



**Great homes
Strong communities
Inspired people**
for Sunderland

Annual Report 2022 - 23

Welcome from the CEO

Louise Bassett, CEO

I'm pleased to introduce Gentoo's Annual Report for the financial year 2022 - 23.

I want to begin by thanking all my Gentoo colleagues for the amazing work they do every day for our customers. They have shown great commitment during what has been another challenging year, and I am full of admiration and appreciation for everything that has been achieved.

In my first year as CEO, I have focussed on getting the basics right to deliver our core purpose of providing safe and decent homes for our valued existing and future customers. I have also prioritised investing in our colleagues and improving our culture by making Gentoo a professional and great place to work.

The rising cost of living has hit our customers hard, and our teams have been providing support to help manage the expense of heating their homes and putting food on the table. We have significantly increased our crisis fund to enable more support than ever and have strengthened our operational teams to assist our customers in sustaining their tenancies. We also continue to invest in supporting our customers with the growing challenge of anti-social behaviour. People should be able to enjoy where they live, and we will continue to play our part in tackling those who threaten the interests of our communities.

Ensuring our homes are safe and decent is our priority and we have continued to invest in the maintenance of our homes. We have reduced our wait times for repairs work and the time it takes to turn around empty properties.

The UK is suffering a housing crisis and Gentoo has over 30,000 people on our waiting list for social housing. Whilst we aspire to increase the number of our properties, investment in our existing homes has to come first. We have continued to spend £1million every week on improving thousands of our existing homes and, over the next five years, we are on target to invest over £220million in our existing homes, whilst remaining committed to also delivering 600 new affordable homes by 2026.

Following the coroner's verdict into the tragic death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak, published in November 2022, Gentoo immediately contacted all our customers to tell us about any concerns regarding damp and mould in their homes. Since then, we have responded to nearly 3,000 customer concerns ahead of this winter and have worked collaboratively with our involved customers to create an easy-to-follow Damp and Mould Procedure.

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act will come into force in April 2024 and the Regulator of Social Housing will hold registered providers to account with the introduction of Tenant Satisfaction Measures and wider-reaching Consumer Standards involving regular inspections. The powers of the Housing Ombudsman have also increased to include the publication of best practice guidance following

the investigation of complaints. Gentoo welcomes this increased rigour and scrutiny of our services, and we are committed to improving our services for our customers.

It has been a year where we have looked to put our customers at the heart of our decision-making. We know we do not always get things right, and we expect our customers to tell us when we fall short of their expectations. That is only right, and we appreciate the feedback Gentoo receives from our customers.

Our Communications and Engagement Team continues to develop under a new directorship as consumer satisfaction and regulation become ever more important in terms of shaping our business.

As with most organisations, we have seen increased running costs over the year and consequently we made a difficult decision to increase our rents, in accordance with the Government cap of 7%. In these challenging times for everyone, we remain committed to spending every penny wisely for our customers. Gentoo is also mindful of its funding position and for the first time since our inception over twenty years ago, we have undertaken a complete refinancing arrangement, which leaves us better able to invest and develop on a more efficient basis.

Gentoo has also taken significant strides in improving our position as a large employer in Sunderland. We have refreshed our Corporate Strategy and are focussed on six clear priorities, which you will see in this report. Our colleagues have developed our new values, which they feel better reflect what we stand for and aim to achieve. Through listening to our colleagues, they have told us how we can make Gentoo a better place to work. We have amazing colleagues and have recruited some excellent talent this year, including another new group of apprentices, some of whom have grown up and live in our homes.

I would also like to thank our numerous stakeholders, partners, and contractors who play an important role in helping us deliver our services to customers. This includes significant and various social value contributions that are required under our procurement practices.

We know there is a lot of hard work ahead as we continue to strive to deliver the best possible outcomes for everyone we serve. And whilst we face many challenges in the provision of social and affordable housing, we are all determined to rise to the occasion and ensure Gentoo's core purpose never changes – to provide safe and decent homes for our customers of today and tomorrow.

Hello from the Chair

Emily Cox, MBE, Group Chair

In my first year as Chair of Gentoo I have been impressed by the continued progress Gentoo is making in supporting its customers and communities. I am immensely proud of the continued support and dedication of our colleagues which has enabled us to play a leading role in Sunderland in supporting our customers and communities through the cost of living crisis. I would like to thank them for their ongoing commitment.

The role of Chair is to help ensure the Board and the Executive Team are focusing on the right issues and developing the right purpose and strategy, executing it effectively and with the right culture and values as an organisation.

As we move to become a truly purpose driven organisation, I am confident that our strategy will provide the capability to deliver even better outcomes for our customers, colleagues and community.

Gentoo's Board of non-executive directors care passionately about social housing and are determined to continue to improve the services to our customers and the communities across Sunderland. Over the last year we have invested £42m – close to £1m per week – in our existing stock. I am delighted by the progress we have made to improving our estates.

The Board is also committed to developing more much needed affordable housing in the city. Everyone deserves to be able to live in a safe, affordable home and it must be our purpose to make this happen.

With 30,000 people on our waiting list, Gentoo's role has never been more crucial. In 2022 - 23, we saw our existing stock of homes reduced by 188 through Right to Buy, further reinforcing the need to deliver more where we can. But it's not just about building new homes or investing and maintaining existing properties to the highest possible standards. We must always demonstrate that we care for our customers and support them as best we can, whether that be providing help and assistance during the current cost of living crisis or showing our commitment to tackling anti-social behaviour where it blights our neighbourhoods. Gentoo must stay true to its social purpose.

One of the highlights of this year has been the formation of a Customer Committee that means people who live in Gentoo's properties will not only be at the forefront of decision-making but will also provide a critical voice in how our services can be improved. We received an amazing response to be part of this new forum and as a result have secured a very enthused group of customers to represent their wider communities. I am excited at the prospect of chairing many productive, open, and frank discussions with those Gentoo serves as we move forward into a new era of consumer-focussed regulation.

During the year, Gentoo has also introduced our customer promise, seeking to ensure at least 90% of our customers are satisfied with our overall service and that we make a positive contribution to our neighbourhoods and communities. As formal Tenant Satisfaction Measures are introduced in 2024 by the Regulator for Social Housing, how we perform for our customers will come under greater scrutiny and so we must always aspire to providing the highest standards in everything we do.

Gentoo's colleagues are vital to achieving our corporate goals and I would like to thank our colleagues for their commitment to our customers. It is heartening to hear of the lengths that colleagues go to in looking after some of the most vulnerable members of our society.

My personal thanks go out to everyone at Gentoo, from the board members who devote their time overseeing the strategic direction of Gentoo, to the fantastic efforts of our front-line colleagues, and those who work tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure that our customers are well served and safe in their homes.

In summary, I am confident that our strategy and commitment to become a truly purpose driven business will enhance the long term future of the Group and benefit all of our stakeholders. We will continue to ensure Gentoo is at the heart of Sunderland's future.

“We must always demonstrate that we care for our customers and support them as best we can, whether that be providing help and assistance during the current cost of living crisis or showing our commitment to tackling anti-social behaviour where it blights our neighbourhoods. Gentoo must stay true to its social purpose.”

Our year in numbers

Heating systems
upgraded

1,242

Properties decorated
externally

1,367

629

new kitchen / bathrooms
installed

50

affordable homes built

Properties fitted
with double glazing

2,714

189

New homes sold

Social activities in extra care/
sheltered schemes

1,102

2,222

empty homes
restored

Veterans housed

68

Young people provided with
a secure home

64

**Domestic abuse/
anti-social behaviour cases**

188

£2.3m

**additional income for
customers including**

5,920

**referrals to Northumbrian
Water rate discount scheme**

£13,788

**donated to corporate
charities by colleagues**

**Telephone
calls answered**

365,481

Amount given out in crisis fund

£34,251

**Repairs and servicing
appointments carried out**

172,564

**Damp, mould and condensation
inspections completed**

4,009

**Customers signed up to
Your Gentoo Voice**

1,193

10,543

**internal stock
condition surveys**

3,025

trees inspected

About us

We are Gentoo.

We are a values-led, charitable organisation that provides more than 60,000 people in Sunderland with a place they can call home.

We have a clear vision and a social purpose. We believe that everyone has the right to live in a good quality home that they can afford.

We invest millions of pounds every year to keep our existing homes safe and decent. We also play our part in helping to deal with the UK housing crisis by building hundreds of new, modern homes for rent in Sunderland.

Where we work

Properties in Northumberland, South Tyneside and Tees Valley
52 homes

North Sunderland
6,091 homes

Washington
6,044 homes

Central Sunderland
3,089 homes

South Sunderland
8,542 homes

Houghton and Hetton
4,739 homes

Who we are

Our core purpose

Our core purpose is to provide safe and decent homes for our customers of today and tomorrow.

Our vision

Our vision is to provide great homes, strong communities and inspired people for Sunderland.

Our values

Our values are what we stand for and what we want to be known for. They are what make us, us.

- **We care about people**
- **We take accountability**
- **We shape the future**
- **We bring leadership**
- **We deliver**

Our priorities

The safety of our customers and colleagues will always be our number one priority.

We have identified six further priorities which will guide the delivery of our services. We live our values in everything we do from the board room to the front room, to deliver our priorities for our customers.

- **We know our customers**
- **We provide great homes**
- **We help communities to thrive**
- **We are a great place to work**
- **We spend our money wisely**
- **We are well governed**

You said, we did

Changes to external repairs

Earlier this year, we asked customers if they would be happy for us to complete external repairs to their property while they weren't home. Of those contacted, 96% were happy to go ahead with the change.

It now means that customers aren't restricted and don't have to take time off work for an appointment. It also allows the Group to offer a more efficient repairs service, as jobs can be completed as and when materials become available.

Typical repairs that can be completed while customers aren't at home include:

- fencing
- roofing
- brickwork
- guttering

We know this option isn't suitable for everyone and customers can still request an appointment for the work to be completed if that's what works best for them.

Our approach to tackling damp and mould

It's important to us that we provide our customers with safe and decent homes. So, we contacted all our customers to ask if they had any issues with damp or mould in their homes. To ensure we provide the necessary support, we set up a specialist team to deal with concerns as soon as possible, set up a dedicated phone line and recruited additional resource to help prevent and treat condensation, damp and mould in our customers' homes.

Relevant colleagues and managers completed the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health Damp and Mould training. We have developed a new Damp and Mould Policy which is aligned with the Housing Ombudsman's report and Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) guidance.

We also held a Damp and Mould Scrutiny Group. The Scrutiny Group told us that customers felt that there was no follow up following a damp and mould complaint and we didn't check back in to make sure the issues were resolved.

We have now implemented a Case Management Team to manage damp and mould cases. Each case will be allocated a case handler who will complete follow up calls to check remedial work has resolved the issues.

We added additional information about damp, mould and condensation on our website. It includes advice about how to clean and clear mould and how to reduce condensation. Find out more at **www.gentoogroup.com/damp**

Decoration packs

Customers told us that the decoration vouchers we give people following any major work to their property could be improved. It could be difficult to visit a store, pick the products they needed, and then get them home.

We have introduced new decorating packs that are better value for money and offer more products and a wider range. Products can also be ordered online or by phone and delivered to customers' homes for free. We have also introduced a disturbance allowance, which is an additional payment when we carry out a full electrical re-wire, new kitchen or new bathroom.

Anti-social behaviour

Customers in Houghton and Easington Lane reported their health and safety concerns about anti-social behaviour.

On Kingsway Street, vehicles were driving over a grassed area and onto a public footpath. At the Brickgarth, people were driving quadbikes and motorbikes onto a local field. We installed fencing and boulders to stop vehicles accessing the grassed area and field.

We know our customers

- We will work with our customers to review and improve how we engage with them and make sure they have a voice in how we provide our services.
- We will make sure at least 90% of our customers are satisfied with our overall service.
- We will make sure at least 90% of our customers are satisfied with our repairs service.
- We will make sure at least 90% of our customers are satisfied that we make a positive contribution to their neighbourhoods and communities.
- We will actively seek to create opportunities for customers to work with us in specific voluntary and paid roles.
- We will improve our digital services for customers to give them more choice on how they access our services.

Our performance

We have developed a clear and concise dashboard to demonstrate our performance as a landlord, which was done working with our customers. The data shows how we performed for the 2022 - 23 financial year, compared to the previous year.

| Measures | 2021 - 22 | 2022 - 23 |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Current rent arrears including housing benefit recovery | £2.5m | £2.3m |
| Average time to re-let a property | 70.13 days | 69.41 days |
| £ invested to customers' homes through planned investment work | £39.1m | £42m |
| Number of properties improved through planned investment work | 11,000 | 7,663 |
| Overall satisfaction with planned improvement work | 97% | 93% |
| Number of repairs and safety inspections | 159,621 | 160,878 |
| Repairs completed right first time | 97.8% | 98% |
| Number of formal complaints received | 466 (stage 1) | 523 (stage 1 and 2) |

Supporting our customers with the cost of living

At the end of 2022, we asked our customers how they were feeling about the cost of living crisis. More than 1,500 customers told us how it's personally affecting them. The results of the survey helped us understand how best we can support our customers.

What we know:

- **81%** of respondents were employed or self-employed.
- **84%** of customers were in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.
- **51%** were extremely or very worried about the cost of living.
- **18%** of customers don't think they'll be able to cope.
- **76.27%** had used a foodbank in the previous 6 months.
- We asked what the biggest concern was and **45%** of respondents said paying rent, **25%** said paying energy bills and **22%** said buying food.
- When given a range of items to consider as being most important to them over the winter; reducing heating and energy use was the most common answer.
- **50%** were either extremely or very worried about paying their rent in winter, however **83%** were aware of Gentoo's Money Matters Team and **65%** were extremely or very likely to use it.
- **72%** were also extremely or very willing to get free energy saving advice.
- **62%** said they were extremely or very likely to use the free warm spaces across Sunderland.
- When asked which training course subjects might be helpful, budgeting and managing money and digital skills for everyday life were the two most common answers.

What we're doing to help:

- Recruited additional resource in the Money Matters Team. Last year, our Money Matters Team generated more than **£2.3m additional income** for customers including 5920 referrals to the Northumbrian Water rate discount scheme.
- Opened Sunderland's first The Bread and Butter Thing (TBBT) food hub in Pennywell Neighbourhood Centre. Members pay just £7.50 to get shopping bags filled with a minimum of **£35 worth of quality nutritious food**.
- Keep Warm in Winter campaign – provided warm packs for over **100 vulnerable customers** which included blankets, hot water bottles and hot flasks.
- Cost of living social media campaign – creating social media posts which offer customers support. This can be energy saving advice, signposting to support services, free food or family activities or money saving tips.

- We are dedicated to improving the EPC rating of all our properties and have committed **£21m** to upgrading the remaining **11,000 homes** with a rating below C to C by 2030. This means our customers will need less energy to heat and fuel their homes and ensures we are supporting the carbon reduction targets set out by the government and Sunderland City Council.
- We are part of the Housing Employment Network North East (HENNE) which aims to support customers 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.
- Regularly promote Sunderland City Council's Warm Spaces through social media or direct emails to customers. We've also offered up one of our community centres, the Nidderdale Centre, as a warm space.
- Through a data sharing agreement with Northumbrian Water, we were able to secure funding for **3,000+ older customers** in receipt of pension credit to assist with their water rates payments.
- Partnered with HEAT to provide utility payments of **up to £150 per household** where a need was established.
- Partnered with the Foundation of Light to direct customers to various cooking on a budget type events.

We provide great homes

- We will work with our customers, colleagues and contractors to deliver new standards that help us to provide outstanding repairs and maintenance services.
- We will work with our customers to prevent damp or mould in their homes and to manage it when it occurs.
- We will spend £55 million on maintaining our existing homes and will improve our response times to provide a better service to our customers.
- We will invest £84 million in our existing homes as part of our investment plan and will focus on replacing roofs and kitchens and upgrading electrical installations.
- We will invest in energy efficiency and make sure at least 70% of our homes achieve an energy efficiency performance rating of C or better by April 2025.
- We will work with our customers to ensure our high-rise residential buildings are safe.
- We will meet our target of building more than 690 new homes and make them available through sale, affordable rent and shared ownership.

Investing in your homes

This year, we delivered £42 million worth of investment work to around 7,000 properties.

We carried out a range of internal and external improvements ranging from roof replacements to full electrical rewires. The work reduced our carbon emissions from our homes usage by more than 6,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide.

The investment included £1.24 million of funding from the government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. The funding was used to improve the energy efficiency of 400 homes and retrofit 20 homes in Whinfell Washington. The homes in Whinfell benefitted from external wall insulation, roof insulation, new windows and doors, to help keep the homes warm and reduce bills for our customers. Following the completion of the work, we asked customers for feedback. 100% of customers surveyed were satisfied with the work that had been carried out in their home.

Joyce has lived in her home in Whinfell for more than six years. She said: "I'm over the moon with how my home looks now, the work has greatly improved the appearance of the whole street. It's now a place I'm proud to call home. Since the work has been carried out, my home is a lot warmer."

84 homes were also modernised as part of the Pennywell modernisation programme which will see more than 1,100 homes modernised over three years using a 'whole house' approach, which means a lot of the work will be completed at the same time to minimise disruption for customers. Customers will benefit from a range of improvements including new roofs, new front door canopies, double glazing, loft insulation, new front boundaries and decoration to the outside of the property. Following the work, the energy efficiency of the homes will improve, with their EPC rating increasing to C. This means properties will require less energy to heat or run.

Maintaining building safety

We have committed a further £2.4 million investment into building safety to ensure our customers who live in our high-rise residential buildings are safe in their homes.

The investment includes the creation of a new Building Safety Team, who will be working closely with colleagues from across the organisation to have a collaborative approach to building safety. They'll also be engaging with customers living in 25 high-rise residential buildings and providing information to the new Building Safety Regulator that demonstrates that each of those buildings is safe to occupy.

This approach will ensure customers are at the forefront of decision making in each high-rise residential building and customers are encouraged to raise building safety queries and concerns. We regularly use our knowledge and expertise to share best practice across the Housing sector on building safety and engage in round table discussions and webinars with other industry experts.

All customers who live in our high-rise residential building are welcome to join our Building Safety Customer Group. The group look to challenge decisions that affect building safety and how effectively we communicate and engage with them.

Anyone who would like to contact our team or get involved in the customer group can email **fireandbuildingsafety@gentoogroup.com**

Our Affordable Homes Plan

We are investing millions of pounds in new homes every year and creating neighbourhoods that customers can be proud of. Our affordable homes plan involves building new neighbourhoods and communities in Sunderland with homes for affordable rent, Shared Ownership and Rent to Buy.

These developments have delivered a **total of 130 new high-quality homes** and a further **385 homes are in construction**. As part of the Group's dedication to carbon reduction, each of the new homes have been built with sustainable technology and feature air source heat pumps, smart meters, full fill cavity wall insulation and electric vehicle charging points.

We now have developments at:

- Austin Place, Pennywell
- Bellmen Green, Silksworth
- Brockwell Green, Fencehouses
- Cricketers Hill, Carley Hill
- Crosstree Park, Downhill
- Keelman Rise, Downhill
- Liberty Grange, Hylton Castle
- Penshaw Gardens, Penshaw
- Wellspring Park, Town End Farm

Internal modernisations

A £3.8 million scheme to modernise Hedworth Court, one of our high-rise residential buildings, started this year. The work will modernise flats and improve the safety of the building. Each flat will benefit from:

- New kitchen
- New bathroom
- Installation of a new more efficient electrical heating system
- Electrical rewire

We want our customers to be proud of their home. Listening to and working with our customers is vital to providing a great service.

Customers can choose from a range of options for worktops, doors, handles and flooring colours. Customers can also choose from a range of waterproof cladding to enhance the appearance of the new bathrooms, complemented with a choice of flooring options.

The scheme also sees the fire safety of the building improved through the installation of a sprinkler system and new fire alarm system in all flats and communal areas.

While this work will benefit the customer and building in the long term, we understand it's disruptive for customers when the work is being carried out. We have weekly drop in sessions with our customers and the contractor and we understand how important it is that they are involved and have the opportunity to provide feedback on how we provide our services and make decisions.

We help communities to thrive

- We will actively seek to create more community-based hubs across Sunderland. We will do this alongside other agencies and local services to provide greater benefits to our customers, neighbourhoods and communities.
- We will work with health providers, Sunderland City Council, the police and other agencies to reduce anti-social behaviour in our neighbourhoods and communities.
- We will review how we manage our estates and open spaces to make sure they are clean, well maintained and meet the needs of our neighbourhoods and communities.
- We will work with other housing associations, local councils and other stakeholders to influence social housing policy as part of the North East devolution deal.

Going beyond bricks and mortar

We have continued to grow and strengthen the additional services that we offer to customers. Throughout 2022, we continued to work closely with our key city partners to drive collaboration and positive change in Sunderland. Every year, we invest in local communities by supporting volunteers and community groups and supporting our customers to realise their full potential.

As part of our placemaking activities, we work in partnership with different stakeholders, including local communities and schools, Northumbria Police, Sunderland City Council and the voluntary and community sector. Projects include Hetton Aspirations Linking Opportunities (HALO) and Southwick Altogether Raising Aspirations (SARA) which were set up to work with local communities and help build a sense of ownership and pride in the area at the same time as tackling a range of issues including anti-social and criminal behaviour, environmental crime, unemployment and poor mental health.

Sunderland Altogether Improving Lives (SAIL) is a new partnership which brings together the expertise of partner agencies under one roof to make the city centre a more pleasant and safer place to be. Our experience has shown us that working with partners is essential to reduce anti-social behaviour and make people feel safer and more secure. We have recruited additional resource in our Community Safety Team to help us tackle more complex and serious issues in our communities.

We work closely with agencies and partnerships, like Northumbria 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.

The support teams work with customers to provide extra support and the Department of Levelling up Housing and Communities has held up the work of our Positive Engagement Officers (PEO), as good practice. The PEO's work with those customers who have complex needs, which impact their ability to sustain their tenancy. Gentoo Group is also part of the government's Anti-Social Behaviour Panel put together to identify how landlords and local support services can work together and provide early intervention for vulnerable perpetrators.

We're proud of our neighbourhoods and want our customers to be proud too. We work hard to ensure our neighbourhoods are safe, clean and attractive places to live and meet our customers standards. We continue to work closely with our involved customers through our Rate Your Estate assessment programme, to ensure our customers scrutinise the work we do to maintain our estates. We've made it easier for our involved customers to complete these assessments by using our digital engagement platform, Your Gentoo Voice, which means we have been able to gather even more feedback on our estates.

We are a great place to work

- We will listen to and communicate with our colleagues to build trust and create an inclusive culture.
- We will embed positive values and behaviours to enable our colleagues to work better together for each other and our customers.
- We will invest in developing our current and future managers and leaders and give them opportunities to thrive.
- We will invest in developing the capability and professionalism of our people.
- We will review how we value, and reward our colleagues for the great work that they do.
- We will invest in technology so our teams can work seamlessly with each other to provide joined-up services.
- We will continue to improve how we work so health and safety is part of everything we do.

Investing in our people

At the beginning of 2023, we started on our journey to improve our culture and to create better working lives for everyone at Gentoo. More than 100 colleagues participated in culture review focus groups and shared their experiences, thoughts and ideas on how to improve the levels of trust and develop a more inclusive organisational working culture.

The feedback was presented to the Group Board and our internal Employee Forum and Trades Unions. The Executive and Senior Leadership Teams then worked up an action plan, taking into account the feedback and recommendations provided. The action plan included our colleagues creating brand new values and behaviours, management development and reward and recognition.

Our colleagues also told us that our corporate strategy was confusing and not fit for purpose. 2023 saw the launch of a refreshed strategy which better reflects the ambition of Gentoo as we deliver for our customers and colleagues. The strategy is clear, easy to understand and focus on our priorities moving forward. We will measure our performance against these business priorities, and we will deliver. The performance results will be available to our customers and stakeholders, so that they can hold us to account.

To continue this journey of cultural change and organisational development, we recently recruited an Executive Director of People, Culture and Engagement. This role will be critical in executing our strategy for our colleagues and customers, in the right way.

Our colleagues know what it is like to work at Gentoo better than anyone and it's important they are part of this journey, to ensure Gentoo is a place where people enjoy coming into work, feel proud, trusted, supported and valued and importantly can be themselves.

Delivering our digital transformation

Colleagues have been preparing to launch our new digital housing solution, Genforce, which will improve the service we provide to our customers. Working with partners, Salesforce and Globant, Genforce will include a range of phases to improve how we work with customers, including how we deal with reports of damp and mould in customers' homes.

First to launch will be a new fire doors inspection process, which will transform the way we inspect and repair fire doors, continuing to ensure our customers are safe in their homes.

We will then launch Customer360, a new customer relationship management system for colleagues to log customer interactions in one place, improving the customer experience with the Group at every interaction.

We spend our money wisely

- We will review Gentoo Homes' operating model to make the most of its surplus and reinvest it to enable us to build more affordable homes.
- We will embed a comprehensive approach to value for money throughout all areas of our business.
- We will continue to invest in knowing the condition of our homes so we can invest our money in the right places.
- We will increase our operating margin to at least 20%.
- We will operate with a commercial mindset and drive continuous improvement in everything we do.

Gentoo Homes

Our profit for purpose private house building arm, Gentoo Homes, generates a surplus which is reinvested back into Gentoo's housing services to support the delivery of affordable rented homes across the city.

They currently have seven developments and sold 189 new homes in 2022 - 23. Since 2007 Gentoo Homes have built more than 3,500 new homes throughout the North East.

Restructure of treasury portfolio

In January, the Group refinanced £364 million of debt as part of a new £460 million financing package. Lenders included UK banks NatWest and HSBC, Dutch lender ABN AMRO and a private placement. The new funding arrangements will lead to greater administrative ease for Gentoo going forward, but also frees up capacity, reduces risk, makes more efficient use of assets, and positions the Group well for the future.

It further enables Gentoo to deliver our core purpose of providing safe and decent homes for our customers of today and tomorrow and continue to play our part in the ongoing regeneration of Sunderland. The restructure has also seen the Group achieve an A+ credit rating with Fitch.

Delivering high quality products, systems and services to our customers

To make sure we deliver exceptional value for money, we use a procurement process to secure the best possible outcome for our customers. We have recently improved the way we manage procurement, to ensure we are delivering high quality products, systems and services to our customers.

GenBuy, our eProcurement system, gives potential and existing suppliers an easy way to respond to our tenders. Where relevant we hold pre-market engagement sessions with prospective suppliers, to tell them about us, and what the contract is for. The system allows us to manage our tenders, contracts and suppliers in one place.

We have introduced a supplier relationship management (SRM) framework, to ensure that supplier relationships are well managed and to help us understand the risk and impact a supplier has to our business. Internally, our partnership approach means that all business areas are supported with procurement requirements. Colleagues are also supported to manage their own supplier relationships. As a registered provider of social housing, we work in line with Public Contract Regulations which requires us to advertise and award tenders. Our procurement activities follow a clear process which gives all interested parties a fair chance to work with us.

We are well governed

- We will retain our G1 regulatory grading.
- We will review our committee structure to ensure our customers' voice is at the heart of our decision making.
- We will continue to demonstrate effective supply chain governance through appropriate procurement and supplier management procedures.
- We will continue to invest in our IT systems and infrastructure to protect us from cyber attacks.

Our ongoing commitment to Cyber Security Excellence

As part of our ongoing commitment to protect ourselves against cyber security threats, we have implemented a number of initiatives to strengthen our digital infrastructure and safeguard the valuable information we hold.

We continuously adopt and adapt industry-leading technologies and are committed to following best practices and staying ahead of emerging threats. We recognise that technology alone cannot protect the organisation and have also introduced a comprehensive internal awareness programme that aims to educate and prepare colleagues to identify and counteract various forms of cyber threats.

Our continuous improvement measures contribute to a developing cyber security posture, as evidenced by our strong performance on external assessments like the Security Scorecard. We also adhere to legal frameworks, such as the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR, ensuring that we not only protect our systems but also act responsibly with the data we hold.

By undertaking these measures, we demonstrate to our customers, colleagues, stakeholders, and the wider public that we take information security seriously across all operational aspects of our business.

Putting customers at the heart of decision making

Earlier this year we recruited for a brand-new Customer Committee to ensure customers are at the forefront of decision making and service improvements. The committee will provide the Gentoo Board with assurance that the consumer standards are being met, value for money is being achieved and excellent services are being delivered to Gentoo customers.

The six successful candidates will meet for the first time in November. They will work directly with the Group Board and involved customers to shape how the Group delivers services across Sunderland.

Our core purpose is to provide safe and decent homes for our customers of today and tomorrow. As a key part of our governance structure, the creation of the committee is the next step in our commitment to not only listening to our customers, but also acting on their feedback and recommendations. Insights from the committee will help us to better understand the challenges facing customers and will help drive purposeful, positive change across the Group.

Brenda Naisby, Customer Board Member said: “It’s great to see Gentoo create more opportunities for customers like me to get involved and represent local communities.

“I have been an involved customer for over five years and joined the Group Board in January 2021.”

Social impact summary

We have continued to make a positive difference in our neighbourhoods, investing in services that deliver real social value, services that help people live their best life possible and have a long lasting impact on our people and communities.

We have measured the impact of our social investment and the outcomes of this using the HACT Wellbeing Valuation Approach and the national TOMs social value framework, both of which are robust social value measurement tools.

By using these formulas, we have been able to accurately measure the social impact of interventions and activities that have a positive impact on our people and communities.

All our tenders over £100k have a social value commitment of 10% of the tender evaluation, and bids are pledged in the Social Value Portal where we then manage the commitment being delivered.

**In 2022-23 we generated
an overall social value of
£6,834,316**

We funded the Raising Aspirations careers programme from Positive Footprints, which aims to inspire youngsters to identify their natural talents, believe in themselves and visualise a positive future. In the last three years, the programme has opened up the world of work for more than **1,300 school children** across **21 primary schools**.

In partnership with RE:GEN, we opened an affordable food hub in Pennywell. In its first six months, The Bread and Butter Thing hub welcomed **826 members**, sold **2,256 bags of food** and **saved residents £56,000** on food bills.

For the 7th year running, our gardening competition recognised keen gardeners for their efforts in creating beautiful gardens and outdoor spaces. The competition, in partnership with RE:GEN and Esh Construction, recognised customer, school and community gardens.

By working together, we can achieve far more than we can on our own, for the good of our customers, communities and the city. A big thank you to our colleagues, partners and contractors who helped us make such a difference. Your brilliant work also allowed us to:

Take

200

families to the Christmas pantomime

Deliver Christmas gifts to

1,000

customers

Support

188

customers with domestic abuse and anti-social behaviour cases

Deliver our

5,000th

gift to those in need at Easter

Deliver Christmas dinners to

180

customers

Help customers save

£56,000

on food bills thanks to The Bread and Butter Thing in partnership with RE:GEN Group



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