gentoo

Customer and Community Engagement and Scrutiny Impact Report 2025-2026

Working together to make a difference across Sunderland

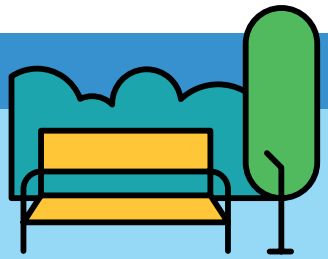
Over the past year, we've increased customer and community engagement across Sunderland to improve services, strengthen neighbourhoods and invest in what matters most.

Listening to customers continues to shape how we deliver services across Gentoo. Through surveys, community events, in-person conversations, scrutiny activities and deep dives into key services, customers have helped us understand what matters most and identify where improvements are needed.

Your feedback has influenced everything from day-to-day service improvements to community investment, family support initiatives and new opportunities for people to get involved and shape decisions.

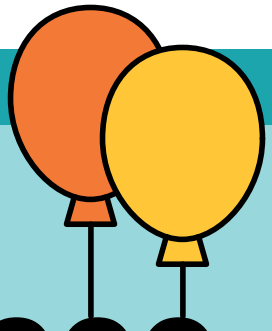
This report highlights the difference your voice has made, showing how we have listened, acted and delivered real change to improve services, support our communities and make neighbourhoods better places to live.

“Everything we’ve achieved this year has started with listening to our customers.”



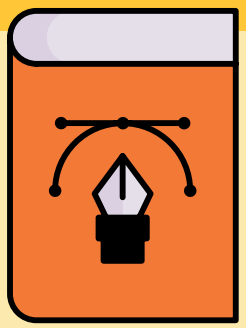
£21,428

awarded to 41 community groups through customer-led grants



6,000+

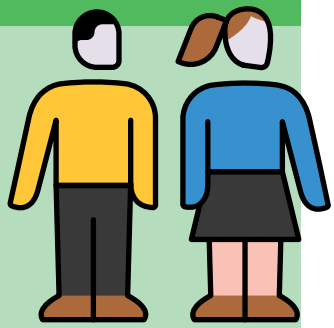
families supported through community events



Over

240

customers engaged in designing our Service Standards



565

children across Sunderland provided with a full school uniform

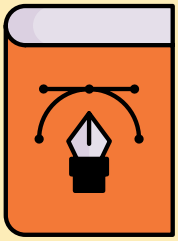
265+

customers supported through the mobile housing hub

Improving services with the people who use them

Customer engagement has played a key role in improving how our services are delivered, helping us make them clearer, more consistent and more focused on what matters most.

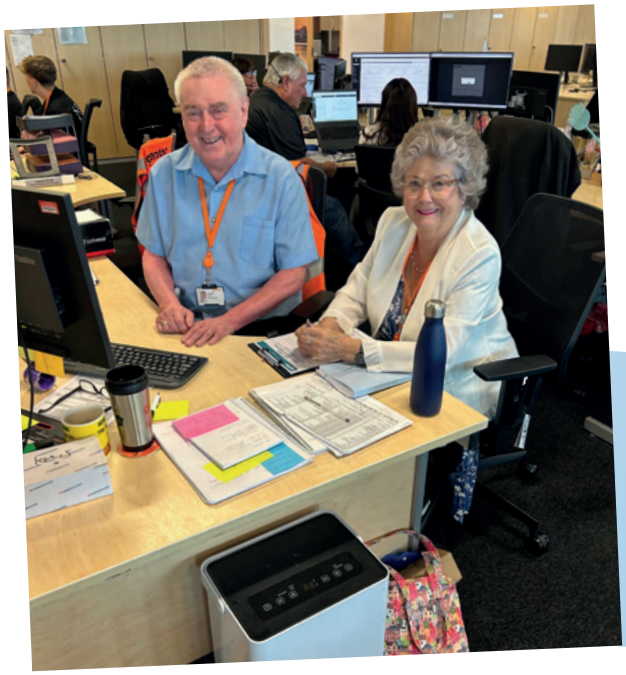
Over 240 customers worked with us to design six new Service Standards, leading to clearer timescales, better safety information and more consistent communication.



We've also improved how we communicate performance, introduced clearer information on how rent is spent and made it easier for customers to understand what we're doing and why.

We've also introduced changes based directly on feedback, including making it easier to contact us and improving the overall customer experience.

Customers have helped shape improvements to key services, including repairs and allocations, resulting in clearer communication, better appointment management and improvements to how homes are advertised.



"Customer engagement doesn't stop at listening, it leads to action."

What this means:
Services are clearer, more reliable and better aligned with what customers need.

Engaging communities every day of the year

Alongside improving services, we've supported families and communities through practical help, direct investment and strong partnerships.

We've engaged with more than 6,000 families through a wide range of events across Sunderland, including large-scale events at the Beacon of Light as well as community-led activities such as Pennywell Community Days, Thorney Close Fun Day and the Pallion Action Group sports day.

We've worked with partners such as Together for Children to deliver events and activities for families, including community sessions supported with activities activities to increase community engagement and connection.

We've also supported smaller, regular activity in community venues, including coffee mornings, social sessions and events at places like the Tansy Centre, Farringdon Jubilee Centre and Bethal Christian Centre.

Through initiatives such as Big Lunch events, we've helped create opportunities for neighbours to come together, reducing isolation and strengthening community connections.

What this means:
More families feel connected to their community and confident accessing support around them.

Reducing pressure on families

We provided 565 children across Sunderland with a full school uniform, including clothing, shoes and essential items.

96%

of families said this support improved their child's experience or eased financial pressure, and 98% said they would like it to continue

One customer said:

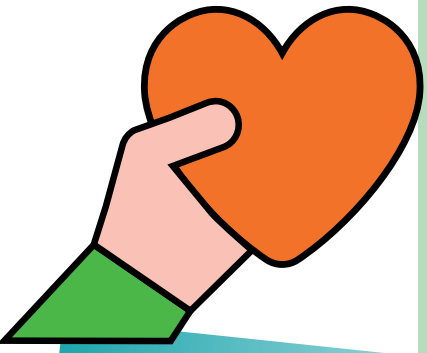
"This helped me massively as a single mam... it helps with the stress and worries."

What this means:
Families are better supported with the cost of everyday essentials, reducing pressure and improving wellbeing.

Keeping older customers connected

We know that feeling connected to your community is important for wellbeing and independence.

That's why we're carrying out proactive visits for customers aged over 80, helping us understand what support they may need and connect them with local services, activities and community opportunities.



Since launching our Support Service, we've completed

1,743

Proactive Connect Visits and made

253

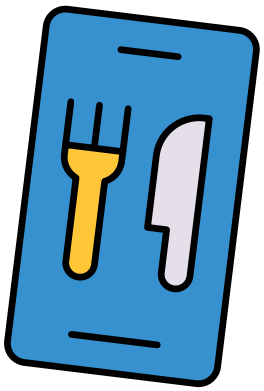
onward referrals, helping customers access additional support and community networks.

We also work closely with partners across Sunderland to create opportunities for older customers to take part in social, cultural and community activities. By helping people stay connected, build friendships and access local support, we're reducing loneliness and helping customers remain active and independent in the communities they call home.

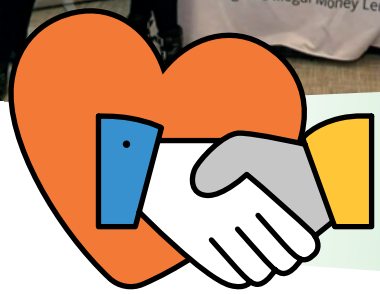
Supporting customers through the cost of living

We've worked with partners to deliver targeted support, including:

- Talk Money Week advice and guidance
- Loan Shark Awareness activity
- Support to access free school meals
- Targeted contact with customers receiving Universal Credit
- Support for those affected by the benefit cap



We also delivered regular engagement drop-in sessions in community locations such as Washington Mill Centre and Mickey's Place, making it easier for customers to access face-to-face support.



What this means:
Customers can access support earlier, helping them manage finances and avoid crisis situations.

Being there when it matters most

Through the Your Gentoo Christmas campaign, we engaged with families across Sunderland through practical help and community activity.

This included over 1,400 referrals to Love, Amelia, Christmas dinners, presents for children, pantomime trips and community events across sheltered schemes, including carol services.

We also supported customers during Going the Eggstra Mile, providing food parcels, toiletries and essential items alongside Easter eggs during school holidays.

"Support is provided at the moments that matter most."

What this means:
Customers receive meaningful engagement at key times of year when financial pressure is highest.

Working alongside communities to improve neighbourhoods

Across Sunderland, we've delivered a wide range of local engagement activity, creating regular opportunities for customers to get involved, shape decisions and improve their neighbourhoods.

This includes:

- monthly resident meetings and regular engagement drop-ins
- neighbourhood walkabouts and Customer and Community Voice meetings
- skip days and estate improvements to tackle waste and prevent anti-social behaviour
- clean and green activity, including litter picks and planting events
- youth-led activity, including litter picks and community projects
- partnership working with groups such as SARA and Back on the Map
- consultation events where customers help shape improvements to homes and buildings

For example, local engagement has included HALO family fun days, Snowfest and community celebrations such as carol services, creating opportunities for people of all ages to come together.

Hetton Aspirations Linking Opportunities (HALO) and Southwick Altogether Raising Aspirations (SARA) 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.

Environmental improvements have included litter picks led by youth groups, planting activity with residents and families, and clean-up work such as pond improvements, helping improve shared spaces and build pride in neighbourhoods.

Practical interventions have also made a difference, including skip days ahead of Bonfire Night, waste initiatives in high-rise buildings, and environmental changes such as installing boulders to reduce anti-social behaviour.

Customers have also helped shape longer-term improvements, including consultations on building upgrades, involvement in new developments, and choosing design features for shared spaces such as play areas and communal areas.

We've worked closely with schools and young people through activity such as breakfast clubs, parents' evenings and work experience opportunities, helping build stronger links between services and communities.

This is supported by regular engagement activity in community venues, including coffee mornings, youth sessions and support groups, creating welcoming spaces for people to connect.

This work is ongoing and consistent, not one-off, ensuring a regular presence in communities.

What this means:
Neighbourhoods are cleaner, safer and better connected, with customers playing an active role in shaping where they live.

"Local engagement activity is happening every day, across Sunderland."

We listen and act

We listen and act

Listening to customers is only the first step, what matters is what we do next.

Over the past year, we've carried out a wide range of engagement and scrutiny activities, including:

- Online surveys and feedback
- Face-to-face engagement and neighbourhood visits
- In-depth service reviews and deep dives
- Customer workshops and involvement sessions

This helps us understand what matters most to our customers and make meaningful improvements to our services and communities. The following pages show how we've listened to your feedback, acted on what you told us and made changes that matter.

Customer Annual Report

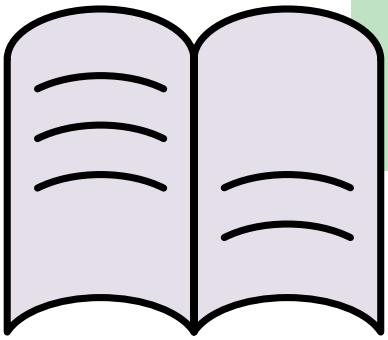
You said:

- The report needed to feel more relevant and easier to read
- Customer involvement should be more visible
- You wanted more information on damp and mould
- It wasn't clear where rent is spent
- You wanted more real stories

You asked for a
clearer, more honest report
– we redesigned it to reflect what matters most to you.

We did:

- Opened with the Customer Committee and how to get involved
- Added a dedicated damp and mould feature
- Included a clear rent breakdown
- Shared more community stories and grant outcomes
- Improved layout and accessibility



Service Standards

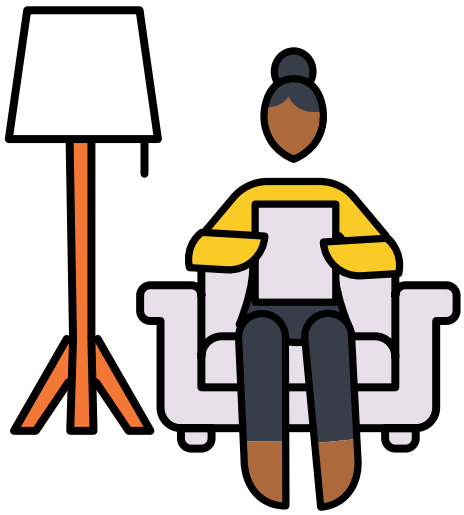
You said:

- Some information wasn't clear
- Responsibilities were confusing
- It wasn't easy to contact the right person

240+ customers
helped shape our new service standards.

We did:

- Rewrote standards in plain English
- Clearly set out responsibilities
- Added clear contact routes
- Strengthened information on ASB and support
- Set clear service expectations



Blackie playpark

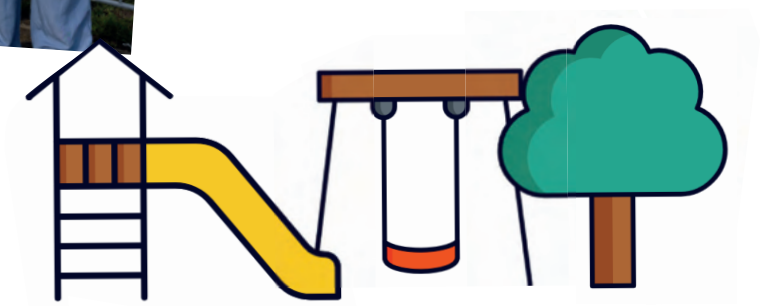
You said:

- You wanted better play spaces
- You wanted a say in design and location

We did:

- Asked you to choose the design and location
- Used your feedback to shape the final plans
- Delivered a playpark based on your priorities

Over
100 people
attended the opening of a playpark shaped by your feedback.



Repairs and Maintenance timescales

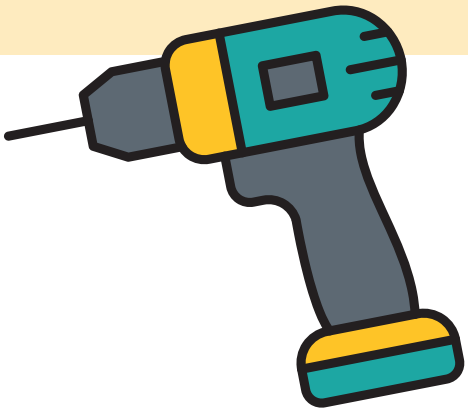
You said:

- Repairs need to be faster
- Communication needs to improve
- Timescales weren't clear

We've made
repairs clearer
faster and easier to understand.

We did:

- Protected emergency response times
- Reduced delays where possible
- Switched to working day timescales
- Improved communication
- Focused on getting repairs right first time



Mobile Housing Hub

You said:

- You wanted more face-to-face support
- We needed to be more visible
- Not everyone can access services online

265
customers engaged

95%
found it helpful

100%
said it was easy to engage

We did:

- Introduced a mobile housing hub
- Took services into local communities
- Created a space for easier conversations

Contact Centre improvements

You said:

- It was difficult to get through
- Hold music was frustrating

We did:

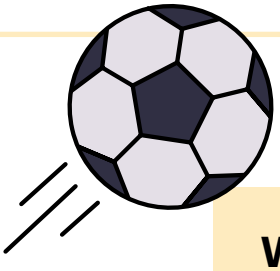
- Worked with you to choose new hold music
- Introduced a callback service
- Made it easier to get in touch

We
call you back
so you don't have to wait.

Family fun days

You said:

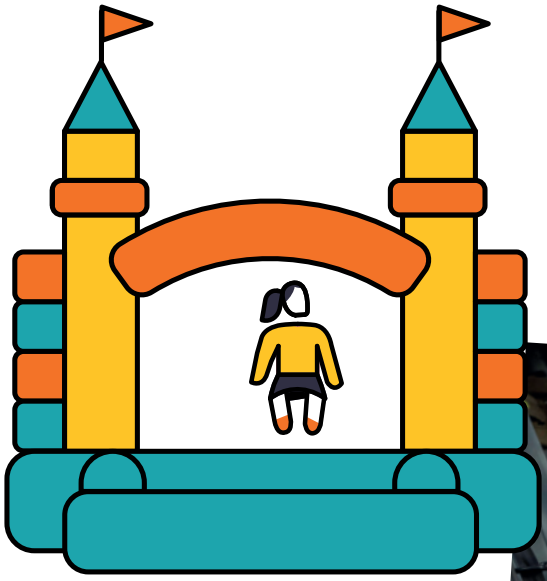
- School holidays can be expensive
- You wanted more local activities



Over
6,000
families have joined our events.

We did:

- Introduced free Family Fun Days
- Provided activities, support and advice
- Created opportunities to connect with services



Moving out of your home guide

You said:

- Moving out can be stressful
- Expectations weren't clear
- You wanted to avoid unexpected charges

Clear guidance

to help you move out with confidence.

We did:

- Created a clear step-by-step guide
- Added a practical checklist
- Explained charges upfront
- Provided support through Coordinators

Allocations deep dive

You said:

- Communication could be clearer
- Bidding and banding were confusing
- Viewing arrangements needed improving

Your feedback

is shaping a fairer allocations process.

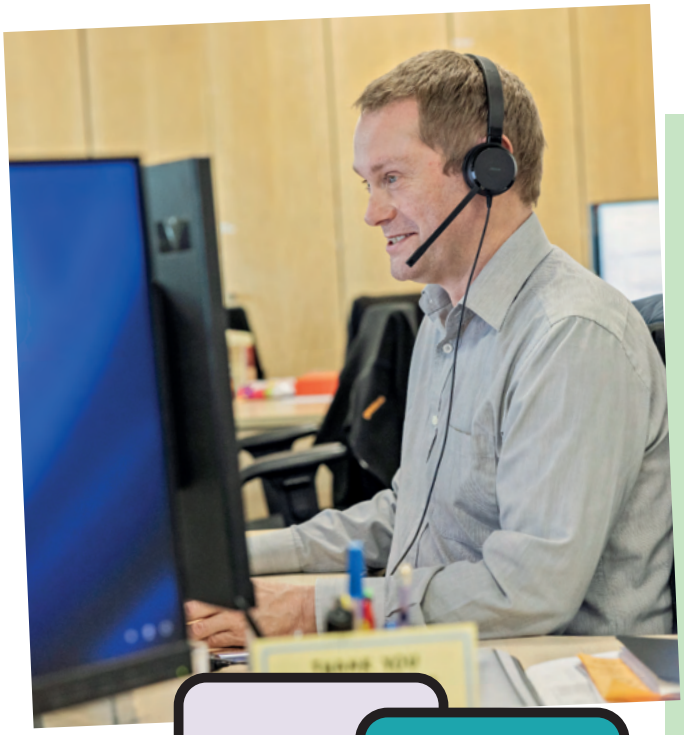
We did:

- Improved communication at each stage
- Simplified explanations of banding and bidding
- Improved viewing arrangements
- Built your feedback into CustomerSure

Repairs and Maintenance deep dive

You said:

- Communication needs to improve
- You want to know who is attending
- Appointment changes were frustrating



We did:

- Improved appointment messages
- Reviewed reminders
- Introduced direct phone calls when appointments change
- Invested £1 million in operatives' vans
- Promoted more ways to report repairs

£1 million
invested to help fix things right first time.

Your voice, making a difference

TENANT ENGAGEMENT EXPERTS tpas

We're proud to have achieved TPAS Accreditation, a national recognition of our commitment to listening to customers and involving them in decisions that shape our services.

The accreditation recognises our commitment to listening, acting on feedback and working alongside customers to make positive changes. Thank you to everyone who has shared their views, challenged us to do better and helped shape the way we work. Together, we're building better services and stronger communities.

This year's work shows how customer voice is driving real change across Sunderland.

- Services are clearer, more responsive and easier to use
- Customers have more influence over decisions that affect them
- Communities are benefiting from investment, support and regular activity
- Neighbourhoods are improving through consistent local engagement
- More customers are engaging with support when they need it

Everything we've achieved is built on one simple approach, continuous customer engagement, listening and acting on what matters.

"Real change happens when customers are listened to and involved."

Supporting our communities

Community Grants Awarded 2025-26

Our community grants programme supports organisations delivering vital services across Sunderland.

During 2025–2026, involved customers awarded £21,428 to 41 organisations, helping to fund projects that improve wellbeing, reduce isolation and strengthen local communities.

Organisation	Area	Awarded for	Amount Awarded
→ Choice Wellbeing Service	Citywide	Beacon of Light fun day and SEND hub resources	£1,000
→ Sincerely J	Citywide	Winter care packs	£500
→ STEFS	Citywide	Sensory den	£500
→ Thornhill Academy	Central	Community cupboard	£1,000
→ Together We Can NE	Central	Craft sessions	£500
→ Love Amelia	Central	Toiletry packs and baby cots	£1,000
→ Friends of Eastwoods Park	Out of Area	Lunch club resources	£500
→ SARA Artistic Flare	North	Craft materials	£500
→ St Cuthbert's Church	North	Fruit trees	£253

Organisation	Area	Awarded for	Amount Awarded
→ Thompson Park Bowling	North	Equipment and marketing	£475
→ Grindon Young Peoples Centre	South	Pizza oven and sports equipment	£500
→ Invigor8 NE CIC	South	Football equipment	£1,000
→ Pennywell Community Centre	South	Food, arts and bingo resources	£1,000
→ Ryhope Allstars Band	South	Hall hire	£1,000
→ Ryhope Choir	South	Hall hire	£520
→ Ryhope Community Spirit	South	Litter picking equipment	£500
→ SAPS	South	Craft materials	£500
→ Tansy Centre	South	Panto and refreshments	£500
→ The Sensory Place	South	Community events	£500
→ Acumen Community Buildings – Youthy	Hetton and Houghton	Youth club resources	£1,000
→ Calm and Grow CIC	Hetton and Houghton	SEND venue hire and resources	£1,000
→ Durham FC Comets	Hetton and Houghton	Venue hire	£969
→ HALO	Hetton and Houghton	Pottery materials and oven costs	£500

Organisation	Area	Awarded for	Amount Awarded
→ Hetton Juniors U12 Lionesses	Hetton and Houghton	Football kit	£500
→ HOPS	Hetton and Houghton	Wellbeing day	£500
→ Houghton Brass	Hetton and Houghton	Band equipment	£500
→ Iceborn Vikings	Hetton and Houghton	Tents	£475
→ Newbottle Community Volunteers	Hetton and Houghton	Selection boxes	£120
→ Penshaw Community Association	Hetton and Houghton	Community resources	£500
→ Space4	Hetton and Houghton	Sensory equipment	£500
→ Columbia Community Association	Washington	Christmas lunch and hampers	£500
→ Crafting Connections CIC	Washington	Café equipment	£480
→ The Crystal Crew Project	Washington	Wellbeing day	£500
→ Washington Juniors FC	Washington	Football equipment	£427.20
→ Washington Station WI	Washington	Weekly activity resources	£300
→ Wessington Primary School	Washington	Christmas crafts	£400

Looking ahead

This year shows the difference your voice makes.

From shaping services to improving communication and supporting communities, your feedback is driving real change across Gentoo.

We will continue to listen, act and improve, making sure your experience stays at the heart of everything we do.

By listening to what matters most to you, we can make changes that improve your experience and the communities we serve. To find out how you can get involved and have your say, please visit **gentoogroup.com/get-involved**

If you have any questions about this report, please email **communications@gentoogroup.com**.

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