

You & Gentoo

Our Customer Annual Report
and newsletter for customers



In this issue:

- Meet our new Chief Executive Officer
- Fire safety remains our key priority
- Chance to win £500 in Genfactor's 10th year!
- Our Customer Annual Report for 2017-18
- Aspire grants really are making a difference

gentoo

Welcome from our Chair

I am pleased to introduce the 2017/18 Customer Annual Report for the first time as Group Chair. I've spent my entire working career providing high quality housing services across the country - largely in the housing association sector. I believe passionately that everyone in our society has the right to a decent home and that organisations like Gentoo can have a massive impact in helping to create and sustain strong and vibrant communities.

I joined Gentoo as a Board member in 2017 and took up the Chair position during a very challenging period. I'm pleased to report that the new Gentoo Board has made significant progress in improving our governance and internal controls and our focus now is on concentrating the efforts of our staff to improving tenant and leaseholder services. This will always be our first priority.

During the past 12 months we have reviewed and developed a number of key systems and processes, including the launch of our online customer portal, 'My Gentoo'. We've also introduced improved asset management systems which are helping us to better understand our housing stock and inform our decisions around planned repairs and reinvestment programmes.

To ensure we can monitor the quality of the services we provide, we regularly seek the opinions of our customers on how we are performing; your views are all important to us.

We are also able to see how we are doing when compared to other housing associations, both regionally and nationally. The Board was delighted to note that overall, Gentoo customers are pleased with the services we provide. We want to see the current improving trend continue and ensure that we are doing the very best we can for you. You can read more about these results on page 15.

We recognise the importance of a prompt and efficient repairs service and the changes we are making to deliver these services are now resulting in shorter waiting times and higher levels of satisfaction. We have also changed the way we allocate homes through the introduction of the new HomeHunt system.

Properties are now assigned on the basis of housing need in line with Gentoo's Charitable Community Benefit Society status.



Annual gas servicing and fire safety remain key priorities for us. The tragic events at Grenfell Tower have led all housing organisations to focus attention on fire safety measures in all buildings. In the past year we have invested over £2.2m to improve fire safety across our high rise blocks and sheltered housing developments; liaising closely with the local Fire Authority. Works have concentrated on the maintenance and upgrading of fire doors with a further £0.3m spending in hand. You can read more about this on page 5.

As the implementation of Universal Credit progresses, our attention is focussed on supporting those affected. Our Money Matters Team has already assisted over 6,500 customers to access benefits to which they are entitled. With 1,327 referrals in 2017/18 alone, the team has offered sound advice and identified more than £2m in unclaimed benefits for customers since it began.

After my first year as Chair, I am extremely confident we will continue to build on the achievements of the past 12 months and, under the leadership of our new permanent Chief Executive Officer, Nigel Wilson, who starts in January 2019, continue to deliver lasting change and improvement in the quality of service we seek to provide.

I hope you find the content of this annual newsletter helpful and interesting.

Keith Loraine OBE
Gentoo Group Chair

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Introducing Nigel Wilson, Gentoo's new Chief Executive Officer

Nigel brings a wealth of skills and experience to Gentoo. He has worked in the social housing sector for over 30 years, most recently as Chief Executive of Wythenshawe Community Housing Group in Manchester.

Keith Loraine OBE, Gentoo Group's Chair, said: "The Group Board and I are delighted that Nigel will be joining Gentoo. He has a fantastic track record as a Chief Executive and a very credible reputation in the sector. We were particularly impressed with his leadership and people development skills and his commitment to good governance and delivering excellent customer service.

"With his vast sector experience, I'm confident he will successfully lead Gentoo so we can continue to make a positive difference, and work towards our vision for the City of Sunderland."

Nigel started his career as a housing officer and worked his way up to a leadership position after having roles in tenant participation and resident

engagement before specialising in new business and regeneration.

Speaking about his appointment, Nigel Wilson said: "I'm looking forward to getting started. I've followed the great work Gentoo has done over the years and understand the current challenges facing the Group and the sector.

"I've been particularly inspired by Gentoo's customer and staff focus. It has achieved so much over the years and this success is something that I want to build upon, working with the new Board and dedicated staff to deliver fantastic results."

The Interim Chief Executive Officer, David Jepson, will continue to lead Gentoo until Nigel joins in January 2019.



Are you looking to move?

Gentoo has over 28,000 properties in Sunderland and the surrounding areas so your perfect home could be just around the corner!

If you or anyone you know are looking to move, we can help. To register your details about your requirements go to

www.gentoogroup.com/homehunt.

If you need any support to register, you can call Gentoo on **0191 525 5000**, or email **contactus@gentoogroup.com**



Being safe from fire at home is our key priority

In the year following the tragic events at Grenfell Tower, we have invested over £2.2m in improving fire safety measures across our high rise blocks and sheltered accommodation.

The majority of this investment has been dedicated to maintaining and upgrading our stock of fire doors. Gentoo joiners and managers are trained to carry out this type of maintenance work and are now fully accredited by a national third party to certify the work as compliant with the current standards.

Findings from the Grenfell Tower fire indicated that there were numerous fire doors wedged open or self-closers removed which allowed smoke to quickly fill the escape routes.

You must never remove a self-closer or use a wedge on a fire door. Doors leading onto escape corridors and stairways need a closing mechanism to ensure that people can get into a corridor and escape safely and quickly in the event of a fire.

Specialist external consultants are continuing to carry out annual Fire Risk Assessments on all of our high rise buildings and sheltered accommodation and we are acting on any highlighted recommendations.

We are continuing to meet regularly with Station Managers from Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service to address any fire safety concerns and we actively encourage the Service to carry out training exercises in our high rise buildings.

This realistic type of training is vitally important in ensuring firefighters are trained to the highest standard to keep our customers safe in the event of a fire.

All major works have been completed post Grenfell and we plan to invest a further £300,000 on other necessary works. We will also be considering the possibility of fitting sprinkler systems during the planning stages of any future major investment in tower blocks and sheltered accommodation.

The safety of our customers and firefighters continues to be a key priority and we take fire safety extremely seriously. If you have any concerns, no matter how small, please get in touch, we're here to help. You can email **contactus@gentoogroup.com** or you can call into your local office.



Green-fingered community Give it a Grow

We recently urged people across Sunderland to pull on their gardening gloves and show pride in their community by running our Give it a Grow gardening competition.

Our annual competition, now in its third year, encourages our tenants and local schools to use their horticultural skills to help the environment and improve the appearance of the community.

Pupils at Ryhope Infant School are celebrating after scooping first place for their entry in the Best School Garden/Greenhouse category (pictured on

the front page). The school has been developing its garden since 2012 and pupils impressed the judges with their quirky allotment, which includes beautiful hanging baskets, a greenhouse made from more than 1,000 plastic bottles, a minibeast hotel to shelter insects and animals, and a Hoover which was re-fabricated to make a flower planter.

We offer Aspire grants of up to £500 to support a range of activities for voluntary, community groups and community-led causes throughout Sunderland.

For more information about Aspire grants, turn to page 22.

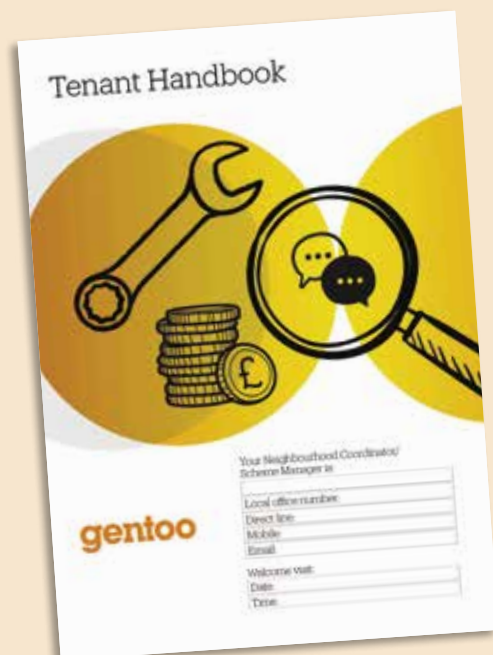


We've got a new Tenant Handbook

Launched in July, the handbook has been designed to give you all the information you may need for starting your tenancy in your new home but it's also a handy tool for those who have older tenancies too.

It contains useful information about us, the services we provide and your rights and responsibilities as a tenant. As a housing association, Gentoo is responsible for managing your property and we work closely with our partners to make sure that our services are of a high standard and good value for money.

We have tried to include as much information as possible in the handbook, but if you don't find what you are



looking for, you may find it at **www.gentooigroup.com** or by speaking to your Neighbourhood Coordinator.

If you would like a copy, you can request one via your Neighbourhood Coordinator or by popping into your local office.

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 2017-18 we have made a number of changes and improvements to the way we deliver our services.

2017-18 highlights:

- 
- Demonstrated **£4.9m** of efficiencies through our Value for Money tracker
 - **£1m** saved on the renegotiated contract for roofs and gables
 - **£7.4m** in external funding secured to deliver a further 216 new homes across four schemes
 - Achieved **88%** customer satisfaction with our repairs service – a 2% increase on last year
 - Assisted customers in accessing financial support of **£913,000** through our Money Matters Team
 - **92** members of the Repairs and Maintenance team achieved a Level 2 NVQ in Multi-Trading

Did you know?

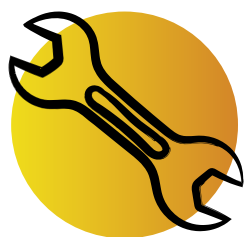
94% of customers feel their rent provides value for money and **96%** are satisfied with the overall service provided by Gentoo.

Our 2017-18 Value for Money Self-Assessment explains our approach and provides further information about how we are achieving value across our business.

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

Our Customer Annual Report for 2017-18

Repairs and maintenance



£21.4m

was spent on delivering this service

179,215

repair and safety check visits were made



99.96%

of homes held a Gas Safety Certificate

28,702

visits were categorised as an emergency



79.44%

of repairs were fixed in one visit

256

compliments were received from customers

Did you know....

- **Fix on the phone** – We now offer troubleshooting advice to enable customers to resolve low level issues with their heating system, saving the need for a repair appointment/call out
- **Urgent appointments** – An 'urgent' repair category of seven days has been reintroduced in response to customer feedback stating that the previous arrangement of 'emergency' or 'mutually convenient' appointments did not always meet their needs
- **Out of Hours routine appointments** – Various shift patterns have been introduced within gas, plumbing and joinery teams to facilitate out of hours non-emergency appointments in response to requests for more flexibility from customers
- **Multi-skilling** – 140 trades staff have received additional training to make them 'multi-skilled', supporting the ethos of fixing repairs right first time

How did we do?

The average waiting time for repair visits in 2017/18 are all within the target response times as shown below:

Repair priority	Target	Performance 2017/18	Variance to target
Emergency Out of Hours	-	2.28 hrs	-
Emergency	24 hrs	17.54 hrs	- 6.46 hrs
Urgent	7 days	6 days	- 1 day
Routine	28 days	19 days	- 9 days
Planned	180 days	69 days	- 111 days

Letting our homes



2,795
properties
were allocated

47.41
was the average
number of days it took
to allocate a property

88%
of customers were
satisfied with the lettable
standard of our properties

Figures refer to all relets including long term void properties held for modernisation and decants.

Looking after your neighbourhood



£3.4m
was spent keeping our
estates tidy

83%
of customers surveyed were
satisfied with our communal
cleaning service



92%
of customers surveyed
were satisfied with their
neighbourhood as a place to live

Did you know....

- **Chipping Waste** – Our Arboriculture Team is ‘chipping’ all waste branches and trees, and donating chips to reuse as animal bedding or to help maintain footpaths. They are also working with several local schools to reuse chips and logs within their gardens for outside play, but also to raise awareness of what happens to trees once they are cut down

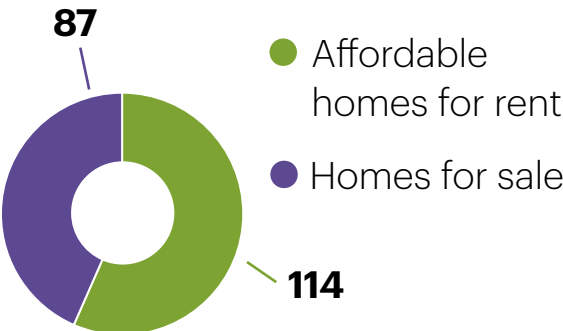
1,625
gardens in empty properties
were cleared and maintained

92%
of fly tipping was removed
within seven days

Investing in new homes



201
new homes
were built in
Sunderland



Our Customer Annual Report for 2017-18 (continued)

Paying your rent



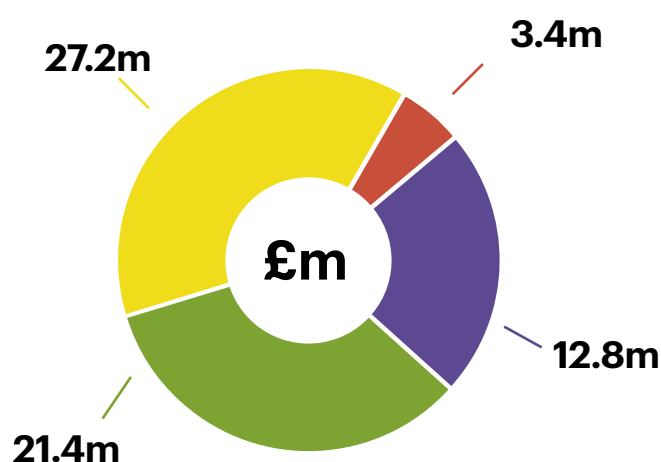
£121.4m

was collected in rent

100.2%

of rent was collected
as percentage of rent due

Key service areas where we spent your rent include:



- Planned maintenance
- Repairs and maintenance
- Housing management and social investment activity
- Estate services

Did you know....

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

Supporting people



167

young people were
supported to live
independently

988

older people were
supported to live well
and independently

Did you know....

- **Service Charges** – Information on service charges is now advertised in sheltered schemes so that customers are more informed of the charges they pay and the services received

Community involvement



£42,701

worth of Aspire Grants were awarded to local community groups

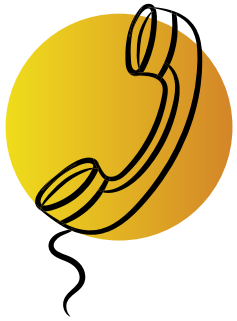
98

grants

22,401

people benefitted

Customer care



394

compliments were received from customers

104

formal complaints were received across the whole group

21

formal complaint appeals were received

229,075

telephone calls were received

Did you know....

- To reduce waiting times, an additional menu option has been added when you call us on 0191 525 5000, so that you can direct your call to the right team
- Reflecting a more digitally skilled customer base, an increasing number of customers are choosing to contact us using social media channels such as Facebook. During 2017/18, we responded to 430 Facebook enquiries

Looking after your home



1,654

boilers were replaced

211

properties were fitted with double glazed windows

27

properties received full modernisation

1,337

properties received gable end repairs

100

roofs were replaced

Our Customer Annual Report for 2017-18 (continued)

Managing your money



1,327

customers were referred to our Money Matters Team

£694,606

worth of debt was identified and consolidated

£913,948

worth of unclaimed benefits were identified

Keeping you safe



136

victims of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) were supported

153

referrals were made to protect vulnerable adults and children



90

customers who cause ASB were supported to change their behaviour

1,284

tenancy breaches were recorded

39

people were referred to mediation to resolve disputes with neighbours

Top breach types:

- Criminal behaviour
- Drugs
- Assault



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

Investing in our homes - 2017/18



We spent

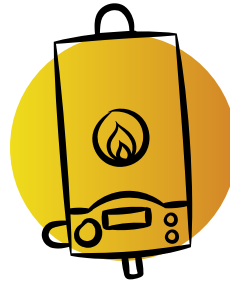
£21.1m

on improving our homes



Central

- **106** 'A' rated boilers were fitted
- **35** roofs were replaced
- **293** gable walls were rebuilt



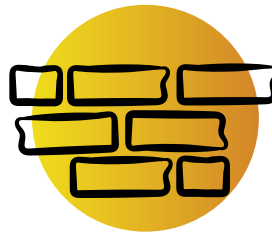
Houghton and Hetton

- **441** 'A' rated boilers were fitted
- **162** gable walls were rebuilt



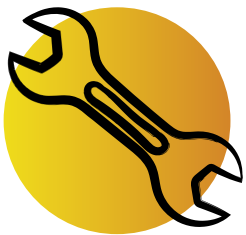
North

- **107** 'A' rated boilers were fitted
- **30** roofs were replaced
- **554** gable walls were rebuilt



South

- **141** 'A' rated boilers were fitted
- **35** roofs were replaced
- **322** gable walls were rebuilt



Washington

- **859** 'A' rated boilers were fitted
- **6** gable walls were rebuilt

Investing in our homes

During 2017/18 we saw an increase in customer feedback about the poor performance of their single glazed windows. In response to this the Group Board agreed an acceleration of our replacement windows programme.

This year (2018/19) we will continue investment works to the external areas of our homes. This will include external wall works, roofing, window and doors and external decoration. Alongside our yearly programme of boiler replacements we are upgrading kitchens, bathrooms and wiring. We are investing in our low to high rise blocks improving lifts, communal doors and flat doors.

After a 100% housing stock check we are committed to carrying out the following work over the next four years:



Central

- Fit **820** 'A' rated boilers
- Replace **598** roofs
- Carry out **528** external wall repairs
- Fit **1,015** properties with double glazing
- Complete **108** internal modernisations



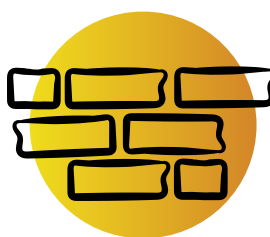
Houghton and Hetton

- Fit **1,116** 'A' rated boilers
- Replace **938** roofs
- Carry out **812** external wall repairs
- Fit **1,295** properties with double glazing
- Complete **67** internal modernisations



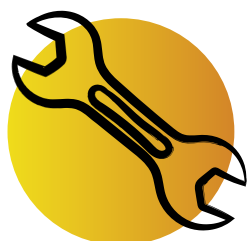
North

- Fit **699** 'A' rated boilers
- Replace **577** roofs
- Carry out **698** external wall repairs
- Fit **949** properties with double glazing
- Complete **167** internal modernisations



South

- Fit **141** 'A' rated boilers
- Replace **35** roofs
- Carry out **322** external wall repairs
- Fit **789** properties with double glazing
- Complete **79** internal modernisations



Washington

- Fit **2,898** 'A' rated boilers
- Replace **779** roofs
- Carry out **196** external wall repairs
- Fit **888** properties with double glazing
- Complete **22** internal modernisations

Our Customer Annual Report for 2017-18

Using feedback and complaints to improve our services

The table below details the numbers of complaints received for the three service areas where the most formal complaints were received:

Nature of complaint	Number received	Upheld	Not upheld
Repairs and maintenance	48	33	15
Tenancy management	18	6	12
Asset management	12	10	2

Repairs and maintenance

Feedback from customers indicates that their dissatisfaction with this service is around the length of time taken to repair their boiler during severe weather conditions.

Outcome

We are re-profiling our gas servicing programme to increase servicing during the summer months (leaving more gas engineers to attend to emergency repairs during winter weather).



Tenancy management

Feedback from customers concerning tenancy management is related to perceived lack of action with neighbour disputes.

Outcome

We will continue to update our Neighbourhood Safety Policy Toolkit and deliver refresher training to staff to ensure they utilise all methods available to effectively resolve neighbour disputes.



Asset management

Feedback from customers around asset management (how we invest in our properties) related to our approach to replacing single glazed windows.

Outcome

Group Board has agreed an acceleration of our replacement windows programme.



Are you claiming Universal Credit?

Universal Credit is a new benefit for people of working age who are sick, unemployed and looking for work or working on a low income.

It will replace Housing Benefit, income-based Job Seekers Allowance, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit.

It has been rolled out in Sunderland for single people, families and couples making a **new** claim.

Please let us know if you are making a claim.

*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.



Gentoo customers can also benefit from support with claims from our Money Matters Team by calling **0300 123 2004*** or emailing **money matters@gentoo group.com**

For further information or support on making a claim call the Universal Credit Helpline on **0800 328 5644** or visit **www.gov.uk/universal-credit/how-to-claim**.

On our best behaviour

We expect all our employees and contractors to complete their work professionally and without causing any unnecessary disruption.

Let us know if we do well, or if we can improve, as your feedback is always welcome!

Please note: There may be occasions when we may need to rearrange your appointment. This may be when:

- Access equipment may be required
- Weather conditions are poor
- Materials may be required

We will contact you if we are going to be delayed or if we need to rearrange your appointment due to unforeseen circumstances such as staff sickness.



Keeping you safe is our priority

We have a legal duty to check all gas appliances in your home on or before the anniversary of the last gas service and give you a valid gas safety certificate.

As well as your gas safety check, we will service your heating appliances and check your smoke alarms and any carbon monoxide detectors.

We also have a legal responsibility to regularly test the electrical installation in your home and carry out water hygiene assessments.

If you can't make your appointment, please contact us as soon as possible (or call us if your appointment is that day or the following day). This will help us rearrange a more convenient time and reallocate the appointment to someone else. You can rearrange your appointment by calling your local area office and pressing 2 for a repair.

By signing your tenancy agreement, you have agreed to allow us into your home for your safety checks. If you don't respond, or repeatedly refuse to give us access to your property, Gentoo will apply for a court order to do so, and you could be at risk of losing your home. Please don't let it get to this stage. If you have any concerns, contact us as soon as possible and we can discuss any worries.

Did you know....

- Last year 23,291 repair and servicing appointments were unable to be carried out as customers did not allow us access. This cost the group approximately £931, 640.
- To ensure customers keep their appointments, Gentoo will book an appointment with you over the phone, send you a reminder text, an appointment card and our operative will ring ahead of the job.
- If your appointment is routine you can also rearrange online 24/7 at **www.gentooigroup.com**.
- Failure to let us know you are not available for an appointment means other customers may have to wait longer for their appointment.



You can help ensure your appointment is kept by:

- Being available for your servicing, repair and inspection appointments or let us know in advance if you cannot be present.
- Making sure someone over the age of 18 is in your property for the duration we are there - as we can't be in your property unsupervised.
- Clearing the area in and around where the work will be carried out.
- Ensuring you have money on your meter. If we are coming for a gas or electric appointment we need money on the meter to test your appliances.



Checking the identity of visitors

It's really important you check the identity of anyone you let into your home. That's why all our employees and contractors carry official identity cards, which includes their photograph. If you're at all concerned about letting anyone in who claims to be from Gentoo, please ask to see their identity card. If they don't have a card, or you're worried, don't let them into your home. Call us on **0191 525 5000** and we'll be happy to confirm if someone from Gentoo was due to call. Genuine callers are always happy to wait for you to check.



Your privacy

Your trust is very important to us and we are committed to keeping your data safe and secure. We will never sell your personal details to anyone and will process (i.e. collect, store and use) the information you provide in a manner that is compliant with Data Protection Legislation.

When you provide information to us, we will inform you what it will be used for and with whom it will be shared.

We will share some of your data with other agencies that are acting on our behalf, such as sub-contractors.

Gentoo Group is also required periodically to share your information with other agencies to help reduce crime or investigate fraud.

We may record telephone calls made to or from the Group for training and monitoring purposes. Gentoo Group also uses CCTV in some areas for the safety of our neighbourhoods.



Any information you provide to us is retained in line with Gentoo Group's retention guidelines and is destroyed once out of retention.

Further information is available in our Privacy Statement at **www.gentooigroup.com**.

If you need this in another format you can email our Data Protection Officer at **dataprotectionofficer@gentooigroup.com** or you can write to:

**Data Protection Officer,
Gentoo Group, Emperor House,
2 Emperor Way, Sunderland SR3 3XR**

We've teamed up with Veterans in Crisis to offer homes to heroes

Working in collaboration with Veterans in Crisis Sunderland, we recently supported 20 military veterans and their families to find permanent homes in the city.

Through the partnership, individuals in need of housing or rehoming are referred to us from Veterans in Crisis Sunderland and are able to view and apply for available properties throughout Sunderland.

Most recently 'Veteran A', a 68-year-old veteran was handed the keys to his new home. He said: "This has changed my life, I was homeless until I was helped by Veterans in Crisis Sunderland. From then, within weeks I had a home to call my own, I am absolutely over the moon."

Michelle Meldrum, Executive Director (Operations), Gentoo said: "This is a great example of how partnership working can help tackle homelessness in our city.

"Our veterans are heroes in their own right and we are delighted to be working with Veterans in Crisis Sunderland to support their clients in finding a place they call home."

If you are a veteran or ex-military personnel and are homeless or need support, you can contact Veterans in Crisis Sunderland by calling **07398 916 590** or emailing **info@veteransincrisis.co.uk**



Helping you to manage your tenancy - My Gentoo

My Gentoo launched last year and gives you the ability to report repairs, view your home and garage rent statements and view your repairs history online.

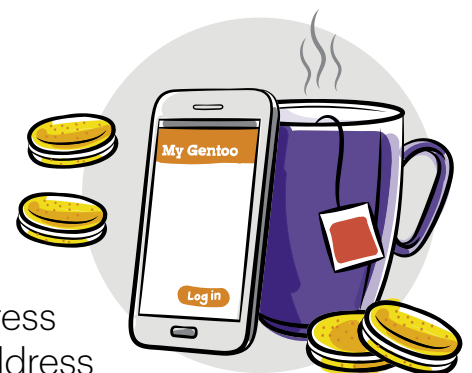
My Gentoo not only allows you to access your information when you want to, but it also lets you update the information that we hold on you as a customer – such as your contact information.

**Look out for a new look
My Gentoo from December!**

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.



The voice of the customer

Customers from across the city work very closely with Gentoo on a regular basis to help shape our services. From giving their opinion and ideas on new policies and procedures, to accompanying us on estate walkabouts, there is a whole range of ways in which you can have your voice heard and help improve the services we provide to make a positive impact in your local community.

You can see the range of ways in which we currently listen to the voices of our customers and there is a variety of improvements/additions in the pipeline which will further improve what we do during 2018/19. A key enhancement is about how we ensure that our customers voices are heard at Group Board and Operations Committee level and equally ensuring that our customers effectively hear the 'voice' of Group Board and Operations Committee.

Customer engagement activities

We have a number of events and activities that you can participate in. If you are interested in being involved, please contact the Community Partnership Coordinators Team on **0191 525 2760** or email **communityteam@gentoogroup.com**.

Community engagement forums

We have five forums, one held in each of the management areas of the city. These groups meet on a bi-monthly basis and they provide the local voice to the Group Board and Committees. These groups share information and discuss things like management performance, how we are responding to local concerns and make suggestions to maintain and improve the local neighbourhood.

What we do now:



Rate Your Estate

We encourage our customers to get involved and help us to maintain our estates and neighbourhoods. We hold regular activities where customers walk around and inspect our estates - identifying issues that need addressing. We regularly carry out Rate Your Estate inspections over the summer months where each inspection takes approximately two hours.

Rate our voids

Gentoo customers help us to inspect our empty (ready to let) properties to ensure that we continue to provide good quality housing to new customers. Customers are invited to inspect these properties to ensure we are offering a good standard of accommodation.

The voice of the customer (continued)

CHAIN projects (Task and finish groups)

Customers are invited to CHAIN (Customers Helping Achieve Improvements Now) projects to work with Gentoo on a specific task such as a policy or customer literature review.



Ustoo Scrutiny Group

Ustoo scrutinise services provided by Gentoo. As an independent group they carry out robust reviews of the customer facing services and performance of Gentoo and report these to the Group Board and Operations Committee.

Information and knowledge meetings

Any of our customers are welcome to attend our regular information and knowledge meetings which are advertised on our website and through social media. At these meetings we will share information with you about service areas, increasing your understanding and awareness.

We would love for you to get involved. If you would like more information on any of the options mentioned, please do not hesitate to contact the Community Partnership Coordinators on **0191 525 2760**.

We look forward to hearing from you!

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 gather information about you through our customer surveys. 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 communities that encourage and embrace diversity. We held a successful International Women's Day event at the Sikh temple and we have been involved with city-wide celebrations such as Sunderland Pride as well as doing 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 Top 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 our extra care housing schemes more LGBT friendly.

THE GEN FACTOR

The Genfactor is returning for its 10th anniversary in 2019 and the competition is looking like it's going to be bigger and better than ever!

The Genfactor is a hugely successful talent competition for young people aged 11 – 18 who live or attend school or college in the City of Sunderland. The competition has the look and feel of a local Britain's Got Talent packed with a variety of acts including singers, dancers,

ventriloquists and magicians, so there's definitely something for everyone!

The auditions were launched in September and will run during October half term school holidays and in the Christmas holidays with the prestigious Genfactor final taking place on 24 April 2019 at Rainton Meadows Arena.

Previous winners have gone on to do great things. In 2011 Alex Forth won a place at London's prestigious Bird College, in 2012 Lauren Waine was accepted into Paul McCartney's Institute of Performing Arts in Liverpool and 2017's finalist Jessica Dale went on to audition for The Voice Kids UK.

You can check out last year's Genfactor finalists on Youtube at **www.gentoo-group.com/genfactor** and you can go to **www.gentoogroup.com** to find out more about how to get involved.

Aspiring to make a difference



People are benefitting from funding to help improve their local communities.

We offer Aspire grants up to the amount of £500 to support a variety of activities for voluntary community groups and individuals for a range of community-led causes.

In the last 12 months Gentoo has awarded 98 grants, worth more than £42,700 to 22,401 people to help a variety of causes –

from community events to youth projects, football clubs to resident associations.

To read more about how Aspire has made a difference in your area visit pages 23-27.

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

Your Washington update



£7,841 of Aspire grants awarded to 5,117 recipients

Glebe Bowling Club benefitted from an Aspire grant to help fund its running costs. Ivan Richardson, Secretary of Glebe Bowling Club said: "Gentoo has been a great source of advertising and a benefactor to the club. Thank you."

We're removing the district heating scheme

As some of you may already know, we are removing most of the district heating scheme in Washington. Once Northern Gas Networks has upgraded the gas connections in Oxclose, Albany and Fatfield, a combi boiler will be installed, allowing customers using the heating scheme to choose their own energy supplier and switch tariffs freely.

A customer consultation cabin will be available for customers to drop in to learn more about the works. It will move per location as works progress. The first site the cabin will be situated in will be the Arklecrag carpark in Albany.

If you have any further queries in the meantime regarding this matter, please contact the Asset Planning Administration Team on

0191 525 2752.

Highfields Manor, Washington

We currently have a range of three and four bedroom homes for sale at Highfields Manor, Washington. They are ideally located in close proximity to a range of local amenities, schools and transport links allowing easy access to the attractions of the region's towns and cities. Each home provides a modern, flexible living space that is perfect for both first time buyers or those looking to upgrade their existing home.

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Your Central update

£6,935 of Aspire grants awarded to 1,067 recipients

Eon Arts was awarded £500 to provide theatrical performances for our sheltered schemes across Sunderland.

Thomas Potts, Assistant Director of Eon Arts said: "The performance connected with the local residents' lives in Sunderland and educated them about



the local history. The success of the performance has opened other doors for us and we have now performed in other community venues."

Tom Urwin House



Earlier this year the gardening group from Tom Urwin House entered a competition held by The Royal

Horticultural Society and Northumbria in Bloom. With the help of Gentoo and a Community Chest grant, they purchased planters, bulbs and flowers and completely transformed the front and back garden.

After the judging day the group was invited along to the awards presentation where they were awarded with a Level 5 Outstanding "It's Your Neighbourhood" Award - the highest achievement in their category. A huge well done to everyone involved!

Chester Gate

We will have a range of contemporary two, three and four bedroom homes for sale at Chester Gate.

The homes will be perfectly located and will hold a prominent position on Chester Road at one of the main gateways into the City of Sunderland from the A19.

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Your Hetton and Houghton update

£8,157 of Aspire grants awarded to 1,708 beneficiaries

Sherwood Gardening Club was awarded £300 for gardening equipment, materials and seeds for the residents to learn how to grow plants and food for the community to benefit from.

John Harrison, Chair of the group, said: "Aspire is one of the best things to happen to our community.



The gardening club is growing from strength to strength because of the grant. Thank you to Gentoo for all of your support."

Meadow View, Houghton-le-Spring

We currently have a range of two, three and four bedroom high-quality homes for sale at Meadow View, Houghton-le-Spring and Bramblewood in Hetton-le-Hole.

Bramblewood is perfect for those wanting to live in a semi-rural part of Tyne and Wear with a hive of local amenities close-by.



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The Monday Lunch Club

Easington Lane Community Access Point (ELCAP) will be holding a special Christmas lunch on Christmas Eve for residents who have no family or won't see their family over the Christmas period.

The Lunch Club was set up by Ann Donkin, one of Gentoo's Community Partnership Coordinators, along with volunteers from the area.

The lunch will consist of two courses, plus mince pies and Christmas carol singing afterwards. If you are interested



in coming along to the weekly lunch club contact Ann Donkin on **0191 525 5797** or Christine from ELCAP on **0191 526 1071**.

Your North update

£7,371 of Aspire grants awarded to 1,198 beneficiaries

Dame Dorothy Residents' Group was awarded £400 to help pay for storage units, cutlery and crockery. The group was set up in 2017 to help prevent social isolation for local residents.

Cynthia Grieves, group resident, said: "Without Aspire the residents of today and the future would not be able to improve the community room. The units have made the room more inviting and easier to use for all of the residents."



Celebrating 30 years of Sunderland AFC

Lifelong Sunderland Association Football Club (SAFC) fan and founder of The Fans Museum, Michael Ganley has gathered a large collection of SAFC memorabilia over the last 30 years.

The Fans Museum, situated in the former Monkwearmouth railway station, which celebrated its 170th birthday this year, boasts an impressive collection of shirts, tickets, medals and cups from around the world, including a shirt from Pele from 1970.

If you'd like to see the collection and find out more, visit:

www.fansmuseum.org



Sunderland Mind Southwick Coffee Club

The Coffee Club runs every Wednesday 10am until 12pm.

You're welcome to come along for a cuppa, chat and take part in craft activities.

There's a small entry fee of £1 per session per person.

For more information, please contact Paul Booth, Sunderland Mind Outreach Worker, on 0191 565 7218 or email community@sunderlandmind.co.uk.

Your South update

£5,264 of Aspire grants awarded to 2,301 beneficiaries

Crow Lane Art Group was awarded £405 to help fund new materials and room hire costs. The club has 30 members that meet regularly to produce artwork and enjoy social mornings.

Sylvia Hurst, Chair of the group, said: "Because of the age range of the group, there were some weeks when there wasn't enough people in attendance to cover the rent. Aspire has taken the worry

away from the group by helping us to pay for ten weeks' rent."



Thurcroft, Doxford Park

We have a superb collection of two, three, four and five bedroom homes for sale at Thurcroft, Doxford Park.

Living in a luxury home only a short distance away from the thriving centre of Sunderland and in close proximity to major city roads means workplaces, excellent schools and a wealth of attractions in the area are all easily accessible. Also, if sport is your passion, then you'll be spoilt for choice with various golf, skiing and football facilities close by.



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For further information, please visit:
www.gentoohomes.com

Have fun and get fit at Farrington Badminton Club

The club runs a two hour badminton session every Friday night (including during school holidays) between 7.00pm and 9.00pm.

The sessions are open to everyone whether you are a complete beginner

or a more experienced player. You can come along on your own or with a friend or family member. The first session is always free and then it's £5 for two hours thereafter.

**For more information, contact
Farrington Badminton Academy on
0791 709 5478.**

Need to get in touch?

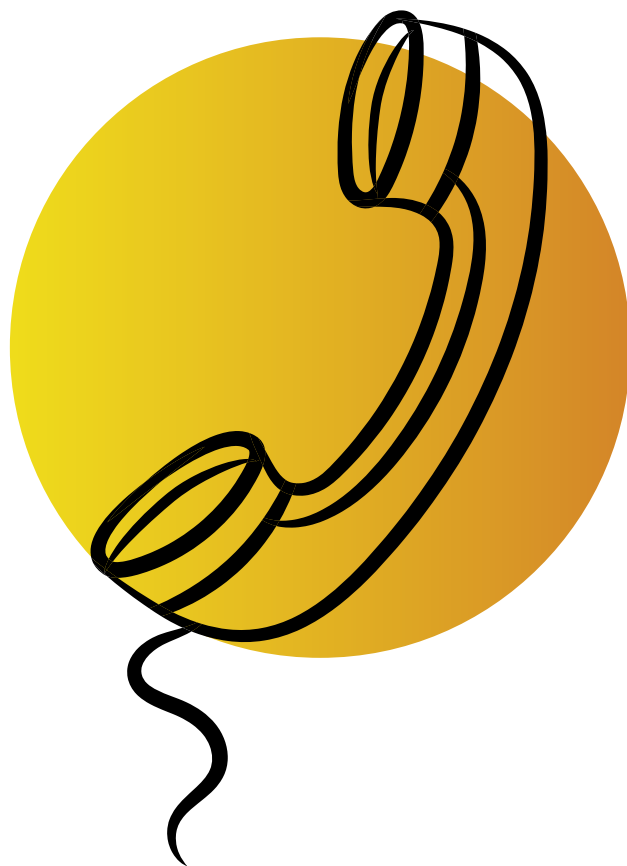
We have direct dials for your local office so you can speak to your Neighbourhood Team direct.

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

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 process is designed to ensure your call is answered more promptly.



We're on Facebook and Twitter too, just search for Gentoo Group.



Doing things the easy way

Did you know that you can set up a Direct Debit to pay your rent easily every month?

A Direct Debit can help you to budget and it will ensure your rent is paid on time. You will need to make sure you have enough money in your bank account or you may be charged.

You can download a form at **www.gentooogroup.com** or pick one up from your local office.

You can also log onto our website **www.gentooogroup.com** to report a repair and view your rent account.



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



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