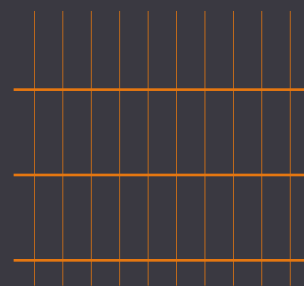


Great homes
Strong communities
Inspired people
for Sunderland



Tenant Handbook

Last updated on 7 August 2024



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Welcome to your new home

At Gentoo, we work with partners to provide excellent services and value for money to all tenants at all times.

We designed this handbook to give you all the information you need to manage your tenancy. It includes details about us, our services, and your rights and responsibilities.

We usually update the handbook twice a year. But the most up-to-date information is available on our website www.gentoogroup.com

Or you can call **0191 525 5000** and select option 4 or speak to your Scheme Manager.

We take pride that we inspire people to make a difference in our homes, communities and business. There are many ways that you can get involved.

Find out more on **page 65**.

We wish you every happiness in your new home.



Your Neighbourhood Co-ordinators

For questions about your rent

Name

Mobile phone

Email address

For questions about anything else to do with your tenancy

Name

Mobile phone

Email address

Get up-to-date details at www.gentoogroup.com/neighbourhood-coordinators

Important details about your home

Electricity

Supplier

Location of mains switch and fuses

Location of meter

Meter reading

Gas

Supplier

Location of meter

Meter reading

Heating

Type

Boiler make and model

Location of boiler

Location of district heating meter

Water

Location of water stop tap

Location of water meter

Meter reading

How we use your information

We respect a person's right to information privacy, protection and security.

We have procedures to collect, store and process your information safely and securely. We follow the legal requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulation.

The main reason we collect your information is to provide you with services as part of your tenancy agreement.

Our Privacy Statement includes details of:

- how we collect your information
- what information we collect from you
- where we store your information
- how long we keep your information for
- how we use your information
- who we may share your information with
- your rights

You can view our full Privacy Statement at www.gentoogroup.com/privacy-statement



Everyone at Gentoo works hard to help tenants

We deserve to be able to do our jobs without getting abuse from tenants, residents or visitors.

This includes physical violence, abusive language and threats, or getting harassed online.

We take this type of behaviour seriously and will act if you abuse, attack, harass or threaten staff or contractors.



Moving into your new home

First things first

You must pay at least 1 week's rent in advance from the start date of your tenancy.

When you move into your new home, remember to:

- find your meters and take readings, see [page 2](#)
- find your water stop tap, see [page 2](#)
- consider if you will stay with the current energy supplier
- register with My Gentoo, our online self-serve portal, see [page 7](#)
- set up a way to pay your rent, see [page 26](#)
- arrange home contents insurance, see [page 47](#)

Your keys

We will give you 2 sets of keys.

We recommend you give the second set to a trusted friend or family member and let us know who they are so we can contact them in an emergency.

We do not keep copies of your keys.

If you move into a flat in a building with a communal entrance, you will also get a key or fob for the building's secure door entry system.

If you lose or damage your keys or fobs, we may charge you.

Moving to a different Gentoo property

Unless your housing needs change, you must be 2 or more years into your current tenancy before you can move to a different Gentoo property.

If your needs do change, call **0191 525 5000** and select option 4.

If you are transferring from another Gentoo property, you must return your keys to us by midday the day after your tenancy in the property you are leaving ends. If you do not return the keys to us on time, we may charge you an extra week's rent for the home you have moved out of. If you get Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, this will only pay for one property.

Moving checklist

- ☐ Give notice to your current landlord. If Gentoo is your landlord, you must give 4 weeks' notice before ending your tenancy.
- ☐ Arrange for Royal Mail to send your post to your new address.
- ☐ Register to vote at your new address.
- ☐ Contact your local council to switch your Council Tax payment and if you get Housing Benefit or Council Tax Support or have a Blue Car Badge.
- ☐ If you get State Pension, pay Income Tax or National Insurance, get tax credits or Child Benefit, update your address with HM Revenue and Customs.
- ☐ If you get Universal Credit, sign into your Universal Credit account to update your address.
- ☐ Contact your water and energy suppliers to let them know you are moving out and give them or arrange for final meter readings.
- ☐ Contact whoever provides your landline, mobile and internet to end or move your services.
- ☐ Contact TV Licensing to update your address or cancel your TV licence if you no longer need one.
- ☐ If you have a car or other vehicle, update your address with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency.
- ☐ Consider if you need to tell your employer, doctor, bank, and insurance companies.

Get support to help you manage your tenancy

Neighbourhood Co-ordinators

Neighbourhood Co-ordinators engage and work with tenants, residents and the wider community to have a positive effect on people's lives.

They offer practical advice and support to help you successfully manage your tenancy. This includes if you have support needs or are unable to pay your rent.

If we are unable to support you, we will refer you to a partner organisation who can help.

Your Neighbourhood Co-ordinator will regularly visit you so they can:

- get to know you and your needs
- help us to improve our services
- make sure we treat everyone fairly

Your tenancy agreement

You will meet your Neighbourhood Co-ordinator when you sign your tenancy agreement and agree to its terms. You will be able to ask them any questions and get advice on things like managing your money and claiming benefits.

Welcome emails

Your Neighbourhood Co-ordinator will send you 3 welcome emails when you start your tenancy.

The first email is a general welcome and includes your tenancy reference number and your co-ordinator's contact details.

The second email is about repairs and how to report them.

The third email is about how you can get involved to help us improve our services.

When you are a new tenant

Your Neighbourhood Co-ordinator will visit you during the first 12 months of your tenancy. This is to make sure you are following the terms of your tenancy agreement so you can become an assured tenant.

The terms of your tenancy they look at include checking you pay your rent on time, maintain your home and garden, and are being a good neighbour and not behaving antisocially.

If you decide to move home

You must give us 4 weeks' notice. We will visit your home to make sure you understand what is expected before you leave. For more information, see [page 67](#).

My Gentoo

My Gentoo gives you access to different services to help you manage your tenancy

It is available 24 hours a day.

You can register for My Gentoo and you will be able to:

- view your rent statement
- pay rent for your home, garage or car parking space
- update your personal information
- report some repairs and book a time that suits you
- cancel or rearrange a repair
- view repairs history
- send us a direct message about your tenancy or a repair

To register you need your:

- name
- date of birth
- tenancy number
- email address

Your tenancy reference number is on your rent card or rent statement letter. It is the first 7 digits shown on the card or letter and starts with a '1'.

If you have any questions or need help to register, email

mygentoo@gentoogroup.com



Tenancy agreements and tenant rights

Tenancy agreements

Your tenancy agreement is a legal contract between you and Gentoo that sets out your rights and responsibilities.

Types of tenancy agreement

Shorthold starter tenancy agreements

This agreement is for new tenants and lasts 12 months but may be extended.

Your Neighbourhood Co-ordinator will visit you during the first 12 months of your tenancy. This is to make sure you are following the terms of your tenancy agreement so you can become an assured tenant.

The terms of your tenancy that they look at include checking you:

- pay your rent on time
- maintain your home and garden
- are being a good neighbour and not behaving antisocially

Assured tenancy agreements

An assured tenancy agreement is for tenants when their shorthold starter tenancy agreement ends.

Assured transferring tenancy agreements

This agreement is for people who have been tenants since before 2001, when Sunderland City Council transferred properties to us.

Affordable rented tenancies

This type of tenancy is for our affordable rent properties where the rent is 80% of local market rent. We plan to build over 1,200 new, affordable homes to rent by 2026.

Tenants with an affordable-rented tenancy will have a shorthold starter or assured tenancy agreement.



Changing the terms of your tenancy agreement

We may only change the terms of your tenancy agreement in one of the following situations. If:

- you agree that we can change it
- it is about your rent or service charges
- we give you a notice that varies your agreement

Before we can give you a notice that varies your agreement we must:

- let you know we intend to change your agreement
- what we intend to change, when it will change, and how it will affect you
- consult with you about the change
- consider any comments you make before a specific deadline

Ending your tenancy agreement

If you follow the terms of your tenancy agreement, you have the right to stay in your home.

If you are an assured tenant, we must get a court order to end your tenancy agreement. Before we can get a court order, we must serve you with a notice of seeking possession. This notice tells you why we are considering legal action and the earliest date we can take you to court.

Ending a tenancy agreement and taking legal action is something we only do when:

- we have tried everything else to help a tenant manage their tenancy
- a tenant has seriously breached their tenancy agreement



Tenancy fraud

Tenancy fraud is someone living in a property they are not legally entitled to. It stops people who are waiting for a property from getting a home.

Tenancy fraud includes:

- giving false information to get a home
- withholding changes in your circumstances that would affect your tenancy
- subletting your home without our permission
- allowing someone else to use your home without our permission
- using a property as a second home
- being paid to give your home to someone not on the tenancy agreement
- trying to succeed the original tenant who has died where you do not have the right to or without telling us you moved in
- using false information to try to buy a property under right to acquire or preserved right to buy

Stopping tenancy fraud

We ask everyone for identification when they sign their tenancy agreement.

We regularly visit tenants in their homes and confirm the identities of everyone who lives there.

Because it is a crime, if you are found guilty of tenancy fraud you:

- will lose your tenancy
- could lose your right to all social housing
- could be fined, imprisoned, or fined and imprisoned

If you are found guilty of illegally subletting your home, you can get an unlawful profit order. This means you will have to pay us any profit you made from subletting your home.

Reporting tenancy fraud

We will keep your report confidential. To report tenancy fraud, you can:

- call **0191 525 5000** and select option 4
- email **tenancy.fraud@gentoogroup.com**
- fill in the report tenancy fraud form at **www.gentoogroup.com/tenancy-fraud**

Tenant rights

Your tenancy agreement gives you the right to use our repairs, emergency repairs, and support services. As a tenant, you have rights we must respect.

All tenants

Right to information

The Data Protection Act 2018 gives you the right to make sure that any personal information we hold about you in our written and electronic records is accurate and up to date. If you want to access your records, we may charge a small fee.

When you ask us, we legally must give you information about:

- how we set your rent
- how quickly we complete repairs
- our lettings and allocations policy
- how we deal with antisocial behaviour

To access your records, email dataprotectionofficer@gentoogroup.com or call **0191 525 5000** and select option 4.

Right to consultation

We will involve you in any major changes that may affect your home or neighbourhood. We will do this:

- by letter
- through our Tenant and Community Voice groups
- at a public meeting
- in local newspapers
- on our website

Right to take in lodgers

You have the right to take in lodgers as long as they do not make your home overcrowded and you tell us before you take them in. Find out more on [page 48](#).

Right to sublet your home

You may not sublet your entire home. If you want to sublet part of your home, you must get our written permission. We will not give you permission if subletting part of your home would mean your home would be overcrowded.

If you sublet your home without getting our permission, you will break the conditions of your tenancy agreement and may lose your home. Find out more on [page 48](#).

Right to live peacefully in your home

We will always ask for your permission before we enter your home. We have the legal right to enter your home to complete repairs we are legally responsible for and to inspect the condition of your home.

We will give you at least 24 hours' notice before we inspect your home.

Right to be treated fairly

We treat everyone fairly and with respect. We will not treat you different because of your:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage or civil partnership
- pregnancy or maternity leave
- race including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

We do not tolerate discrimination, harassment or intimidation against any person or group of people. We will take action against anyone responsible for this behaviour.



All tenants with assured tenancy agreements

Right to assign

If you have an assured tenancy, you may have the right to assign it to another person.

You can assign your tenancy:

- as part of a mutual exchange
- to someone who qualifies as your successor if you die

A court can also order you to assign your tenancy.



There are situations where we can stop your tenancy going to the person you assign your tenancy to, see

www.gentoogroup.com/tenant-rights

Right to Shared Ownership

Tenants living in new rented homes can buy a share of their property through Right to Shared Ownership. You must live in a home we built as part of the Affordable Homes Programme 2021 to 2026. Find more about Shared Ownership at

www.gentoogroup.com/shared-ownership

Tenants with assured non-transferring tenancy agreements

These rights are for people who became tenants after 27 March 2001.

Right to succeed

If a tenant dies, their tenancy may be passed on to someone who lived with them immediately before their death. A successor could be:

- their civil partner, husband or wife
- someone who lived with them as a civil partner, husband or wife
- a member of their family who has documents that prove they lived with the original tenant for at least 12 months before they died

If the tenancy is part of an extra care scheme, there is no right to succeed for a family member or friend.

Right to exchange

If you want to move home, you can swap with another Gentoo tenant or a tenant from a different registered provider or local council. If the tenancy is part of an extra care scheme, there is no right to exchange. Find more about swapping your home at

www.gentoogroup.com/swapping-your-home

Right to acquire

The right to acquire gives you the chance to buy your rented home at a discount. We will tell you if you can buy your home when you apply. You must have lived in a social rent property for at least 3 years. Time in a private rent or market rent property does not qualify you for the right to acquire.

How much your home is discounted depends on its location. For properties in Tyne and Wear, the discount is £9,000.

If you apply to buy your home, we will complete repairs that are legally required, but we will not improve your home by doing things like replacing your roof, kitchen, bathroom or windows. This is because these would change the value of your home.



Tenants with assured transferring tenancy agreements

These rights are for people who became tenants before 27 March 2001 and have been tenants continuously ever since.

Preserved right to buy

The right to buy gives you the chance to buy your rented home at a discount. How much your home is discounted depends on how long you have been a tenant, if your home is a house or a flat, its age and condition.

If you apply to buy your home, we will complete repairs that are legally required, but we will not improve your home by doing things like replacing your roof, kitchen, bathroom or windows. This is because these would change the value of your home.

Right to succeed

We do not take account of tenancies that were succeeded before 27 March 2001. Otherwise, the rules are the same as those for assured non-transferring tenancies.

Right to compensation for improvements

If you improve your home, you may be able to claim compensation when you leave. This depends on your tenancy agreement and if you had our written permission to improve your home.

You cannot claim compensation for all the changes you make to your home. We will pay you an amount based on how much the improvement is worth when you leave.

Right to repair

This scheme gives you the right to get urgent and minor repairs fixed quickly where whatever is damaged will affect your health, safety or security.

The repairs must:

- cost less than £250
- be urgent and minor
- be qualifying repairs

If we do not complete the work by an agreed date, you can ask us to give the work to another contractor. If the second contractor does not complete the work by your new date, we may compensate you £10, plus £2 a day for every day we do not complete the repair. The most we will compensate you is £50.

The right to repair does not apply when:

- you have any outstanding debts to us
- you cancel the repair
- you do not give us reasonable access to inspect or complete the repair
- you employ your own contractor to complete the work and send us their bill
- the repair is not to your home
- the contractor could not complete the work because of bad weather or unavailable parts

Repairs

Our repairs service is available to all tenants so we can make you feel safe and secure in your home and prevent further damage. We prioritise repairs for vulnerable tenants, and repairs that would affect your health, safety and wellbeing.

Reporting a repair

To report a repair, you can:

- call **0191 525 5000** and select option 2
- use My Gentoo, see **page 7**
- send us a message on Facebook or Twitter with your address and repair details

If you live in a building with communal areas and facilities, you can report repairs for them too.

When you report a repair

We will need to know:

- your name, address and telephone
- as much information as possible about the repair
- if there is an immediate risk to your health or damage to your home
- when you are available
- anything about your personal circumstances that would help, like you have hearing loss

We will:

- give you a date and time slot for the appointment
- send a text to your mobile to confirm the appointment date and time slot

Reminder text messages

Where possible, we will send text reminders 7 days before your appointment and at 9am the day before.

On the day of the appointment

We will call you to let you know we are on our way.

Always ask to see a tradesperson's identification. Call us on **0191 525 5000** and select option 2 if you would like to confirm someone's identity.

You must:

- clean and clear the area around the repair as much as possible
- have someone aged 18 or over at your home for your appointment
- keep any pets out of the way and under control
- not smoke inside your home while we are completing a repair

Cancelling or rearranging a repair appointment

You cannot cancel your gas or electrical safety checks, but you can rearrange them.

If your repair appointment is in less than 24 hours, call **0191 525 5000** and select option 2.

If your repair appointment is in more than 24 hours, you can:

- fill in the cancel or rearrange your repair appointment form on our website
- call **0191 525 5000** and select option 2
- send us a message on Facebook or Twitter with your name, address, contact number and appointment date



Waiting times

Emergency repairs

These repairs are when there is an immediate risk to your health and safety or damage to your home if we do not repair them quickly. We aim to complete these repairs within 24 hours.

Find out more at

www.gentoogroup.com/emergency-repairs

Urgent repairs

These repairs are not emergencies but will prevent health and safety risks, serious inconvenience, and further damage to your home. We aim to complete these within 7 days.

Routine repairs

These repairs do not risk your health or safety, or further damage to your home. We aim to complete these within 28 days.

Planned repairs

These are larger repairs we complete in a planned way and there is no risk to you or your home. We aim to complete these within 180 days.

We may need time to order materials or organise different tradespeople. It may include brickwork, guttering, roofing, or replacing your kitchen or bathroom.

Repairs we are responsible for

General housekeeping

It is our responsibility to:

- make sure your home is secure, in a good condition and protected against the weather
- repair shared or communal areas
- give you advice about how to prevent damp and condensation

Heating

It is our responsibility to:

- complete a gas safety check once a year, see [page 29](#)
- repair your boiler when you have no heating or hot water

There are checks you can do before you report a repair if your boiler, heating or hot water has stopped working, see [page 21](#).

Plumbing

It is our responsibility to clear blockages that you cannot clear yourself.

Drains

It is our responsibility to provide you with a gully and external drain covers.

A gully is outside and has a grating or grid to stop leaves, litter and larger objects from getting into the sewer.

Electrical

It is our responsibility to:

- complete an electrical safety check every 5 years, see [page 30](#)
- replace lightbulbs and fluorescent tubes in encased light fittings and outside light fittings
- test smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors once a year

Plastering

It is our responsibility to:

- patch walls and ceilings
- skim walls and ceilings where there is a structural problem
- grout tiles to repair damage caused by general wear and tear

Joinery

It is our responsibility to:

- maintain and repair all fire doors
- repair or replace doors damaged by general wear and tear, including letterboxes
- complete general repairs to your kitchen caused by wear and tear
- repair existing fencing, bolts and catches

Repairs that you are responsible for

As your landlord, we are responsible for making sure your home is safe and secure. You are responsible for general repairs and maintaining your home.

General housekeeping

It is your responsibility to:

- decorate and clean your home and windows, including refreshing nicotine-stained walls
- supply and fit floor coverings
- take care of your garden and cut the grass
- maintain and repair any fixture, fitting or appliance you or a previous tenant installed, unless we agree to do it
- install, maintain and replace clothes posts, washing lines and rotary dryers
- maintain your garden shed
- maintain doorbells, door knockers, door numbers and door stoppers
- deal with any pests in your home

If you live in a sheltered housing or extra care scheme and your doorbell is hardwired to your electricity, we will repair it.

Pests include rats, ants and wasps. If your home needs a major repair, we may need to do this repair before you can do any pest control work.

Find out more about pest control on [page 39](#).

Keys

It is your responsibility to

- replace lost keys, fobs or locks when you are locked outside your house
- get extra keys for your home

Heating

It is your responsibility to:

- remove radiators when you decorate
- check and bleed your radiators
- get our permission before you get a smart meter or change any woodwork, boxing in and cupboards around meters

It is your responsibility to use a qualified tradesperson to fit:

- pipework for washing machines and dishwashers
- vents for tumble driers

Plumbing

It is your responsibility to:

- clear small blockages from basins, baths, sinks and toilets
- replace plugs and chains to basins, baths and sinks
- replace toilet seats
- provide a shower curtain

Drains

It is your responsibility to keep your gully clear of leaves and rubbish.

A gully is outside and has a grating or grid to stop leaves, litter and larger objects from getting into the sewer.

Electrical

It is your responsibility to:

- supply and repair aerials, satellite dishes and telephones, except in communal areas
- replace lightbulbs and fluorescent tubes on standard light fittings
- press the button on smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors once a week to make sure it works

Installing and maintaining appliances

It is your responsibility to use a Gas Safe Registered tradesperson to:

- service gas cooking appliances you own
- install pipework for gas cookers
- fit the gas bayonet on gas appliances

You must get our permission before you get any pipework installed or gas bayonets fitted.

Plastering

It is your responsibility to:

- plaster small cracks and small holes on internal walls or ceilings
- grout tiles to repair damage caused by mould and mildew

Joinery

It is your responsibility to:

- tighten screws, handles and hinges on kitchen cupboards and doors
- get our permission to alter kitchen units for things like cookers, fridges and freezers
- adjust doors if you fit new carpets, except fire doors

Find out more about fire doors on [page 32](#).



Repairs we will charge you for

Our repairs service is part of your tenancy agreement, but we do charge for some repairs.

We will tell you if you must pay for a repair when you report it, how much it will cost and if you must pay in advance.

We will charge you for repairs if the damage is:

- from neglect or misuse
- on purpose
- because of a lack of care
- repetitive and caused by you, other householder members or visitors

We will also charge you if you:

- damage or lose your keys or fobs
- damage locks
- damage something you changed in your home without our permission
- leave rubbish, furniture, or personal belongings at the end of your tenancy
- report an emergency repair out of working hours and it is not an emergency

We recommend you get home contents insurance to cover any accidental damage.

Find out more about the home insurance policy we offer to tenants on [page 47](#).



No heating or hot water

A warm home helps reduce illness and prevent damp.

There are checks you can do to fix your heating and hot water before you report a repair. If you complete these checks and need to report a repair, see [page 21](#).

Check your electricity supply

Make sure your boiler is turned on at the wall. If it is on and displays an error code or there is a flashing light, press the reset button.

If nothing electrical in your home is working, check outside for signs of a power cut, like streetlights not working.

If it is a power cut, call [105](#).

Check your gas supply

Switch on another gas appliance, like a gas cooker, to make sure your home's gas supply is working.

If you have a prepayment meter, make sure you have enough credit.

Check your thermostat

Check its display to see if there is a battery icon. If there is, it means your thermostat needs new batteries.

Replace the batteries and press the reset button to restart the thermostat.

If the batteries are OK, set the thermostat to be above the current temperature of the room. This may cause your boiler and heating to start working.

Check your boiler's pressure

Make sure your boiler's pressure gauge is between 1 and 1.5 bar. If it is lower than 1 bar or in the red, your boiler pressure is too low.

After you have used your boiler and it has cooled down, check the pressure has stayed above 1 bar. If it is below 1 bar or if you regularly need to increase your boiler's pressure:

Check your radiators

When your boiler is running, check the temperature at the top and bottom of your radiators. If the top part of your radiator is colder than the bottom half, the radiator has trapped air in it. If more than one radiator is cold, we need to check your entire heating system.

To remove trapped air and make your radiators more efficient, you need to bleed your radiators. To bleed a radiator, you need a radiator key and a dry cloth.

Find out more at www.gentoogroup.com/no-heating-or-hot-water

Dealing with damp and mould

Damp happens when water comes to your home from outside or because of condensation. Damp can damage your home and cause mould.

If you have damp or mould in your home

Call **0191 525 5500**. The line is open Monday to Thursday, from 8:30am to 5pm, and Friday, from 8:30am to 12:30pm.

Where needed, we will arrange a damp inspection in your home. During the inspection, we will:

- assess the structure of the property
- check the level of humidity
- check your extractor fans work
- take photographs and samples of any issues we find

If we find faults or damage during a damp inspection, we will contact you to arrange a repair appointment.

Causes of damp

Faults and damage

Faults and damage can cause rising and penetrating damp.

Rising damp is water rising from the ground into your home. It only affects basements and ground floor rooms.

Usually, it will leave a mark on the wall and rise no more than 30cm to 60cm (1 foot to 2 feet) above ground.

Penetrating damp is water getting from the outside to the inside of your home. It affects external walls or ceilings. Usually, it appears as a patch that looks and feels damp.

Faults and damage include damaged, blocked, missing or leaking:

- bath, shower and sink seals
- brickwork, including pointing between bricks
- doors and windows
- drains
- ground, depending on the ground level and condition of the damp proof course
- gullies, which are outside and has a grating or grid to stop leaves, litter and larger objects from getting into the sewer
- gutters and downpipes
- roof tiles
- water and waste pipes

Rising and penetrating damp does not usually cause mould. The damp areas are usually too wet or contain salts or chemicals that stop black mould from growing.

We are responsible for repairing any faults and damage that cause damp.

Condensation

Condensation is the most common cause of damp. It happens when moist air inside a home touches a cold surface. The water drops can soak into paintwork, wallpaper, woodwork or plastered surfaces and make windows, walls and ceilings appear wet.

It also causes mould to grow.

Moist air in one part of your home can cause condensation in another part of your home. The moist air will move to colder parts of your home.

Condensation is worse from September to April when it is colder and does not depend on whether it is wet or dry outside. You usually find it:

- in corners of rooms
- on north-facing walls
- in areas with little or no air circulation, like cupboards or behind furniture

Everything you do adds moisture to the air, including:

- cleaning and washing up
- cooking and boiling a kettle
- drying clothes indoors
- using the bath and shower

You are responsible for reducing condensation in your home and cleaning and removing mould.

Reducing condensation in your home

Keep your home warm

A consistent warm temperature of 15°C to 16°C keeps surfaces warm and makes it more difficult for condensation to form.

To help keep your home warm, you can also:

- tuck long curtains behind radiators
- keep doors closed to stop any draughts
- open your blinds and curtains when the sun is shining to allow the natural sunlight to warm up a room

Avoid using portable heaters that use oil, paraffin or gas bottles.

Wipe away excess moisture

Wipe moisture off windows and windowsills every morning.

Stop moist air reaching other rooms

Close internal doors during the night and when you use your kitchen or bathroom.

Keep your loft hatch closed when you are not using your loft.

Produce less moist air

You can:

- cover pans when cooking
- dry clothes outside or in your bathroom with the door closed and window open or extractor fan on
- put cold water in the bath before the hot water to reduce the steam
- switch off a kettle as soon as the water has boiled
- vent tumble dryers outside

Avoid:

- drying clothes on radiators
- using portable heaters that use oil, paraffin or gas bottles

A dehumidifier will help reduce moist air.

Help air to circulate and leave your home

To help air circulate, you can:

- use ceiling fans
- leave space between the back of furniture and walls
- put furniture near internal walls instead of external walls or against or near radiators
- open cupboard doors, wardrobe doors and drawers to let out trapped air

To help air leave your home, you can use extractor fans and open:

- bathroom windows when using the bath or shower
- bedroom windows in the morning
- curtains and blinds
- kitchen windows when cooking
- windows on opposite sides of your home

Never block air bricks or vents in walls, doors and windows.

Cleaning and clearing mould

Wipe down the area with a fungicidal wash that has a Health and Safety Executive approval number. You can buy fungicidal wash from supermarkets and DIY shops.

Never use undiluted bleach to clean walls or ceilings with mould. This can be dangerous and may encourage mould to grow in the future.

If you need to redecorate, use an oil-based sealer or primer and fungicidal paint.

Once you have removed any mould, follow the different ways to reduce condensation in your home to stop the mould from growing back.

Water leaks, blocked pipes and drains

Water leaks and blocked drains can cause a lot of damage to your home and may affect your neighbours' homes too.

Water leaks

To help prevent leaks:

- use a qualified tradesperson to install pipework for washing machines, dishwashers and tumble driers
- find out where your stop tap is and how to turn it off, see [page 2](#)

Blocked pipes and drains

To help keep pipes and drains clear:

- only flush toilet paper down the toilet
- put sanitary products, nappies, incontinence pads and bandages in the bin
- put grease, cooking fat and oil in the bin, not the sink
- clean plugs, plugholes and drain holes regularly but avoid using acid-based cleaning products

Blocked and broken drains are one of the major causes of pest problems, see [page 39](#).

Reporting a water leak, blocked pipe or drain

If a public sewer is blocked, call Northumbrian Water on **0345 717 1100**.

Emergency repairs include:

- blocked toilets and it is the only one in your home
- water leaks you cannot stop
- a blocked gully

A gully is outside and has a grating or grid to stop leaves, litter and larger objects from getting into the sewer.

You can report an emergency repair 24 hours a day by calling **0191 525 5000** and selecting option 2.

For other repairs:

- use My Gentoo to report a repair, see [page 7](#)
- call **0191 525 5000** and select option 2 between 8:30am and 5pm, Monday to Friday



Paying your rent and other charges

Rent

You can pay your rent every week. Or you can pay in advance every 2 weeks, 4 weeks, or month.

Reference number

You will need your 9-digit reference number from your rent payment card or rent statement.

Set up a Direct Debit

To set up a Direct Debit, call our Income Services Team on **0191 525 2765**.

They are available Monday to Thursday, 8:30am to 5pm, and Friday, 8:30am to 12:30pm.

Pay online

This is through our online payment system at **www.gentoogroup.com/pay-online**

Pay by phone

Call our telephone payments service on **0161 621 2987**, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Use your rent payment card

You can use your rent payment card and pay in cash at any Post Office, PayPoint or where you see the allpay logo.



You can also use the iPhone or Android allpay app.

Set up a standing order or pay by bank transfer

Our bank details are:

- Bank name: NatWest
- Account number: 67500048
- Sort code: 55 61 11

Use your 9-digit reference number from your rent payment card or rent statement as your payment reference.

Service charges

Service charges are part of your rent. There is a list of charges in your tenancy agreement and you get a service charge statement every year.

Service charges include adapting, cleaning, decorating, inspecting and maintaining:

- communal areas and equipment, like automatic opening vents, bin chutes, emergency lighting, and furniture
- fire alarms and fire doors
- janitors and scheme managers
- land around your home
- lifts
- safety and security measures, like CCTV, door entry systems and personal fall protection system
- specialist equipment in your home, like a stairlift



If you are unable to pay your rent or other charges

Call **0191 525 5000** and select option 4 and we will work with you to create a plan to help you pay your rent at a rate you can afford.

They may also refer you to our Money Matters Team.

Whatever your financial situation, our Money Matters Team will work with you to give you all the support and advice you need.

Find out more about how we can help you manage your money on **page 52**.

Discretionary Housing Payment

Sunderland City Council provide a Discretionary Housing Payment to help with rent or housing costs.

You can apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment if you already get Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit. Find out more at

www.sunderland.gov.uk/dhp

Council Tax Support

Sunderland City Council also provide Council Tax Support to help with Council Tax costs. Find out more at

www.sunderland.gov.uk/benefitclaim



Home contents insurance

You will need your 9-digit reference number from your contents insurance payment card.

You can pay your home contents insurance the same ways that you can pay your rent.

But if you do not know your reference number or want to set up a Direct Debit, call our Tenants Insurance Team on **0191 525 5678**. For more about home contents insurance, see **page 47**.



Safety in your home

Gas safety

Gas leaks

If you can smell gas or think you have a gas leak in your home:

- open all your doors and windows
- switch off your gas supply by turning a handle next to your gas meter so it is 90 degrees to the gas pipe
- call Northern Gas Networks on **0800 111 999** at once and they will visit your home within 2 hours
- put out all flames, including cigarettes and candles
- do not use electric switches or mobile phones to avoid any sparks

If the smell of gas is strong, leave your home at once.

If you smell gas outside your home, shut all windows and doors to stop the fumes getting inside.

Northern Gas Networks may also ask:

- how long you have been able to smell gas
- if the smell is inside or outside your home
- where your gas meter is
- if you can still smell gas after you turn the gas off
- if anyone else is affected by the smell

Gas safety checks

We must complete a gas safety check once a year for all homes with a gas meter or gas pipework. This helps keep you, your family and your neighbours safe from gas and carbon monoxide leaks.

If you stop us from completing your check, you may lose the right to use our repairs service.

You cannot cancel your yearly gas safety check, but you can rearrange it. If you think a safety check is overdue or need to rearrange it, call us at once on **0800 5877 809**.

We will send you a letter to let you know when we are coming to complete your check. There must be someone aged 18 or over at your home for this appointment.

You can view the gas safety record for your home within 28 days of a gas safety check. We no longer print copies so you can only view it online at **<https://tenancydocuments.gentoogroup.com>**

If you cannot view your gas safety record, call **0800 5877 809**.

After your gas safety check, we may contact you to arrange an appointment to inspect the work completed during your safety check.

This appointment is not legally required, but we appreciate everyone who is able to give us access to their home.

Electrical testing

We check all electrical wiring before you move into your home.

Keeping your electrics safe

It is your responsibility to make sure your own electrical devices and appliances are safe. Call **0191 525 5000** and select option 2 if:

- your plug sockets are not working
- your electricity is not working
- you have any issues or concerns with any of your electrics

Electrical safety check

We are legally required to repair the electrical installation in your home. To help us do this, we aim to check it at least once every 5 years.

If you stop us from completing your check, you may lose the right to use our repairs service.

You cannot cancel your electrical safety check, but you can rearrange it. If you think a safety check is overdue or need to rearrange it, call us at once on **0191 525 5000** and select option 2.

We will send you a letter with the date for your electrical safety check appointment. There must be someone aged 18 or over at your home for this appointment. The test can take 4 hours to complete.

You must make sure we can access all electrical equipment during the appointment.

We will:

- switch off all electrical equipment before the test
- switch off your electricity for most of the test
- need access to all electrical equipment, including the fuse board, switches and sockets
- test electrical wiring, plug sockets and lights

After your electrical safety check, we may contact you to arrange an appointment to inspect the work completed during your safety check.

This appointment is not legally required, but we appreciate everyone who is able to give us access to their home.

Carbon monoxide

Carbon monoxide is a poisonous gas you cannot see, taste or smell. To help keep you safe, we check your gas meter and pipework once a year.

If you think there is carbon monoxide in your home, call us at once on **0191 525 5000** and select option 2.

We will ask you to turn off your gas supply. This is usually a handle under your boiler, but we will guide you through it if you are not sure.

We will tell Northern Gas Networks who will visit your home within 2 hours.

Checks to see if carbon monoxide is in your home

Check to see if:

- gas flames burn orange and yellow instead of blue
- there are soot stains on or near appliances
- it is difficult to light your fire
- you have a blocked chimney
- your boiler's pilot light keeps blowing out
- there is more condensation than usual in your home

There are physical signs of carbon monoxide that are like other illnesses. These are:

- being out of breath
- chest and stomach pains
- feeling tired and weak
- headaches
- sickness
- sight problems

How carbon monoxide can get in your home

Carbon monoxide can get into your home through a:

- blocked chimney
- incorrectly installed fuel appliance
- fuel appliance that is in a poor condition



Fire safety

We want you to feel safe in your home and know what to do if there is a fire. For more information about anything to do with fire safety, email tenantfiresafety@gentoogroup.com

Fire doors

We use fire doors to prevent fire spreading from one area to another.

Your front door is a fire door if you live in a flat in a high-rise building, low-rise building, sheltered housing scheme or extra care scheme.

What we are responsible for

We are responsible for maintaining and repairing all fire doors.

We will inspect fire doors, including your front door, at least once a year. It is important that you give us access to your flat so we can check the door will work correctly in a fire.

What you are responsible for

You must keep your front door closed when you are not using it, and never wedge or hold it open in any way.

You must never alter or interfere with the self-closing device on your door.

If a fire door is damaged, you must report a repair immediately, see [page 15](#).

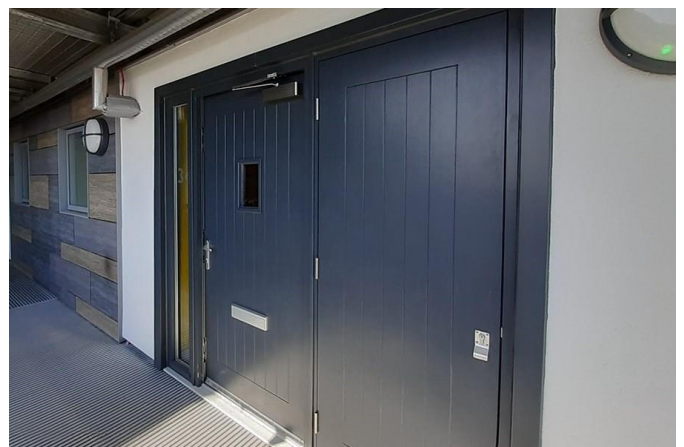
You must never replace or change a fire door.

Changes include:

- adjusting the bottom, top or sides
- painting or adding vinyl to the door
- removing or adjusting door closers
- repairing, changing or adding locks
- changing the letterbox
- decorating the door, like hanging wreathes or festive decorations
- screwing anything into the door, including door knockers, door numbers, handles, chains and bolts

If you replace or change a fire door, we may charge you to complete any repairs.

You should close all doors in your property at night and when there is nobody in the property.



Fires in your home or building

If there is a fire in your home or building, follow the guidance on what you should do for the type of home and building you live in. Never try to put out the fire yourself or use a lift.

If you or a member of your household would need help to get to a safe place, call **0191 525 5000** and select option 4 to let us know.

Flats connected to our Concierge Service

Our Concierge Service will contact you when the fire alarm goes off in your flat.

If there is no fire, they will cancel the alarm. If there is a fire or no response from your flat after 90 seconds, they will call the fire and rescue service.

Fires in your home

If there is a fire in your home, evacuate your home and building immediately.

Fires in purpose-built buildings that have a communal building entrance or communal staircase

If you consider it to be safe, you can stay in your flat and wait for instructions from the fire and rescue service.

If you do not consider it to be safe, evacuate your home and building as soon as possible.

This type of flat includes those in:

- sheltered housing and extra care schemes
- high-rise buildings at least 18 metres or 7 storeys tall
- low-rise buildings less than 18 metres or 7 storeys tall, including 2-storey flats or maisonettes

Fires in converted buildings

If there is a fire in your building, evacuate your home and building when you hear the fire alarm, or the fire and rescue service tells you to.

Evacuating your home and building

You must:

- get out of your home
- close all doors
- use the nearest exit to get to a safe place
- dial **999**, explain what has happened, where you are, and your building's address
- stay in the safe place until someone lets you know it is fine to go back inside

If the fire is in a communal area that you are in:

- use the nearest exit to get to a safe place
- dial **999**, explain what has happened, where you are, and your building's address

Fire risk assessments

We complete fire risk assessments in our 25 high-rise buildings every year or after any major changes.

We also complete regular assessments in our other communal buildings, including low-rise buildings, sheltered housing and extra care schemes, and buildings converted into flats.

Other fire safety checks

We also check essential firefighting equipment in our 25 high-rise buildings every month. This includes:

- automatic doors that are linked to the fire alarm
- dry risers
- fire detection and alarm systems
- lifts
- smoke control systems
- sprinkler systems where fitted

Fire alarms and smoke detectors

All our properties have a smoke detector fitted. All our high-rise buildings and sheltered housing and extra care schemes have a communal fire alarm that we test every week.

If you need help to know when there is a fire alarm

If you or a member of your household needs help to know when there is a fire alarm, call **0191 525 5000** and select option 4. We will arrange a visit for you with our Fire Safety Team to look at ways we can adapt your home.

Test your smoke detector once a week

Testing your smoke detector is important for your safety. The smoke detector is an early warning system that can give you enough time to get out of your home if there is a fire.

Where possible, press and hold the test button for 3 seconds until you hear an alarm. This means the detector is working. The detector will sound for several seconds and stop automatically.

Never remove the batteries from your smoke detector

Call **0191 525 5000** and select option 2 to report a repair if the alarm is quiet or it beeps constantly or occasionally.

We will replace your smoke detector when you need a new one.

Smoke detector tests that we do

We will test your smoke detector once a year to make sure it is still up to date and working as well as it can.

We will test your smoke detector when we do our legally required yearly gas safety check or we will arrange a separate safety check.

False alarms

A false alarm is when the fire alarm sounds but there is no fire.

To avoid false alarms, you can:

- put out all smoking materials before you put them in your bin
- regularly clean ashtrays
- put out candles and incense at night and before you leave a room, so you never leave them unattended

- avoid using aerosols or appliances like hair straighteners and hair dryers next to smoke detectors
- turn on your extractor fan or open your kitchen window when you cook and if you burn any food
- turn on your extractor fan or open your bathroom window when you use the bath or shower

You can call **0191 525 5000** to report a false alarm.

Preventing fires

Tips on how to prevent fires in your home and building.

Cooking

Always:

- keep tea towels and clothes away from your cooker and hob
- supervise children in the kitchen
- keep matches and cookware on hobs out of the reach of children
- clean a toaster before you use it
- keep toasters away from curtains and kitchen rolls
- check your food is dry before putting it in hot oil
- use a thermostat-controlled electric deep fat fryer instead of a chip pan because they cannot overheat
- use microwave-safe cookware in your microwave and avoid metal and foil, plastic containers and bags, and cardboard lined with wax or plastic
- check you have switched off your cooker and other appliances when you finish cooking

If you need to leave the kitchen while you are cooking, to reduce the risk of a fire turn your oven, grill and hob off or down.

If oil starts to give off smoke, turn off the heat and leave it to cool down.

If a pan catches fire, you can turn off the heat if it is safe. You should try to:

- close your kitchen door
- get out of your home
- get to a safe place
- dial 999, explain what has happened, where you are, and your building's address

Never:

- cook if you have been drinking alcohol or taking drugs
- try to put out the fire yourself
- move the pan
- throw water over the pan

Electrics

Always:

- follow manufacturers' instructions when you use electrical appliances
- register all your electrical items so you can find out about any problems
- check if an appliance has any product recalls or alerts
- keep electrical leads, appliances and devices away from water
- check for loose wiring and faults with plugs, sockets, fuses and switches, this includes scorch marks and lights that flicker
- unplug appliances and devices when you are not using them, when they are fully charged, and when you go to bed or leave the house
- use the adapter or charger that comes with an appliance or device, and get the same make and model when you need a replacement

Never:

- overload electric sockets, extension leads, adapters or chargers
- plug an appliance that uses a lot of electricity into an extension lead or adapter, like a washing machine, fridge freezer, or electric heater
- cover appliances, devices, adapters or chargers, including leaving them on your bed

If you have any concerns about the electrics in your home or have broken sockets or switches, report a repair immediately, see [page 15](#).

Portable heaters

Always put heaters somewhere:

- you will not accidentally walk into them or knock them over
- away from curtains and furniture and things that could catch fire

Never use heaters to dry clothes, or sit too close to a heater because you could burn yourself.

Electric blankets

Always:

- unplug an electric blanket before you get into bed unless it has thermostatic controls that mean it is safe to use all night
- store electric blankets flat, rolled up or loosely folded
- check the blanket for signs of wear and tear

Never buy secondhand electric blankets.

Balconies

If your home has a balcony, never do anything on your balcony that could cause a fire. This includes:

- smoking
- using a barbecue or fire pit
- storing things that could catch fire, like wood, gas bottles and papers
- adapting your balcony
- installing screens that could catch fire

If you have any questions or concerns about your balcony, call **0191 525 5000** and select option 4.

Storing waste and other items

Always keep:

- your rubbish bin at least 1 metre away from the building
- communal areas clear and tidy and not use them to store items like mobility scooters, bicycles and furniture

Never store rubbish bins and other waste:

- in electric meter cupboards
- on landings
- against your building
- under windows
- beside ventilation grilles
- in front of entrances and exits

You can use Sunderland City Council's bulky waste collection service or the free household waste and recycling centres in Pallion and Wrekenton.

Never store personal items in electric meter cupboards. Because it is a fire hazard, we may remove and destroy them at any time.

Smoking

Always:

- put out all smoking materials when you have finished with them and before you put them in your bin
- use a proper ashtray that will not tip over and is made of something that will not burn, not something that could catch fire like a paper bag

- use child-resistant matches and lighters
- keep other types of match and lighter out of the reach of children

It is safer to smoke outdoors.

Never:

- smoke in bed
- smoke illegally made cigarettes
- leave a lit cigarette, cigar or pipe unattended because it could fall over and start a fire
- discard of smoking materials outside of building entrances

Candles and incense

Be careful with candles or incense and take extra care if you have been drinking alcohol or taking drugs or medicine.

Always put candles and incense somewhere:

- you will not accidentally walk into them or knock them over
- away from curtains and furniture and things that could catch fire

Always:

- put out candles and incense at night and before you leave a room
- use child-resistant matches and lighters
- keep other types of match and lighter out of the reach of children

Never leave children alone with candles and incense.

Water hygiene

There is a risk of bacteria, like Legionella, growing in your water system but there are things you can do to reduce the risk.

Water temperature

The risk of Legionella bacteria growing increases in water systems between 20°C and 50°C. Below 20°C, the bacteria is inactive and stops growing. Above 50°C, it struggles to survive. Water above 50°C is a scalding risk.

So, keep your cold water cold and keep your hot water hot.

Taps and showerheads

Regularly clean and descale limescale from taps and showerheads.

Infrequently used outlets

An infrequently used outlet is any water outlet that nobody has used for 7 days.

If you have been away from your home for 7 days or more:

- run taps for about 5 minutes at a low flow to prevent creating water spray
- remove shower heads and run at a high temperature for about 2 minutes
- close toilet lids and flush toilet twice to circulate fresh water through the system
- heat your hot water tank to above 60°C before you use it, if you switched it off

If you are going to be away from your home for 7 days or more and have a wet and dry toilet, like a Closomat, switch it off at the wall. This removes warm water from the cistern. When you return to your home, close the toilet lid and flush twice.

If you have a water butt, you will need to regularly drain and empty it to prevent water from becoming stagnant.

People at higher risk

Bacteria can affect everyone, but certain groups of people are at higher risk, including people:

- over 50
- with existing conditions that affect their breathing or their heart
- being treated for cancer
- with diabetes or kidney disease
- with a weakened immune system

Water hygiene risk assessment

We will complete a domestic water hygiene risk assessment when needed.

If we find anything that needs repairing during the assessment, we will arrange a repair appointment with you.

Pest control

Pests in your home include rats, ants and wasps. Sunderland City Council has a pest control service that is free.

Booking a pest control appointment

If you have pests inside or outside of your home, you can call **0191 520 5550** or book a pest control appointment online at

www.sunderland.gov.uk/article/15073

If your home needs a major repair, the council will tell us. We may need to do this repair before the council can do any pest control work.

Blocked and broken drains are one of the major causes of pest problems. Find out how to help keep pipes and drains clear at **www.gentoogroup.com/water-leaks-blocked-pipes-drains**



Asbestos

Asbestos can be dangerous if moved or damaged. You must get our permission before you improve or adapt your home.

Wherever we find asbestos, we check its condition. If it is in a good condition, we either it in place or remove it. If it is in a poor condition or could cause harm, we remove it. We have asbestos surveys for all our communal areas, and we recheck these once a year.

If we have an asbestos survey for your home, we will give you a copy when you move in. We may arrange an asbestos survey for your home while you live there to check it is safe for you to improve or adapt your home.

If you think you have moved or damaged asbestos, leave your home and do not return until it is safe. Call **0191 525 5000** and select option 2 to report a repair.

If you think you have found asbestos, call our Asbestos Team on **0191 525 2752**. We will arrange for an asbestos surveyor to visit your home.



Windows and balconies

To keep you, your family and your neighbours safe, never:

- drop or throw things off your balcony
- climb over your balcony railing
- hang things over your balcony railing
- drop or throw things out of your windows
- lean or climb out your windows
- adjust or remove window restrictors or other safety devices
- leave windows open when it is windy

If you have a window that needs to be repaired, report it at once and keep the window closed until we repair it.

Find out more about how to prevent fires on your balcony on **page 36**.

Flood awareness

All properties have some level of risk in terms of exposure to flooding, which is why it is so important to always be prepared to help protect your home, family and possessions in such an event.

Flooding can occur when the volume of rainfall exceeds the capacity of drainage systems (known as surface water flooding) or when the water level of a river, lake or stream rises and overflows onto the neighbouring land (known as fluvial or river water flooding).

To help you remain prepared for any potential flooding, below are four key things you can do.

1. Find out the flood risk in your area

You can use the following link to find out the risk of flooding in your area:

www.gov.uk/check-long-term-flood-risk

2. Sign up for flood warnings

If you live in an area with a higher risk of flooding from rivers, you can sign up to receive official flood warnings at:

www.gov.uk/sign-up-for-flood-warnings

If you live in an area with a higher risk of flooding from surface water or flash flooding, there is no dedicated alert system. You can, however, sign up to the Met Office weather warnings which will warn you of heavy rain spells that often lead to surface water flooding. You can do this by using the following link:

[www.metoffice.gov.uk/ weather/ warnings-and-advice/uk-warnings](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/warnings-and-advice/uk-warnings)



3. Notify us

If you think you are at immediate risk of flooding or have suffered from flood damage, please contact Gentoo on 0191 525 5000.

We provide support through the provision of items such as sandbags and work with other civic agencies such as Sunderland City Council to ensure you receive all the support that is available to you.

In the event of flooding, we will also complete a flood reliance survey to your property to limit your risk of exposure to and damage from future floods.

Sunderland City Council also provide guidance in terms of who to contact in the event of a flood. This can be found using the following link:

www.sunderland.gov.uk/article/17439/Report-flooding-blockages-and-water-pollution

4. Plan and prepare

If you live in an area with a higher risk of flooding it is important to be prepared. There is a wide range of useful guidance contained in the links below:

<https://check-for-flooding.service.gov.uk/plan-ahead-for-flooding>

<https://www.sunderland.gov.uk/article/17438/Preparing-for-flooding>

<https://thefloodhub.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Household-flood-planning-guide.pdf>



Maintaining and living in your home

Being a good neighbour

People have different lifestyles. When you live alongside people or share a building, it is important to respect your neighbours.

Always keep noise to a reasonable level

You must be as quiet as possible between 11pm and 7:30am.

To do this you can:

- use the door handle or doorknob to close doors carefully rather than letting them slam
- fit a carpet instead of laminate, wood or ceramic flooring
- do louder tasks during the day or early evening or on a weekend, including things like DIY, vacuuming, using your washing machine, putting out rubbish or using bin chutes
- play music, TV and games at a suitable volume
- use your usual speaking voice
- keep communal areas, landings, hallways, stairs, corridors and lifts clear of rubbish and other items

If noise becomes an issue, you can speak to your neighbour about it and agree a way forward.

If that does not work or you feel uncomfortable approaching a neighbour, call **0191 525 5000** and select option 4, or speak to your Scheme Manager.

Rubbish

You are responsible for your household and recycling bins. This includes leaving the bin out to be collected by 7:30am on the correct day and taking it back in on the same day.

You are also responsible for disposing of any large items or bulky packaging. If you live in a building with a communal entrance, you must never:

- leave items in a communal area
- force items down a bin chute

Sunderland City Council has a bulky waste collection service. Find out more at **www.sunderland.gov.uk/bulky-waste**

You can also use the free household waste and recycling centres in Pallion and Wrekenton. Find out more at **www.sunderland.gov.uk/hwrc**

Decorating, improving and adapting your home

We want all tenants to feel at home in their property and encourage them to decorate. But you may need our permission before you decorate, improve or adapt your home. For the most up to date advice on permissions, please visit the [permissions section on our website](#).

Permission

You do not need our permission to do general decorating like painting, putting up wallpaper or laying carpets.

You need our permission to:

- lay laminate flooring
- replace doors, kitchen or bathroom
- alter kitchen units for things like cookers, fridges and freezers
- install new pipework for cookers
- fit gas bayonets on gas appliances
- install a shower
- change your electric fittings
- put a shed or other outbuilding in your garden
- install a water meter or smart meter
- install a satellite dish, you may need planning permission too if you live in a building with a communal entrance
- park certain types of vehicle outside your home
- build a driveway

If you improve or adapt your home, we may decide to not improve your home as part of our investment programmes. For example, if you replaced your bathroom and your property is now due to get a new bathroom, we may decide to not replace it.

If you decorate, improve or adapt your home without our permission, you have breached your tenancy agreement. We may ask you to return the property to its original condition and charge you for any work we must do, like repairs.

If you move out of a Gentoo property, we may ask you to return the property to its original condition and charge you for any work we must do, like repairs.

When you ask for our permission, include:

- details of what you want to do
- who you plan to get to do the work, this includes if you are doing the work yourself, getting someone you know or paying a tradesperson
- how long the work will take and when you expect to finish it
- if you need or already have planning permission from Sunderland City Council

If the works are likely to damage or disturb the fabric of the building, we will arrange an asbestos survey before the work starts.

Things we do not give our permission to do

We never give our permission to do things that:

- may create health and safety problems
- do not follow our policies
- do not meet our standards
- may increase how much it would cost to maintain a property
- would reduce the value of a property

This includes, but is not limited to:

- installing gas or electric fires or wood-burning stoves
- adding decking, hot tubs, ponds, pigeon lofts or chicken coops to garden areas
- installing garden lights that connect to the main power
- extending your home for things like conservatories
- converting or boarding your loft and installing loft ladders because you must not store anything in your loft
- adding door or window shutters
- fitting patio and French doors
- removing internal walls or partitioning any room
- painting UPVC doors and windows
- adding leading to windows
- fitting pet flaps in external doors
- adding polystyrene coving or tiles or ceiling cladding
- artexing any surface
- installing range cookers

- installing or replacing glass panel doors
- painting kitchen units, tiles and bathroom suites
- converting outhouses and outbuildings
- removing handrails, balustrades and banisters
- laying laminate flooring in high-rise and upper-floor flats
- installing a garage, carport or any other lean-to structures
- installing a satellite dish in a high-rise building
- replacing or changing external and internal fire doors

Find out more about fire doors on [page 32](#).



Gardens and garden sheds

Maintaining your garden and any garden sheds is part of your tenancy.

Maintaining your garden

This includes:

- cutting grass, hedges and shrubs
- pruning trees
- weeding
- keeping your garden free from any rubbish
- repairing your washing line or rotary dryer
- putting garden waste in your brown bin
- keeping your shed in a good condition

Sunderland City Council offer a garden waste collection that costs £34.50 a year. Find out more at www.sunderland.gov.uk/gardenwaste

Permission

You need our permission to get a shed or other outbuilding.

We never give permission for decking, hot tubs, ponds, and lights that connect to the main power.

Getting help to maintain your garden

Some people may need help to maintain their garden. We offer a gardening service from May to October for tenants who:

- we assess as having a vulnerability
- have no family or friends to help them with their garden

Each visit costs £20 and we tidy your garden, weed and cut your grass.

We may decide to charge you more than £20 or not maintain your garden if it is:

- too large
- overgrown with trees, hedges and shrubs
- full of rubbish or debris



Parking outside your home

You must not park any vehicle in any place or way that would endanger, damage or obstruct other people, vehicles or property.

All vehicles must be taxed, insured and fit to drive.

You can park your car:

- in a communal car park
- on a properly built driveway

A properly built driveway has a dropped kerb that allows your car to cross safely from the road to a driveway.

You can also park your car on a public street, at your own risk.

You must not park or drive your car or any other vehicle on any:

- footpath
- pavement or paved area
- grass verge or grassed area

Driveways and carports

You need to get our permission to build a driveway. You will also need to apply for planning permission for a dropped kerb from Sunderland City Council.

We never give permission for people to build a carport.

Parking other kinds of vehicle

You need to get our permission to park any vehicle that is not a car on your property or in a communal car park.

This includes caravans, vans, trailers, commercial vehicles, and horse boxes.

Repairing vehicles outside of your home

You must only complete minor repairs to vehicles outside of your home, and they should be done at a reasonable time of the day.

Repairs must not be for profit or disturb neighbours with excessive noise, smells, fumes, dirt or vibrations.

Outside your home means areas that are:

- part of your property, like driveways, backyards and gardens
- near your property, like pavements, streets and back lanes

Pets in your home

How many pets or the type of pets you can have depends on the type of property you rent from us.

If you live in a flat with a communal building entrance, you cannot have dogs, cats and other pets.

If you live in sheltered housing or an extra care scheme, you must ask your Scheme Manager for permission before you get any pet.

If you live in any other type of property, you can only keep small domestic pets, like 2 small dogs or 2 cats. You need our permission to have any other kind of pet.

You must ensure your pets are fully compliant with all legislation. This includes having a Certificate of Exemption for your pet if one is required and providing us with a copy. Failing to do so could result in a breach of your tenancy agreement.

Gentoo staff must be shown a duty of care when visiting your property. You are responsible for ensuring your pets do not impact in any way on our colleagues during their visit or are aggressive towards them. Our colleagues can request pets are kept securely in a separate room during a visit. Failure to guarantee this could result in the visit being cancelled.

For more information, call **0191 525 5000** and select option 4 to talk about pets in your home.

Insuring the contents of your home

We recommend everyone has contents insurance to protect their valuables. You can get it from any provider, but we designed our scheme with our provider specifically for tenants.

Everyone can insure contents valued from £4,000 to £40,000, but it is cheaper for people 60 years old or older. With our policy you:

- do not need a bank account
- can pay along with your rent every week, 2 weeks, 4 weeks, or month
- can change or cancel your policy for free
- can claim and this will not make your insurance more expensive
- have no excess to pay, except £100 for accidental damage and personal belonging claims

This means if you accidentally damage a TV worth £300, you pay £100 towards replacing it. Your insurance pays the other £200.

For more information call **0191 525 5678** or visit www.gentoogroup.com/hci

Taking in a lodger and subletting your home

You must not sublet your entire home, but you can ask for our permission to take in lodger, sublet part of your home or have family members or friends move in.

Permission

You must ask our permission so we can make sure your home would not become overcrowded.

To ask our permission, call **0191 525 5000** and select option 4.

If you sublet your entire home or do not ask our permission, you will breach your tenancy agreement and may lose your home.

Rent a Room Scheme

The Rent a Room Scheme lets you earn up to £7,500 a year tax-free if you let a furnished room in your home. Find out more at www.gov.uk/rent-room-in-your-home/the-rent-a-room-scheme



Lodgers, sub-tenants, family members and friends

You may want to do a background check on lodgers or sub-tenants. This may include getting a reference from their previous landlord and checking if they can afford their rent.

We recommend you have a contract with lodgers and sub-tenants that you both sign and agree to follow. If you want your lodger or sub-tenant to leave your home, you must give them a reasonable amount of notice.

Bills and benefits

We recommend that you get advice about how rental income or changing who lives with you could affect your bills and benefits.

You should contact the Department for Work and Pensions and Sunderland City Council and let them know about any income or changes to your household. If you do not tell them, you may have to pay money back or they may prosecute you for fraud.

Find out more about taking in lodgers and subletting your home and how it affects bills and benefits at www.gentoogroup.com/lodgers

Living in a flat, sheltered housing or extra care scheme

We have different types of flat across Sunderland. This information is for flats in buildings with communal entrances and hallways.

Support and care

Scheme managers are onsite Monday to Friday in all sheltered housing schemes and extra care schemes.

Onsite care teams in extra care schemes respond to your calls 24 hours a day.

If you live in a sheltered housing or extra care scheme, your flat is connected to our Concierge Service. This service is available 24 hours a day so there is always someone available to help if you need it.

If you live in a sheltered housing or extra care scheme and would like more support, Sunderland Care and Support provide Sunderland Telecare's 24-hour service. There is a cost for this service and your Scheme Manager can help you to request it.

Secure door entry systems

All flats in buildings with communal entrances have secure door entry systems you open with a key or fob. They may also have CCTV as part of the entry system.

For your security and your neighbours' security:

- close the door securely when you enter or leave
- keep your key or fob safe, you will need to pay to replace it

Never:

- give your key or fob to someone else
- let someone in who you do not know or are not expecting
- prop open the doors

The door entry systems link to our Concierge Service if you live in City Green or any building that has an intercom system.

Intercom system

The intercom is part of your secure door entry system, and it allows us to call you or send you send important messages. This could be about planned works that we are doing in their building.

The system also allows you to call our Concierge Service.

This buildings with intercoms are:

- Benedict Court
- Knightswood
- Turnbull House
- all high-rise buildings except City Green and River Quarter
- all sheltered housing and extra care schemes

The intercom system in Cherry Tree Gardens is different from the others and only allows us to call you.

Lifts

Every lift has CCTV cameras and an emergency button in case it breaks down. You can report a repair for a lift that is not working properly, see [page 15](#).

Windows and balconies

To keep you, your family and your neighbours safe, never:

- drop or throw things off your balcony
- climb over your balcony railing
- hang things over your balcony railing
- drop or throw things out of your windows
- lean or climb out your windows
- adjust or remove window restrictors or other safety devices
- leave windows open when it is windy

If you have a window that needs to be repaired, report it at once and keep the window closed until we repair it.

Smoking

It is against the law to smoke in any indoor communal areas, landings, hallways, stairs, corridors and lifts.

Noticeboards

All our high-rise buildings, low-rise buildings, sheltered housing and extra care schemes have a noticeboard with essential information for you. It includes:

- the cleaning schedule for the building's communal areas
- numbers to call to keep yourself safe, including reporting a carbon monoxide emergency or antisocial behaviour
- fire safety advice and what to do if there is a fire in your flat or building
- your Neighbourhood Co-ordinator's name and contact details

Communal areas

Janitors or cleaning contractors clean communal areas.

All tenants and leaseholders must keep communal areas clear and tidy. You must not leave items like mobility scooters, bicycles and furniture in communal areas.

If they do not block fire exits, communal areas can have:

- natural plants in a pot or vase
- non-slip, rubber-backed, edged and trimmed doormats

Scheme managers

Every scheme has a Scheme Manager who will:

- speak with you to make sure you have the support you need
- give advice and support about your tenancy
- refer you to other services for financial advice
- help you to report a repair
- maintain the health and safety and security of the building
- help you to access other services and agencies to support you in your home

Your Scheme Manager will not:

- help you with medicine
- repair something in your home
- wash, clean or shop for you

With your permission, they may access your flat in an emergency.

Get contact details for all scheme managers from www.gentoogroup.com/scheme-managers

Janitors

Our janitors make sure communal and outside areas are clean, safe and secure including:

- bin chutes and bin areas
- floors
- garden areas
- landings
- lifts
- stairwells
- windows

They do this for:

- all 25 high-rise buildings
- Benedict Court
- 32 to 105 Arklecrag

When needed, janitors report repairs, suspicious incidents or observations.

Contact details for all janitor teams.

Get contact details for all janitor teams from www.gentoogroup.com/janitors



Support services

Managing your money

Whatever your financial situation, our Money Matters Team will work with you to give you all the support and advice you need.

They offer a free service to help you make the most of your money. The service is available to all tenants and you do not have to be in debt to use it.

We can arrange a confidential, face-to-face chat.

To contact our Money Matters Team, you can:

- call **0300 123 2004**
- email **moneymatters@gentoogroup.com**
- fill in the Money Matters contact form on our website at **www.gentoogroup.com/moneymatters**

The team can help you:

- apply for benefits you are entitled to, like Housing Benefit and Universal Credit
- apply for Council Tax Support and a Discretionary Housing Payment from Sunderland City Council to help you with your rent, see **page 28**
- apply for a discount on your water bill
- budget your money
- deal with your debts and arrange repayment plans
- recover from fuel debt
- reduce your energy costs
- refer you to partners for free, impartial support and solutions



Illegal money lending

People who illegally lend money are often called loan sharks. They are illegal because they do not have the licence required by the Consumer Credit Act 1974.

Reporting a loan shark

To report a loan shark, you can:

- call **0300 555 2222**, 24 hours day
- text **07860 022 116**
- email **reportaloanshark@stoploansharks.gov.uk**
- report a loan shark online at **www.stoploansharks.co.uk**

If you would like more information or support about illegal money lending, call **0191 525 5000** and select option 4.

Identifying a loan shark

Loan sharks usually loan money without:

- asking you for ID or proof of income
- giving you any paperwork, like statements, balances or receipts

They usually charge higher the standard interest rates and may threaten you if you miss a payment or cannot pay back the money you borrowed.

You can also search the Financial Services Register to see if a company or person is authorised by the Financial Conduct Authority.



Antisocial behaviour

Antisocial behaviour is anything that causes or is likely to cause you to feel alarmed, distressed, intimidated or harassed. Any information you give us is confidential unless we are legally required to report it.

Reporting antisocial behaviour

In most cases we need you to tell us what has happened. We then investigate and gather evidence to support or disprove a claim. We deal with all claims confidentially and as a priority.

To report antisocial behaviour, you can:

- call us on **0191 525 5000** and select option 4, or **0800 028 4445**
- report it online, see www.gentoogroup.com/asb
- visit your local office, see www.gentoogroup.com/contact
- send us a message on social media, like Facebook and Twitter

If someone makes an antisocial behaviour complaint that is false or malicious, we may consider the complaint to be antisocial behaviour.

Our approach

We have specialists who give support based on the needs of the people involved.

We always try to:

- respond quickly and decisively
- investigate and get involved as early as possible to prevent the situation from getting more serious
- gather evidence to support or disprove a claim
- manage the expectations of those involved, including what we can and cannot do, and how long it might take
- offer support and reasonable adjustments
- mediate disputes
- involve or refer people to other agencies

We will only evict a tenant after trying everything else first.

If the person behaving in an antisocial way is not a tenant, we will do whatever we can to protect our tenants. If the person is a tenant, we will do whatever we can to protect private-rented tenants or homeowners.

What is antisocial behaviour

Antisocial behaviour is anything that causes or is likely to cause you to feel alarmed, distressed, intimidated or harassed. It includes:

- aggressive or threatening behaviour, like stalking
- criminal and illegal activity in or near your home and neighbourhood, like dealing drugs, handing stolen goods, illegal money lending, and prostitution
- domestic abuse
- graffiti
- illegally dumping rubbish, fly tipping and setting fires
- hate crime
- neglect and intentional damage to a home or garden
- serious disagreements between neighbours
- violent behaviour, both physical and verbal, towards neighbours, the public or Gentoo staff

It also includes disturbances from things like:

- alcohol or drug misuse
- animals, including uncontrolled animals, barking and smells
- noise
- overcrowded homes, where you have allowed more people to move into your home without our permission

What is not antisocial behaviour

This includes:

- banging doors or closing doors
- car parking disputes
- children playing
- day-to-day living noise
- dogs barking if it is a short or isolated incident
- one-off parties
- social media and email disputes, unless it is part of wider harassment
- talking in loud voices
- using showers, washing machines, vacuum cleaners and other appliances at reasonable times
- walking up and down stairs
- young children crying



Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse can happen to anyone and your safety is our priority. Any information you give us is confidential unless we are legally required to report it. We will never tell the person responsible you spoke to us.

Reporting domestic abuse

We deal with all claims confidentially and as a priority.

To report domestic abuse, you can:

- call us on **0191 525 5000** and select option 4 or **0800 028 4445**
- report it online, see www.gentoogroup.com/domestic-abuse
- visit your local office, see www.gentoogroup.com/contact

You can also call:

- Wearside Women in Need on **0800 066 5555**
- ManKind on **01823 334 244**
- the National Domestic Violence Helpline on **0808 2000 247**

Ways we can help

When you report domestic abuse to us, we will:

- act quickly and compassionately
- put your safety first
- make sure you are not in danger
- offer you support and advice
- talk with you about your options and what you want to do next
- work with other organisations to get you the support you need

What is domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is an incident or pattern of incidents where someone's behaviour is abusive, threatening, violent, and coercive and controlling, including forced marriage, and being isolated from family and friends.

The abuse can be from family members or partners and could be controlling, emotional, financial, physical, psychological and sexual.

Hate crime and hate incidents

We do not allow hate crimes or hate incidents in any form. We want everyone to feel safe and secure in their home and neighbourhood. Any information you give us is confidential unless we are legally required to report it.

Reporting hate crime and hate incidents

We deal with all claims confidentially and as a priority. To report hate crime and hate incidents, you can:

- call us on **0191 525 5000** and select option 4
- report it online to the police, see www.report-it.org.uk/your_police_force
- report it online to us, see www.gentoogroup.com/hate-crime
- visit your local office, see www.gentoogroup.com/contact

Protected characteristics

Nobody should be treated less favourably because of their:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage or civil partnership
- pregnancy or maternity leave
- race including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

What is a hate crime

Hate crime can happen to anyone who has a protected characteristic.

Hate crime is a criminal offence and it breaches the conditions of our tenancy agreements.

Hate crimes can include:

- abusive or threatening behaviour
- assault
- bullying and harassment
- inciting others to commit hate crimes
- physical violence
- property damage
- robbery

What is a hate incident

A hate incident is not a criminal offence but may feel one to those involved.

A hate incident that includes harassment is a crime.

Hate incidents include:

- abusive phone or text messages
- hate mail
- hoax calls
- malicious complaints
- threats of violence
- verbal abuse

Frauds and scams

People who are trying to defraud or scam you may claim to be our staff or sub-contractors working for us.

Reporting frauds and scams

If you suspect someone is not from Gentoo or a sub-contractor, do not let them into your home. You can:

- call us on **0191 525 5000** and select option 2 to confirm someone's identity and appointment details
- report an incident to Northumbria Police
- tell Northumbria Police about a fraud or scam

Find out more at

www.gentoogroup.com/frauds

Possible frauds and scams

People may:

- offer to check your home for damp
- offer to check your boiler
- offer to work on outstanding repairs
- try to arrange surveys for outstanding repairs
- ask for images of your home and front door

Ways to stay safe

Visiting your home

We will always let you know if we are coming to your home to complete any work. This will either be a letter, text message or phone call.

Always ask to see a tradesperson's identification. Call us on **0191 525 5000** and select option 2 if you would like to confirm someone's identity.

Our tradespeople and sub-contractors will never ask you for money.

Telephone calls

Never give your details out over the telephone. This includes your:

- bank details
- personal information
- tenancy information



Neighbourhood safety help and support

In an emergency

If you need urgent support or are in an emergency, you can call the police on **999** or **101**, or register with **www.emergencysms.net** so you can send text messages to the police.

Our support officers

Our support officers will help you in any way they can. They will give you unbiased, non-judgmental support for as long as you need it. They will:

- offer you support and advice
- talk with you about your options and what you want to do next
- work with other organisations to get you the support you need

A Support Officer can meet you wherever you feel safest. If you want them to visit your home, they do not wear Gentoo uniforms or badges so your neighbours will not know they are from Gentoo.

They will talk about how to keep you safe and give you emotional and practical support. This may include:

- housing advice
- alternative safe accommodation
- going to court with you
- help you deal with any agencies like the police and the council
- refer you to professional support bodies like counselling services

Mediation

Mediation is our first choice and we offer an impartial mediation service.

Acceptable behaviour agreements or contracts

An acceptable behaviour agreement or contract is a written agreement or contract that gets the person who is behaving in an antisocial way to recognise their behaviour and how it affects others.

The agreement is between the person behaving in an antisocial way, us, the police, and any other involved agency.

The agreement includes information about specific incidents as examples of things they will stop doing. It also aims to make the person responsible for their actions and admit to everyone involved that their behaviour may be unacceptable.

Notice of seeking possession

In most cases, before we serve a notice of seeking possession, we will send a tenant a letter to let them know we are going to serve them with a notice. The letter explains the parts of their tenancy agreement they are breaching and gives them time to change their behaviour before any further legal action.

Rehousing

If you need to be rehoused, we will give you housing advice and talk with you about safe housing. We will give you advice and support if you cannot get into your home or are afraid to stay in your home. The police may go with you if you need to get personal belongings from your home.

We usually find alternative housing when there is a proven threat of violence or intimidation and the person threatening or intimidating you knows where you live.

Positive engagement

Positive engagement is support for people who are responsible for antisocial and abusive behaviour because of:

- alcohol misuse or alcohol dependency problems
- drug misuse or drug dependency problems
- mental health conditions

They may also be at risk of losing their tenancy.

If you are behaving in an antisocial or abusive way and recognise this and want your behaviour to change, speak to one of our support officers. You can call **0191 525 5000** and select option 4 or email **safetyandsupport@gentoogroup.com**

CCTV

We use CCTV and noise monitoring equipment in neighbourhoods to prevent, investigate and detect antisocial behaviour and crime.

Organisations we work with to support people

Our experience has shown us that working with partners is essential to reduce antisocial behaviour and make people feel safer and more secure.

We work closely with agencies and partnerships, like the police, Sunderland City Council, Wearside Women in Need, ManKind and the Safer Sunderland Partnership. This allows us to develop a shared understanding of responsibilities with one another.

Our most important partner is our tenants and our neighbourhoods. We will listen to what people tell us and get involved with neighbourhoods to help:

- prevent and reduce antisocial behaviour
- change perceptions of antisocial behaviour
- telling people what we have done

We are part of the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance to improve the housing sector's response to domestic abuse. Organisations that are part of the alliance work together and share best practices. Find out more at **www.dahalliance.org.uk**

Supporting you back into work

We can refer you to partner organisations who can give advice, support and training to help you learn new skills and get back into work.

Find out more about how we can support you back into work at

www.gentoogroup.com/back-into-work

Under One Roof

Under One Roof gives people who want to get back into work one-to-one support with a job coach. It provides:

- confidence for life and work
- qualifications in English, maths and IT
- support to help you write a CV
- interview skills

Under One Roof can help if you are unable to find work or have been unemployed for a long time.

Housing Employment Network North East (HENNE)

We are part of HENNE, a partnership of 13 housing providers across the North East that are responsible for more than 190,000 homes.

The partnership and its providers work with tenants, residents, communities, and stakeholders to achieve a strategic, co-ordinated approach to employability.

HENNE aims to support tenants and residents with direct access to the local labour market and help people develop skills and experience too.

HENNE will work with people who are economically inactive to help support and explore how they can prepare for, find, and get quality jobs.

Foundation of Light programmes

The Foundation of Light offers programmes at the Beacon of Light to help young people aged 16 to 19 get qualifications, skills and practical work experience.

If you want to start your own business

The North East Business and Innovation Centre (BIC) has information and support for people who want to start their own business.

Wellbeing support

We offer free wellbeing support, advice and practical help all our tenants. Our Wellbeing Service can help you:

- apply for different benefits
- assess your health and mobility to give you the best housing advice and find out how to adapt your home
- maintain and keep your home safe
- be physically and mentally healthy, active and independent for as long as possible
- get involved in community activities
- be less socially isolated

If you would like to use our Wellbeing Service, call **0191 525 5000** and select option 4, or speak to your Scheme Manager.

Health and mobility assessments

We assess vulnerable and disabled tenants so we can support you in your home. We do assessments to help us find out what your specific needs are, and we use this to:

- give you the best possible housing advice
- find out how to adapt your home
- assess whether a priority move would be more suitable for you

If you would like an assessment, call **0191 525 5000** and select option 4, or speak to your Scheme Manager. They will refer you to a Support Co-ordinator who will contact you to arrange an assessment.



Supporting young people

We support young people aged 16 to 25 to help them live independently. We offer supported housing, advice and guidance to meet their specific needs.

Our support officers help young people to:

- identify their needs and what they want to achieve
- develop an action plan that lets them work out how to achieve their needs
- improve their health and wellbeing
- keep in contact with family and friends
- find out what is happening in their local area

Our support officers also support young people with their training and education choices.

We help young people learn how to live in their own home, including how to:

- cook
- clean
- budget their money
- make their home safe

We help young people move into their own home and understand their rights and responsibilities.

Find out more at

www.gentoogroup.com/young-people



Furnishing your home

We want to help you settle into your home as soon as possible. We work with Newcastle Furniture Service (NFS) so you can rent furniture for your home.

You can choose what you need from NFS's list of furniture. NFS own the furniture and you rent it from them.

They will repair your furniture for free. They will arrange with you to replace, reuse and recycle all items after 4 years for free.

To get help furnishing your home, call **0191 525 5000** and select option 4.

Find out more at

www.gentoogroup.com/furniture

Aspire Community Grant Programme

Our Aspire Community Grant Programme supports communities with donations of up to £500.

Aspire grants are for local volunteers and community groups in Gentoo neighbourhoods to help Gentoo tenants.

Aspire grants have been awarded to:

- art, music and drama clubs
- children and young people's clubs
- clubs for older people
- local football clubs
- parent and toddler playgroups
- volunteer groups

Find out more at

www.gentoogroup.com/aspire



Empower Sunderland Local Community Fund

The fund grants money to energy and environmental projects in Sunderland that will help the local community.

Projects include:

- fitting solar panels
- installing double glazing and new heating systems in community centres
- installing LED lighting in a library and an equestrian centre

Find out more at

www.gentoogroup.com/empower



Get involved

Find out how to get involved, share your views, and give us feedback to help us improve our services for tenants as much as possible.

Tenant and Community Voice groups

The groups are a forum to help us make business decisions and improve our services.

We have 7 Tenant and Community Voice groups. One for each of the 5 Gentoo areas, one for tenants aged 25 and under, and one who specifically discuss high-rise building safety.

Each group meets every 2 months and is led by a chairperson who is a Gentoo tenant. The groups work together to:

- give feedback on changes to our service
- decide how to spend the £10,000 local area budget
- identify what needs improving in the local areas
- approve Aspire grant applications

Find out more and apply to be a member at

www.gentoogroup.com/tcvg

Scrutiny Group

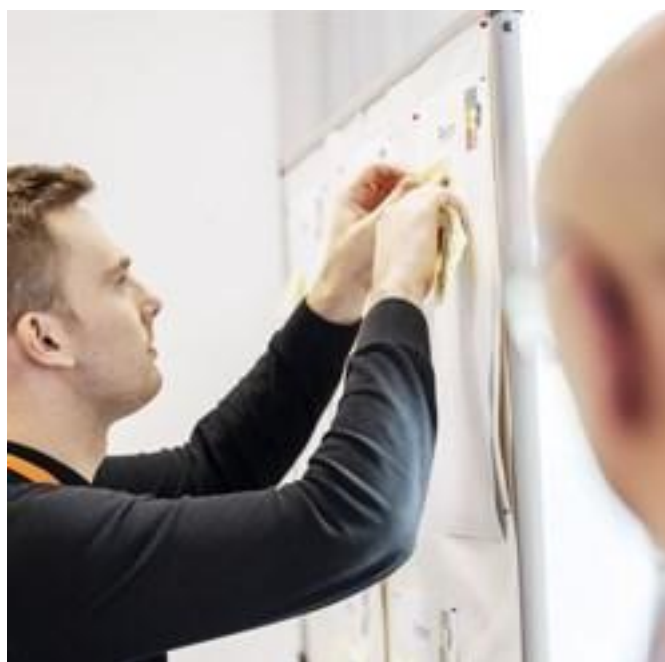
The Scrutiny Group reviews and gives feedback on:

- business plans
- operational performance
- how we engage with tenants
- any requests from Gentoo board or Tenant and Community Voice groups
- important projects

We present the feedback to the Gentoo board and use it to improve our services.

Find out more and apply to be a member at

www.gentoogroup.com/scrutiny-group



Task and finish groups

Our task and finish groups bring tenants and residents together to talk about specific topics.

The groups meet to have relaxed, informal discussions about a specific topic.

Tenants in the group influence what, when and how decisions are made.

The group have recently talked about our:

- affordable development properties
- lettable standards
- telephone system changes
- tenant annual report for 2021 to 2022

Find out more and how to get involved at www.gentoogroup.com/tfg

Your Gentoo Voice

Through our online portal we ask for your opinion to help us make decisions. You can share your views and give us feedback on projects we are working on.

The portal is available to all tenants. After you register, you can view the latest projects on the homepage and take part in online forums, surveys and polls.

Your feedback will:

- help us make decisions
- affect how we achieve our projects' aims
- make sure that what we do will help you, tenants and residents

Register at <https://yourgentoovoice.uk.engagementhq.com/>



Ending your tenancy or moving out of a Gentoo property

If you are in a joint tenancy, either tenant can end the tenancy. This will end the tenancy for both tenants.

If you want to end your tenancy, you must tell us first.

To end your tenancy, you must give 4 weeks' notice before you plan to move out and leave your home. You can send a letter to your local office or call **0191 525 5000** and select option 4.

Before you end your tenancy or move out

Get the property inspected by your Neighbourhood Co-ordinator

They will let you know what you need to do to the property before you end your tenancy.

Pay your rent and any other charges

Make sure your accounts with us are up to date. This includes your rent, home contents insurance, and any other charges.

Clean and empty the property

You must:

- leave the property clean, neat and tidy condition
- repair or replace any broken fixtures and fittings you are responsible for, see **page 18**
- remove all furniture and belongings from the property, including your garden, garage and any other outbuildings

If you need to remove a gas or electric cooking appliance, you must get a competent person to remove it. You must leave the property and its fixtures in a safe condition.

If you rent any furniture from Newcastle Furniture Service, you must contact them and arrange to return any furniture.

If you need a help to clear a property, Sunderland City Council has a bulky waste collection service. Find out more at **www.sunderland.gov.uk/bulky-waste**

You can also use the free household waste and recycling centres in Pallion and Wrekenton. Find out more at **www.sunderland.gov.uk/hwrc**

After you move out and leave your home

Because it costs us time and money to clean, empty and repair a property, we may charge you if the property:

- is not clean, neat and tidy condition
- has furniture and belongings you left behind
- needs repair work, like dented or smashed internal doors, broken or painted kitchen units
- needs repair work that you are responsible for, see [page 18](#)

If we charge you for cleaning, emptying or repairing a property, we will agree a repayment plan with you.

If you do not pay, we will not allow you to reapply to join our housing register.

Moving checklist

Use the moving checklist on [page 5](#) to find what other things you need to do.

You must return your keys to us by midday the day after your tenancy ends. If you do not return the keys to us on time, we may charge you an extra week's rent. If you get Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, this will only pay for one property.



Give us your feedback

We welcome all feedback so we can improve our services for our tenants. We always try to provide excellent services, but when our performance is less than it should be, we like to find out why and make changes where needed.

Compliments

Compliments can help us understand where we are performing well and meeting your expectations. This can help us further improve our services.

Complaints

If you want to make a complaint, tell us as much as you can so we can fully investigate. Tell us if:

- we have done something incorrectly
- we have not done something we said we would do
- you are not happy with our service or standards

We initially try to solve any problems informally within the department that is responsible. If a complaint needs to be investigated, we make it a stage one formal complaint and follow our complaints process.

Ways you can give us your feedback

You can:

- visit your local office and speak to a member of staff
- email feedback@gentoogroup.com
- fill in a compliments form, see www.gentoogroup.com/compliments
- fill in a complaints form, see www.gentoogroup.com/complaints
- fill in the general enquiries form at www.gentoogroup.com/general-enquiries
- send us a message on Facebook or Twitter
- write a letter to Tenant Voice Team, Gento Group Limited, Emperor House, 2 Emperor Way, Doxford International Business Park, Sunderland, SR3 3XR



Contact details

Telephone

0191 525 5000

Monday to Thursday

8:30am to 5pm

Friday

8:30am to 12:30pm

Website

www.gentooogroup.com

Office addresses

Head office

Emperor House

2 Emperor Way

Doxford International Business Park

Sunderland

SR3 3XR

North Sunderland

The Cornhill Centre

Goschen Street

Southwick

Sunderland

SR5 2LR

Central Sunderland

City Hall

Plater Way

Sunderland

SR1 3AD

South Sunderland

Akeler House

1 Emperor Way

Doxford International Business Park

Sunderland

SR3 3XR

Houghton and Hetton

The Skyline Centre

88 Newbottle Street

Houghton

DH4 4AJ

Washington

Pennine House

Washington

NE37 1LY

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