



Complaints Policy

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Accountable Executive:	Executive Director of Corporate Services
Approved by:	Executive Director of Corporate Services
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For the full version history of this policy, see the back page	

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For support and advice regarding the Policy, please contact the Policy Owner.

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1.0 Introduction and Scope

1.1 The Regulator of Social Housing and The Housing Ombudsman requires that Gentoo as a Registered Provider has an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible, and to recognise that feedback is a valuable source of information to help improve and modernise our services. Each complaint should be treated as an opportunity for learning and a way to embed change.

1.2 This policy aims to clearly set out our approach to consistently and effectively resolve complaints across the Group. It has been developed and aligned to the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code.

1.3 There are services within the Group which are required by regulation and legislation to offer tenants different routes at different stages of this process. Some subsidiaries of the Group have a different process for handling complaints, taking into account best practice in their sector and regulatory requirements. The principles in the Group policy still apply, regardless of any agreed variations to the process that follows.

1.4 The scope of this policy covers:

Gentoo Group	X
Gentoo Homes	
Gentoo Developments	
Gentoo Genie	

1.3 It applies to:

General Needs rented properties	X
Supported Housing	X

Sheltered Housing	X
Leasehold/Shared ownership	X
Rent to Buy properties	X
Market rented properties (domestic)	X
Temporary Accommodation	X
Stock owned but not managed by the Group	X
Communal Areas, including those relating to Leasehold/Shared Ownership properties	X
Commercial Property (offices, depots etc)	X
Stock managed by Gentoo on behalf of a third party	X
Garages and outbuildings	X
Remote plant (district heating, electrical pumps etc)	X
Curtilage	X

2.0 Links to Strategy and the Business Plan

2.1 Our vision and values set the direction and shape the culture of our organisation.

2.2 Gentoo's vision is:

Great Homes – Strong Communities – Inspired People

2.3 The Group's values are:

- Do the right thing
- Make a difference
- Keep learning
- Work together
- Give all you've got

2.4 For this 2020 Business Plan, the Group's Board and Executive Team have refreshed Gentoo's strategic aims, centred on the following themes:

- Place
- People
- Perform
- Partner
- Pride

2.5 These "5P's" have been developed to articulate the delivery of our vision via the following strategic aims:

- Provide homes and services that enable our tenants and communities to succeed **(Place)**
- Invest in people and communities to help realise opportunities and release potential **(People)**
- Be well governed and financially resilient, operating efficiently and responsibly, investing wisely to fulfil our social purpose **(Perform)**

2.6 The above aims will be supported by the following enablers:

- Work with others to influence and generate sustainable change **(Partner)**

- Harness the collective passion and energy of our people to support the city's plan (**Pride**)

2.7 Gentoo's policies support the delivery of the Group's Vision, Values and Strategy.

3.0 Regulation and Legislation

3.1 The Executive Director (Corporate Services) will ensure this policy has regard to all legislation, regulation and best practice. The legislation and regulation applicable to this policy is:

- The Regulator of Social Housing's Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard
- Regulation prescribed by the Financial Conduct Authority
- Localism Act 2011
- Equality Act 2010
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

4.0 Our Policy Statement

4.1 A complaint is defined as *"An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents"*.

4.2 Our approach to handling complaints will be easily accessible and well publicised. It will be simple and easy to understand. Tenants can raise a complaint by:

- Email feedback@gentoo.com
- Through any colleague either in person or by telephone
- Logging it on our website, or through our social media channels
- Writing to us at Gentoo Group, Emperor House, Sunderland, SR3 3XR

4.3 Some complaints can be dealt with informally through little or no investigation with the expectation that each service area is responsible to investigate and resolve this form of complaint. These are recorded as 'Own It Fix It' complaints.

4.4 Stage 1 Complaints

- We will assign a complaint owner who will be a Tenant Voice Partner
- The Tenant Voice Partner will acknowledge receipt of the complaint via telephone within 1 working day from the date the complaint is received
- This will be followed up with a written acknowledgement
- The Tenant Voice Partner will agree a Mutually Agreed Resolution Date (MARD) with the tenants if the complaint cannot be resolved within 10 working days or less

- The Tenant Voice Partner will agree how often the tenants wants to be updated throughout the complaint and their preferred method of contact
- The Tenant Voice Partner will provide a written response to the complaint, providing the complainant with appeal details, the complainant has 15 working days to request an appeal

4.5 **Stage 2 Complaints**

These are escalated from Stage 1 where a tenant has provided further information or is still dissatisfied with the initial response during the Stage 1 investigation. These complaints will be dealt with by the Head of Tenant Voice, Tenant Voice Lead , or a Senior Manager within the Group.

- The Head of Tenant Voice, Tenant Voice Lead, or a Senior Manager within the Group will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 1 working day from the date the complaint is received
- This will be followed up with a written acknowledgement
- They will agree a Mutually Agreed Resolution Date (MARD) with the tenant if the complaint cannot be resolved within 20 working days or less
- They will agree how often the tenants wants to be updated throughout the complaint and their preferred method of contact
- They will provide a written response to the complaint, providing the complainant with appeal details

4.6 The stages of our complaints process are designed to achieve a resolution for the tenant as promptly and efficiently as possible. We will not investigate a complaint reported to us after six months of the issue occurring.

4.7 We reserve the right to refuse to deal with a complaint when the issue(s) being raised have previously exhausted our complaints procedure and no new facts or evidence have been provided.

4.8 We reserve the right to deal with a complaint or complainant outside the usual standards in place at that time if the tenant's behaviour is considered to be unreasonable. The complainant will be advised of this in writing and has the right to appeal the decision.

4.9 If at the end of the process the tenant is still not satisfied, as with all stages of the complaints process, we will inform them of the next steps. Stage 2 is the final stage in our internal complaint handling process. If the tenant remains dissatisfied with our investigation into their complaint, they can request for the complaint to be escalated to The Housing Ombudsman or a Designated Person within 8 weeks of the final decision.

5.0 **Roles and Responsibilities**

- 5.1 As a Housing Association, we have a statutory responsibility to comply with all relevant regulation and legislation in relation to dealing with and handling tenant complaints.
- 5.2 The Head of Tenant Voice is accountable for adequate resourcing and having effective processes in place to implement this policy.
- 5.3 Overall responsibility for this policy lies with the Head of Tenant Voice and accountability lies with the Executive Director (Corporate Services).
- 5.4 Responsibility for the implementation of this policy lies with every employee of Gentoo.

6.0 Monitoring and Review

- 6.1 This policy will be reviewed every three years or in line with business need.
- 6.2 The Head of Tenant Voice will be responsible for monitoring implementation of the policy. Service leads will be responsible for implementation within their service areas.

7.0 Policy Outcomes

- 7.1 This Policy aims to achieve the following outcomes:
 - Our service is fair, accessible and tenants are communicated with in the way they prefer
 - Issues with services are dealt with so that complaints are prevented from arising in the first place – ‘Own It Fix It’
 - Prompt action is taken to investigate complaints and negotiate an appropriate resolution
 - Services are improved from trends in complaints and such improvements are communicated to tenants
- 7.2 The success of this policy rests on colleagues within Gentoo, taking full responsibility and accountability, supporting the Tenant Voice Partners when dealing with complaints around their business, with a One Gentoo approach.

8.0 Policy Compliance

- 8.1 To ensure compliance with this policy, Gentoo has the following published service standards:
 - To acknowledge a complaint within 1 working day
 - To resolve and respond to a complaint within 10 working days, or agree an appropriate timescale with the complainant (a mutually agreed resolution date, MARD)

- 8.2 Performance against these standards is reported to Group Board and Senior Leadership Team and to tenants/residents via the Customer Annual Report.
- 8.3 Any urgent concerns or risks will be flagged immediately as required to the relevant Director or Senior Manager.

9.0 Equalities Statement

- 9.1 We are committed to the principles of diversity and inclusion throughout the organisation and aim to:
- Meet the needs of tenants from all backgrounds
 - Ensure that our services are relevant, responsive and sensitive to the needs of our existing and future tenants
 - Ensure that all sections of the community in which we work have equal access to our services
- 9.2 An Equality Assessment has been completed on this policy.

10.0 Escalation

- 10.1 Where Group Board has concerns about significant issues in any area of compliance with this Complaints Policy, they must escalate these concerns to the Executive Director (Corporate Services).
- 10.2 Where a colleague has concerns about significant issues in any area of compliance with this policy, they must escalate these concerns through their line management structure, ultimately to the Group Executive Team.
- 10.3 Where a colleague continues to have concerns about significant issues in any area of compliance with this policy, they should refer to the Group Whistleblowing Policy.

Version Control

Version	Reason	Issuer	Date
2.0	Changed formatting of policy	Kirsty Collins	15/02/2018
2.1	Amended names to job titles, added accountable Exec Director to front page and amended review date to 3 years	Sarah Treadwell	09/05/2019
2.2	Removed toolkit as this has been reviewed	Sarah Treadwell	29/08/2019
3.0	Fundamental review.	Catherine Loftus	21/09/2020

3.1	Removal of 'via telephone' from paragraph 4.5, bullet point one.	Jo-Anne Parkinson	07/01/2021
3.2	Job title changes	Emma Peat	April 2021