special Stagecoach scholarship, won by finalist Sam J Scott.

Do you know someone aged between 11 - 18 years old who lives or studies in Sunderland who could be the next shining star?

Check out the Genfactor Facebook page or go to **www.gentoogroup.com/genfactor** to find out more!

My Gentoo - improving our digital offer



My Gentoo is your online portal where you can use your tenancy number to create an online account to view your rent statements, look at your repairs history and report repairs.

My Gentoo not only allows you to view your information when you want to, it lets you update the information that we hold on you as a tenant – such as your contact details.

It will be improving throughout next year to provide more options to manage your tenancy online.

If you have any questions about My Gentoo you can email **mygentoo@gentoogroup.com** and a member of the team will be able to help.

Hate crime and diversity



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

A hate crime or a hate incident is when someone, motivated by prejudice, targets another person because of their race or ethnicity, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, or gender identity. We have a zero tolerance approach to such incidents/crimes and whether you are a victim or a witness we urge you to report. Search 'hate crime' on our website for further advice and information.

It's all about you!

As part of our commitment to knowing you better, we carry out tenant surveys. The information we collect enables us to tailor our services to meet your specific requirements. It helps us to develop and improve our services and ensures that we are treating everyone fairly.

Please be assured that we take the privacy of your information very seriously. There is a detailed Privacy Statement on our website that explains all of your data protection rights. You can find it under 'privacy policy' on the footer of our website.

This year, we have continued our work to build stronger local communities that encourage and embrace diversity. We collaborated with local groups, we held a successful International Women's Day event and we were involved with city-wide celebrations such as Sunderland Pride. We are passionate about fostering an environment where differences are respected and celebrated. We were very proud to receive several awards this year for the work we have done with both minority ethnic and LGBT communities.

We're here to help

Please remember that our staff also deserve to be treated with respect and should not have to face violence or abuse when doing their job.

Let's ask your family and friends...

Do you have a family member or friend who is looking for a new home?

Look no further, we have a huge variety of homes across the city and there is definitely something for everyone!

We have launched a brand new campaign to help people unlock the door to a fantastic Gentoo home.

Take the quiz with family members and friends to help them find a happy home just like you.

If the answer is **YES** to any of the questions opposite, it's time for them to get moving!

We can help your friends and family with the application process, arrange viewings and even get them moved in a matter of days!

To sign up call **0191 525 5010** and quote "**Are You Gentoo?**"



Are you gentoo?

YES
☒

Would you like more outdoor space for the kids? ☐

Are you ready to fly the nest and maybe share with mates? ☐

Do you want a flexible easy in, easy out contract? ☐

Are you ready for independent living? ☐

Would you like to see some homes really quickly and get the keys in a matter of days? ☐

Do you want help to get on the property ladder and save a deposit while renting? ☐

Do you want to be close to local amenities such as transport links, work, leisure facilities and schools? ☐

Would you like a more affordable rent? ☐

“ We got the phone call to say it was ours and we were jumping for joy! ”

What's on

There's a great mix of things to do in Sunderland. Here's a selection of events and activities to get involved in:

Lights Out

From 25 October to 3 November, the city will be alive with things that go bump in the night to celebrate Halloween. From scary installations to a range of family activities, there will be lots to do – if you're brave enough!

To find out more, visit: www.sunderlandbid.co.uk/events/lights-out



Festival of Light

From 21 November to 22 December, Mowbray Park will be transformed into a winter wonderland featuring light installations, live music, illuminated street theatre characters and Christmas shows.

Visit www.seeitdoitsunderland.co.uk for more information.



Down at the Farm

Take a tractor ride around this fun family-run farm and meet the animals. You can feed the lambs, cuddle a bunny, or hold a fluffy chick! Find out more here:

www.downatthefarm.co.uk



Sample fabulous flavours at Sunderland's Farmers' Market

Enjoy a wide range of fresh produce from local farmers.

Go to: www.neefm.co.uk for details.

It's competition time!

Would you like to win £100 worth of Intu shopping vouchers?

Just answer the question below – you'll find the information somewhere in this newsletter!

How many new and refurbished communal fire doors did we install last year?

Submit your answer at www.gentooogroup.com/competition by 15/11/19 for a chance to win.

A huge Gentoo good luck to you all!

Terms and conditions apply.

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