

gentoo

Great homes
Strong communities
Inspired people
for Sunderland

gentoo
TRADES
ACADEMY

Annual Report 2023–24

www.gentoo.com

Welcome from our CEO

Louise Bassett

2023-24 has been a year of positive change and strong progress for Gentoo and I would like to thank our colleagues for the excellent work they do every day for our customers.

We have made great headway in delivering on the six key priorities of our Corporate Strategy and have been laser focussed on improving services to customers and delivering our Customer Promise. The condition of our homes, and how they are maintained, is what matters most to our customers and we made the decision to prioritise our spend on investing in our customers' homes above building new homes.

We spend over £1 million every week investing in our customers' homes and I am immensely proud of the thousands of improvements we have made this year, including kitchens, bathrooms, windows, electrical rewiring, and roofs, as well as investment in the safety of our high-rise buildings. We have made great progress to improve the energy rating of our homes and at the end of the financial year, 75% of our homes were at EPC C or above. We are also proud that through our property condition surveys, we know the condition of 98% of our customers' homes.

Gentoo has welcomed the changes brought by the new Consumer Standards and was prepared for the implementation of these during this year. This has included significant work on the Gentoo culture and putting customers at the heart of everything we do.



The Tenant Satisfaction Measures give us a clear indication of what our customers think about our performance and in this financial year, the data tells us that overall, 78% of customers are satisfied with our performance. Gentoo's 2023-24 Tenant Satisfaction Measures are shared in this report, and we are committed to continuously improve our performance across all areas.

Whilst we have prioritised the investment in our customers' homes, the need to build more homes remains a priority as the waiting list for our homes continues to grow. Unfortunately, we were unable to fully deliver on our target for new affordable homes due to scheme delays and the challenges of the economic climate, however, we are confident to deliver our plan to build more than 700 new affordable homes by 2029 and are ambitious to increase this.

I am enormously proud of the considerable progress Gentoo has made to its financial performance and operating margin, in what has been another year of increasing costs, high repairs demand, and lower than planned sales in our private house building division,

Gentoo Homes. Our overall operating margin has increased from 14.3% to 22.4%. An increased operating margin gives us confidence that we are spending our money wisely and increases the investment we can make in our customers' homes.

At the start of 2024, we made the difficult decision to increase our customers' rents by 7.7%, in accordance with government guidelines. We did not take this decision lightly, particularly with the cost of living still a concern for so many. To support our customers seeking financial support, we increased the size of our Money Matters Team, and this team has helped our customers gain over £3 million in additional income this year. We also increased our tenancy sustainment fund from £50k to £500k, and this has been used to support customers with cost of living challenges, including helping with energy costs, food, flooring, and beds for children, alongside many other acts of kindness from our colleagues.

Whilst we have made considerable progress to our services to customers, I acknowledge that we did not always get things right. Throughout the year, it was a priority of mine to meet with customers and listen to their feedback. I heard both criticism and compliments, but above all I received the benefit of honest, invaluable feedback from our customers lived experiences which has helped us improve our services. I would like to thank our customers for their honest feedback. I would also like to apologise to those customers who have not had a positive experience with Gentoo. We know we still have much to do to improve our customer experience, and delivery of our Customer Promise will continue to be our focus in 2024-25.

We established a new Customer Committee to ensure that customer voice is at the heart of our decisions making. The Customer Committee has already added significant value, and I'd like to thank them for their challenge, ideas for improvement, and genuine commitment to Gentoo.

We have continued to invest in the development of colleagues and recruited new customer facing positions to further strengthen our teams. We have also continued our commitment to invest in skills for the future and have increased the number of apprenticeships this year as well as introducing a Gentoo Trades Academy in partnership with Sunderland College.

Throughout the year, we have worked in partnership with many organisations to help deliver our services, including external contractors supporting us to deliver our investment programme and build new homes, to working with Northumbria Police and Sunderland City Council to tackle homelessness and anti-social behaviour. Gentoo has also joined forces with other social housing providers to create the North East Housing Partnership which has been established to work with the North East Combined Authority to deliver more and better affordable housing in the region.

The Regulator of Social Housing carried out a routine planned inspection of Gentoo against the Governance and Financial Standards and for the first time against the new Consumer Standards. I am delighted that the Regulator of Social Housing awarded Gentoo the highest gradings of C1 and G1 for the Consumer and Governance standards and V2 for Financial Viability. Whilst we are pleased to have this assurance, and have made substantial progress to improve our services to customers, there is still much to do. More than ever, I am committed to continuing to improve our services to customers and delivering on our Customer Promise, and I will not rest until we have achieved these aims.

The year ahead will continue to be challenging but the passion and commitment to improving our services to customers, being a responsible business, making Gentoo a great place to work and staying focussed on our core purpose of providing safe and decent homes for our customers will continue.

Welcome from our Group Chair

Emily Cox MBE

Gentoo's vision is to have great homes, strong communities and inspired people across Sunderland. Gentoo is a purpose driven business and an anchor institution in Sunderland. We work with the Council and other partners to create a connected, international city with opportunities for all.

A key cornerstone of Gentoo's culture and strategy is to ensure that customers play a key part in decision making and this is a key focus for me as Chair of the Board. Gentoo welcomes the changes in regulation and the strengthening of the Housing Ombudsman's role in the handling of customer complaints - and this is an area the Board and I are focussed on. During the year, a new Customer Committee has been established. This Committee puts those who live in our properties at the forefront of shaping our strategy and provides strong feedback to the Board. The Committee has the Chief Executive Officer and other members of the Executive Team in attendance. Board Members are also on the Committee, which is chaired by me.

The Committee has played a central role in determining our services are delivered, providing direct feedback to the Board and holding the Executive Team to account when it comes to meeting customer standards, health and safety and achieving value for money. I would like to thank the Customer Committee, all of the Group's Board and Committee Members and external partners



for all of their work in support of Gentoo's social purpose.

We recognise that the riots over the summer had a significant impact on our communities. We work closely with the Police and have supported key partners to make communities safer and to facilitate social inclusion. We have been a key player in the development of localised community groups to help prevent and support victims of anti-social behaviour. As an anchor institution in the city, Gentoo is a leader in providing support services to our customers through strong partnerships with specialist organisations. This includes working with our customers to ensure their welfare, as well as financial advice and support. During the year, the Board also initiated an increase in the tenancy sustainment fund to £500k to support customers with cost of living challenges.

December 2023 saw the tenth anniversary of Gentoo's Money Matters Service. This service helps customers with specialist financial and debt advice. During the 10 years, more than 13,000 customers have



benefited from the service and have been able to claim additional income in excess of £11 million. Continuing to provide this free, and sometimes life-changing service makes a positive difference to so many customers in challenging times. We also have a young persons' support team, who do brilliant work to ensure young people are supported to succeed and sustain their tenancies.

Ensuring customers know their rights when dissatisfied with the services we provide is also important. In early 2024, Gentoo invited customers into its head office for the opportunity to meet the Housing Ombudsman, Richard Blakeway, and raise individual concerns. Holding these sessions are vital to our pledge to listen to our customers and act on what they tell us, and I hope we can hold further sessions in future to help deliver better services.

Since the year end, the Group has been inspected by the Regulator of Social Housing as part of its routine planned inspection programme. The inspection assessed how well Gentoo is meeting the Regulator's

Governance and Financial Viability requirements and how we are delivering the new Consumer Standards which came into force for all social landlords in April 2024. The Regulator concluded that Gentoo is delivering the outcomes of the Consumer Standards and has confirmed the highest grading of C1. Gentoo also continued to meet the Governance and Financial viability requirements with continued gradings of G1 and V2 respectively. Whilst we have made good progress, there is still much to do, and the Group is committed to improving our services to customers and delivering on its Customer Promise.

Finally, I would like to thank Gentoo's colleagues for their hard work and their continuing commitment to 'move the dial' for customers and helping customers thrive. It is because of them Gentoo is able to support our customers, residents and communities by investing in services that help people live their best possible life.

About us

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.



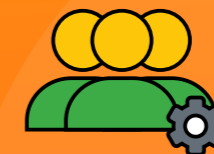
We help communities to thrive.



We provide great homes.



We are a great place to work.

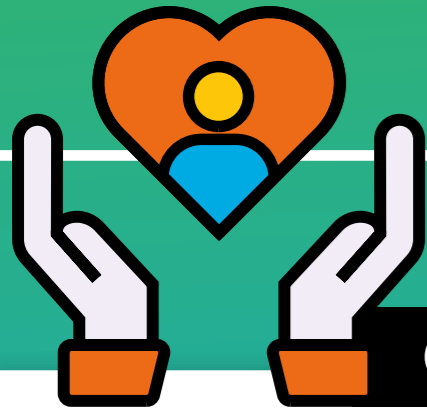


We are well governed.



We spend our money wisely.

Our year in numbers 2023-24



Customers and Communities

430k+

calls answered

35

engagement events held

1,300

Christmas Gifts given out

£20,911

given out in Aspire Grants to 44 groups

£259k

given out through the Tenancy Sustainment Fund

2,456

support referrals received

1,218

social activities delivered in our sheltered and extra care schemes

£3.3m

in additional income for customers, including water rates discount

151

victims/survivors of domestic abuse supported

Number of complaints
Stage 1 - **345**
Stage 2 - **107**

£12,240

raised for our corporate charities

64

victims of ASB supported



Homes

531

new kitchens or bathrooms

112

New homes sold

£39.4m

invested into existing homes

30,143

emergency repairs completed

825

new roofs

163,229

servicing, maintenance and repair visits carried out

£38m

spent repairing and maintaining our properties

62

affordable homes built

20,830

homes improved to EPC C in total by end of 2023-24

22.3%

overall operating margin

£12m

surplus

£178m

turnover

100.56%

rent collection



A great place to work

36

apprentices

£768

on average invested in training and development for every colleague

We've been awarded:



Consumer Standards

Governance and Financial Viability

*Figures submitted to the Regulator of Social Housing as part of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures were Stage 1, 342 and Stage 2, 105. They do not include Leasehold or Shared Ownership customers.

Tenant Satisfaction Measures

In April 2023, the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) announced the introduction of 22 Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs). The RSH regulates providers of social housing in England.

They promote a viable, efficient and well-governed social housing sector able to deliver more and better social homes. The results of the TSMs show how we're performing when it comes to providing good quality homes and services for our customers.

The measures are split into two parts:

- 10 performance measures that we will collect through management performance information
- 12 customer perception survey measures that will be collected through surveying



Customer perception measures

78.0%

overall satisfaction

77.2%

satisfaction that the home is well maintained

78.8%

satisfaction with our repairs service

82.1%

satisfaction that your home is safe

72.7%

satisfaction with time taken to complete your last repair

69.4%

satisfaction that we listen and act

76.0%

satisfaction that we keep you informed about things that matter to you

76.9%

satisfaction that we keep communal areas clean and well maintained

80.1%

agreement that we treat you fairly and with respect

69.7%

satisfaction we make a positive contribution to neighbourhoods

39.7%

satisfaction with our approach to handling complaints

64.6%

satisfaction with our approach to handling anti-social behaviour



Performance measures

Number of stage one and stage two complaints relative to the size of the landlord

Stage one
11.9%

Stage two
3.6%

Homes that do not meet the Decent Homes Standard

0.1%

Stage one and stage two complaints responded to within the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling timescales

Stage one
75.1%

Stage two
98.1%

Lift safety checks

100%

Fire safety checks

100%**

Anti-social behaviour cases

relative to the size of the landlord

29.5%

that involve hate cases

29.5%

Gas safety checks

100%*

Asbestos safety checks

100%

Water safety checks

99.3%

*Actual performance was 99.99 but in-line with the TSM guidance this has been rounded to 100%.

**Actual performance was 99.95 but in-line with the TSM guidance this has been rounded to 100%.

We know our customers

Improving our customer engagement

At Gentoo we recognise changes to our services can have a significant impact on our customers – that is why it is so important we ensure our customers are at the forefront of our decision making and that we listen, learn, care and act on what they tell us.

Knowing our customers, how we can adapt our services, and what they think about our services is a priority at Gentoo, which is why engaging with customers on a regular basis throughout the year is crucial.

We do this in various ways. From holding drop-in sessions across Sunderland where customers can speak to colleagues about issues that matter to them, to ensuring Gentoo is held to account by organisations such as our involved customers who play a key role in ensuring services are delivered to the best level and that value for money is achieved in doing so.

In 2024, the Regulator of Social Housing introduced new consumer standards. At Gentoo, we welcomed the introduction of these and have worked to deliver an open and honest approach with our customers, treating them with fairness and respect so that they can access services, raise

complaints, influence decision making and hold us to account.

Earlier in the year, Gentoo was inspected by the RSH to assess how well we are delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards. This inspection assessed all four of the consumer standards: the Neighbourhood and Community Standard, the Safety and Quality Standard, the Tenancy Standard and the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard.

The Regulator concluded that Gentoo is delivering the outcomes of the Consumer Standards and has confirmed the highest grading of C1.

The Regulator:

- acknowledged that Gentoo has the appropriate systems in place to ensure the health and safety of our customers in their homes and that we keep an accurate record of the condition of homes at an individual property level and keep this information up to date.
- stated that Gentoo demonstrated that it provides “an effective, efficient and timely repairs service”, takes action to improve the service when issues occur and that our approach to repairs is informed by the needs of our customers.



- was assured that Gentoo works with partners to deter and tackle anti-social behaviour in our neighbourhoods, and how we work with our customer committee and scrutiny panel to review our approach for reporting anti-social behaviour and hate crime incidents.
- recognised how Gentoo recently reviewed its allocations policy to “ensure all properties are let in a fair and transparent way” and supports customers to sustain their tenancies.
- noted how Gentoo learns from information on complaint types and outcomes and uses this to seek to make improvements, with customers having been asked to scrutinise our approach to complaints handling.
- saw there are a wide range of meaningful opportunities for customers to influence and scrutinise Gentoo’s strategies, policies and services. With evidence that Gentoo considers customer input to make improvements, including at board level, and that customer feedback has improved service delivery and strategic decision making.

During the year, our involved customers attended their local Customer and Community voice meeting, a great opportunity for customers to come together and discuss concerns within their local community. Customers also had a say in how budgets are spent in their area as well as reviewing grant application which help support local beneficiaries. Customers also discussed office accommodation changes across the city as well as how to get the best out of events such as neighbourhood walks with extra engagement and promotion.

Gentoo is working towards a new Customer Engagement Strategy, to include complaint drop-ins, family-friendly events within communities and to ensure all communication is accessible to customers.

We also now have more than 1300 customers signed up on Your Gentoo Voice, where they can give their thoughts on a range of topics, which includes rent statements and allocation policy amongst other projects.

The online responses received via Your Gentoo Voice have helped directly shape and improve services.

Our involved customers also took part in sessions to scrutinise our services, including input into the welcome pack customers receive, making rent letters and statements easy to read and understand, plus our approach to dealing with anti-social behaviour. They have also been involved in policy reviews and deep dives in areas including repairs, allocations, compensation and decants.

Following feedback from customers, we also created a 'You said, we did' page on our website, which allows customers to go on and see the changes we have implemented because of their involvement and feedback.

Gentoo is always interested in working with customers to improve services. Anyone interested in doing so can email us at: customerinvolvement@gentoo.com for more information.

Improving complaint handling

Complaints are very important to us. They help us to learn when things go wrong and to improve our services. If something does go wrong, we will apologise, investigate what happened and work with the customer to make it right.

At Gentoo we understand that we must improve on how we listen and respond to customer complaints. It is only through improving how we receive and act on feedback that we will improve customer satisfaction and the overall customer experience.

Over 2023-24, a number of changes were made to improve complaint handling and customer experience. These included:

- All complaint letter templates were reviewed to ensure that Housing Ombudsman contact details are included in all correspondence. This was completed during October/November 2023 as part of

the consultation on the Housing Ombudsman Code exercise with our customers.

- A 'Meet the Ombudsman' event was held at Gentoo offices and online, for customers and Board members. Attendees heard directly about the services available from the Housing Ombudsman, Richard Blakeway and were able to ask questions and raise issues.
- The Customer Voice Team amended their approach to redress specifically compensation offers, ensuring that service failures are identified and redressed as early as possible.
- Learning from and reporting on complaints, sharing insight and giving clear communication to colleagues helped them to 'own and fix' service requests problems swiftly, making the distinction between service requests and complaints clearer.
- The Customer Voice Team undertook training with a sector specialist in preparation for the new Consumer Standards and statutory Complaint Handling Code.
- A new Customer Committee as part our Governance framework was established. One of the terms of reference is to provide scrutiny of complaint handling and learning. Complaints, lessons learned, and improvements are discussed at all committee meetings and reported into the Board.
- The Customer Voice Team meet with service teams to review learning and insights, this included holding 'Learning Lab' sessions to review insight from the last few months.
- In the case of receiving an Ombudsman determination, a detailed review of the case review is prioritised with senior managers from across the business to ensure lessons are learned.



We also now have more than 1300 customers signed up on Your Gentoo Voice, where they can give their thoughts on a range of topics.

We provide great homes

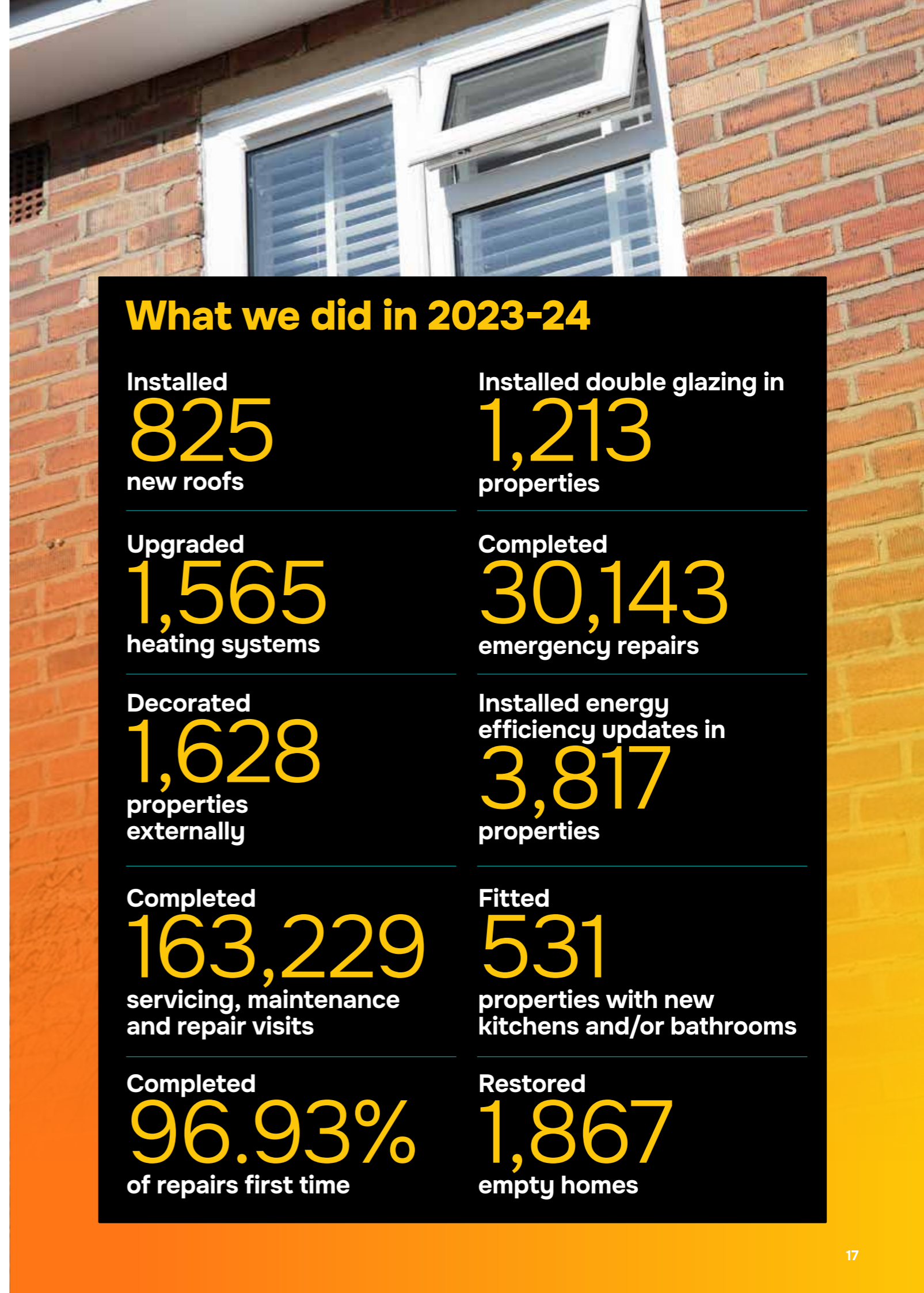
Investing in our homes

Every week, Gentoo spends around £1 million on our existing housing stock through planned investment and maintenance of customers' homes.

Planned investment is the work we carry out to ensure our properties meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard. This includes installing new kitchens,

bathrooms, electrical rewires, heating systems, windows and roofs.

Planned maintenance is the day-to-day work undertaken to ensure our properties remain secure, in good condition and are protected against the weather. This includes work such as gas servicing, boiler repairs, plastering and plumbing repairs.



What we did in 2023-24

Installed
825
new roofs

Installed double glazing in
1,213
properties

Upgraded
1,565
heating systems

Completed
30,143
emergency repairs

Decorated
1,628
properties
externally

Installed energy
efficiency updates in
3,817
properties

Completed
163,229
servicing, maintenance
and repair visits

Fitted
531
properties with new
kitchens and/or bathrooms

Completed
96.93%
of repairs first time

Restored
1,867
empty homes

A new look for Pennywell

Back in October 2022, work began on a major modernisation programme for Pennywell.

Fast forward to 2024, with work completed in the summer, more than 1,100 homes will have benefitted from the work. A 'whole house' approach has been used on the project, meaning a lot of the work has been completed at the same time to minimise disruption.

Improvements to properties have included new roofs, new front door canopies, double glazing, loft insulation, new front boundaries and external decoration. The work has also resulted in properties becoming more energy efficient with most homes now achieving an EPC rating of C.

2023-24 was a key year for delivery of the Pennywell programme, with 856 homes benefitting from improvement work.

Rose Taylor, who has lived in her Pennywell home for 52 years, said:

"I've had new fencing, windows and a new garage roof. It didn't take long for the works to be done and it has been wonderful. I cannot fault it, the windows are absolutely lovely and the team were really good. The work makes a lot of difference. The house is a lot warmer and you can really feel the heat. It has been lovely and really made a difference to Pennywell."



EPC – Every Property Counts

Thousands of Gentoo customers have seen their homes receive a higher energy efficiency rating in the last 12 months.

We are committed to all of our properties having an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of at least C by 2030. A C rating is given to a home built using energy efficient building methods or one which has undergone renovation work aimed at increasing its energy efficiency.

By the end of March 2024, 20,830 of our homes had an EPC rating of C or above, representing 72.9% of our total properties. This is an increase of 10.75% compared to March 2023. We currently have 7,710 properties where work is still needed to achieve an EPC C rating to meet the 2030 target.

Every new home or home offered for sale or rent in England must have a valid EPC. The better the rating, the more attractive the property will be to a potential buyer or

renter who will know it positively impacts on their monthly energy bills.

EPC ratings - which go from A (most energy efficient) to G (woefully inefficient) - are calculated on a formula that measures the amount of energy used per square metre and how many tonnes of CO₂ the property emits per year. A C rating means a home is between 69 and 80% energy efficient.

The progress made in making more homes energy efficient during 2023-24 comes after it was announced in March that Gentoo will receive £2.845 million from the Government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Wave 2.2 Fund (SHDF). This will see an additional 700 homes across Sunderland benefit from energy efficiency upgrades including improved loft and cavity wall insulation, low energy lighting, solar PV and improved ventilation measures as part of a co-funded £5.690 million project delivered across 2024-25 and 2025-26.



Damp and mould – a new approach

Working with our customers, Gentoo's new dedicated Damp and Mould policy was approved in May 2023.

We worked closely with our customers to create a new user-friendly procedure as part of our more proactive and empathetic approach to tackling damp and mould in our properties.

Across 2023, we visited 4,238 homes to inspect, assist and advise with issues of damp, mould and condensation. Gentoo's Rapid Damp Team had availability within 24 hours for wash and clean down treatments for severe cases and seven days for moderate and slight cases. All inspections are carried out within 10 days of reporting.

In October 2023, a comprehensive review of services was undertaken, and 20 extra staff members were appointed to support day-to-day repairs. Repair Managers and Repair Supervisors were moved from a 'trade based' approach to an 'area' approach to offer a consistent personal service for customers, ensuring that one

supervisor and one manager oversees a geographical area rather than their allocated trade.

Outstanding repairs were reduced by approximately 4,000 jobs by applying an area-based approach for non-urgent repairs. The team reduced the average repair response time from 40 days to approximately 17 days by the end of the financial year.



This new approach involves:

Rolling programme of stock condition surveys

Each stock condition survey includes an inspection of the home to identify any visible signs of damp and/or mould.

Pre-allocation checks of empty homes

An Empty Homes Officer will visit empty properties and carry out a damp and mould assessment prior to them being allocated to a customer.

Visits to customers' homes

Colleagues will proactively look for signs of damp and/or mould each time they visit a customer's home. Colleagues will now also identify any vulnerabilities, communication requirements, language barriers or disabilities and capture any reasonable adjustments that may benefit the customer.

Detailing the data

Gentoo maps cases of damp and mould to identify hotspots, with inspections and property investment targeted towards those areas. Investment includes loft top-up programmes and improved specification of mechanical extraction as part of kitchen and bathroom works in properties.

New case management approach

Key stages include cases initially triaged based on risk of harm, Case Coordinators then being allocated to each case and a two-stage aftercare process (8 weeks and 12 months).

Colleague training

Key staff involved in the case management process and all customer-facing staff have been given dedicated awareness training as part of the new approach, with damp and mould specialist training provided to all inspectors and building surveyors on diagnosis and treatment. A specialist Damp and Mould Team was set up which includes a Damp and Mould Repair Manager, a Damp and Mould Supervisor, two Case Coordinators and three specialised Inspectors.

Improved customer experience

A new damp, mould and condensation guidance leaflet was produced for all customers and Gentoo's website was also updated with the customer-friendly damp and mould procedure.

Keeping customers safe in their homes

Ensuring customers are safe in their homes will always be a priority for Gentoo.

In June 2023, we announced a £2.4 million investment into building safety. This investment included the creation of a new Building Safety Team to meet the requirements of the Building Safety Act 2022, which was published following the Grenfell Tower tragedy in 2017. Across Sunderland, Gentoo is responsible for 25 high-rise residential buildings.

The team works closely with colleagues from across the organisation including Property Maintenance, Property Investment and Housing, to have a collaborative approach to building safety. In 2024, we launched our engagement

strategy with customers living in our high-rise residential buildings to ensure they are at the forefront of decision making in each building and are encouraged to raise building safety queries and concerns.

The team also provide customers with practical safety demonstrations and the opportunity to receive expert advice on key building safety topics.

In September 2023, to coincide with Fire Door Safety Week, customers who are members of our Building Safety Customer Group were shown around the training facility of contractor Isoler to learn about the importance of fire doors in their buildings. The visit was also aimed at helping them in their roles as fire safety ambassadors for their buildings.



The purpose of the strategy is to:

- Understand the needs of customers living on our high-rise residential buildings
- Identify the best way to communicate with customers as individuals
- Empower customers to have their say and raise building safety concerns
- Listen to customers and understand their concerns
- Consult with customers about decisions that affect the safety of their building
- Provide ways for customers to get involved in how their buildings are managed

A 'high' standard of work

Continuous customer engagement was key to the successful delivery of a major improvement scheme to one of our high-rise buildings, Hedworth Court, in Hendon.

Started in June 2023 and completed in March 2024, 76 customers saw their homes benefit from new kitchens, bathrooms, electrical rewires and a sprinkler system. In addition, the building also received new front entrance fire doors, new sprinkler system and fire

safety improvements, including a new fire alarm system throughout the building and a new automatic ventilation system in the staircase.

This was the first time we had carried out intrusive work of this kind in a high-rise residential building while customers remained in their homes – so keeping them informed on how things were progressing was key.

Before work started, we invited customers to a special event where they could meet the contractor, EQUANS, look around a show flat and ask questions



about the programme. A weekly drop-in event to keep customers updated on how works were progressing and provide an opportunity for them to raise any concerns was well-received and provided good feedback which was acted upon, such as increased cleaning of communal areas during the works.

After works were completed, a special event was held in the newly refurbished communal lounge to thank customers for their patience and co-operation during the project.

Building for the future

At Gentoo, we are committed to playing our part in addressing the housing crisis by building more high-quality affordable homes across our communities.

With more than 30,000 people on our waiting list, the need has never been greater.

That work continued across 2023-24, with activity ongoing at five key sites. Through our Affordable Homes programme, we aim to deliver more than 700 additional homes by 2029. These will be available for Affordable Rent, Social Rent, Shared Ownership and Rent to Buy.

With each development, we strive to meet these placemaking objectives:

Characterful homes designed for all

- Delivering a variety of house types and tenures, supporting an inclusive community
- Provide homes for first-time buyers, families and older people
- Provide homes which enable people to downsize or upsize and still remain in their local area
- Construct environmentally friendly housing
- Gives priority to safe walking and cycling routes
- Provide homes which are bright, with plenty of light and space
- Provide generous gardens and green spaces for exercise



Integrated and accessible

- Integrates with existing developments and is well connected to its neighbours
- Is in proximity to high quality and convenient bus routes
- Retains or reroutes existing public rights of way
- Provides personal travel planning to residents to encourage take up of sustainable travel

Green spaces and environment

- Provides tree-lined streets, new shrubs, wildflower grasses and wetland areas
- Improves wildlife corridors and enhances biodiversity
- Delivers a sustainable drainage system to assist with water management, reduce flood risk and provide habitats for wildlife

Across our Affordable Homes programme we have designed 13 house types. All have been designed with a focus on volume and light and, where possible, feature a view from the front door to the rear of the property. Ground floor ceiling heights have been increased by 15cms, enabling the provision of larger windows.

Gentoo is also committed to building homes which have minimal energy costs for customers, forming part of our aim to

reduce carbon emissions by 75-80% by 2025.

In our properties we are:

- Investing in air source heat pumps rather than gas combi boilers
- Equipping properties and/or allocated spaces with dedicated electric vehicle charging points
- Providing full fill cavity wall insulation
- Installing photovoltaic panels where required to generate our own renewable electricity which customers can use to help reduce their energy bills
- Fitting smart meters in homes to provide customers with greater control and understanding on their energy use
- Giving homes triple glazing (or high performing double with equivalent U-Value) as standard to improve energy and thermal efficiency



2023-24 was a year of progress on these five sites across Sunderland



Penshaw Gardens

This £11.5 million eco-friendly affordable housing scheme for people over the age of 55, features 72 self-contained properties over three storeys, consisting of one- and two-bedroom apartments and is anticipated to complete in winter 2024.

We are also creating living spaces to boost local wildlife and support biodiversity. We have worked with regeneration specialist Vistry North East to install four bat boxes – including one specifically designed for bats during the breeding season – three swift nesting boxes, two sparrow terraces, two bumblebee boxes and five bee bricks.

Crosstree Park

2024 saw work completed on this new affordable development in Downhill as residents moved in to the £7.4 million site, which is made up of 41 two and three-bedroom homes and two-bedroom bungalows.

Crosstree Park was the launch pad for Gentoo's Shared Ownership offer, which makes it easier for aspiring homeowners to buy an affordable share in a new property.



Wellspring Park

Situated in Town End Farm, the development comprises of 71 properties, including two, three and four-bedroom homes, two-bedroom apartments, and two-bedroom bungalows.

Roofs have been fitted to some properties with others having seen kitchens

installed. Most of the properties will be available for affordable rent with some forming part of our Shared Ownership offering. The first properties will be available from winter 2024, with the full development due for completion by spring 2025.



Cricketers' Hill

2023 saw work begin on this development in Carley Hill which will consist of 115 homes, including two, three and four-

bedroom houses, two-bedroom apartments, and two-bedroom bungalows.

The homes will be available for affordable rent, Shared Ownership and Rent to Buy. Cricketers' Hill is also the launch pad for Gentoo's Rent to Buy offer which makes it easier for aspiring homeowners to save for a deposit to buy their home in future by paying affordable rent, calculated at 20% less than market rents for the area.

The first properties are set to be available in winter 2024.



Eskdene Rise

After work on this 86-home site, in Hetton-le-Hole, was halted after the contractor went into administration in February 2023. The start of 2024 saw the development back up and running again with a new partnership with Adderstone Living.

A mix of two, three and four-bedroom houses, two-bedroom apartments and two-bedroom bungalows will be available for affordable rent, Shared Ownership and Rent to Buy. The first properties are set to be available in spring 2025.

We help communities to thrive

At Gentoo, it's not just about building and providing safe and good quality homes for our customers, it's also about helping out in our neighbourhoods.

Throughout 2023-24, our colleagues and contractor partners went above and beyond in giving something back to our communities.

Here are some examples where they made a real difference...

From a 'shack' to a 'palace'

Back in September, Gentoo and our partners at EQUANS gave a stylish makeover to a popular community centre to make it a home from home for people while their own properties benefitted from improvement work.

While more than 650 properties in Washington were receiving works including kitchen replacements and

rewires, residents were looking for somewhere to go to avoid the inevitable but necessary disruption caused by the works.

We worked with Columbia Community Association to see if they could adjust their opening hours to provide somewhere warm and safe for customers to go. In return, EQUANS installed a brand new kitchen at the centre – transforming it from a 'shack' to a 'palace' in the words of secretary Marion Taylor.

It wasn't just cuppas on offer, but computers too as EQUANS also decorated an IT room and Gentoo donated 12 laptops so residents could improve their online skills.



11.7 million reasons to help

More than 13,000 customers have benefitted from the specialist financial and debt advice provided by our Money Matters team – with £11.7million in additional income claimed during its ten years of operating.

Launched back in 2013, the free service helped customers claim £8,594,649 in money they didn't always know they were entitled to. The team also supported customers in relation to water discount schemes, which resulted in a further £3million in discounts being claimed.

The Money Matters team marked its tenth anniversary in 2023. It has specially trained, dedicated colleagues who offer specialist financial and debt advice. It supports some of our most financially vulnerable customers by providing benefit checks, energy saving advice, budgeting assistance and signposting to

partners for debt advice. The team also supports those customers who may have recently had a change in circumstances and may need guidance.

Gentoo is on hand to help and support any customers experiencing difficult times and has a fund available which can offer support in times of emergency, and which does not need to be paid back. This has provided more than £123,000 in crisis funding to families across the city to help with essentials such as gas and electric top-ups, urgent food shops, essential travel, such as a bus pass to help somebody get to work, and baby essentials, including beds for children.

Customers who would like to speak to a specialist Money Matters advisor about financial matters can do so confidentially by calling **0300 123 2004** or by emailing **money matters@gentoo group.com**





Helping our customers all year round

Whether it is offering financial advice and signposting to support, help with grant applications, arranging events and

helping local charities, Gentoo colleagues show how much they care for our customers all year round.

Working together to tackle anti-social behaviour (ASB)

At Gentoo, we know ASB can be a blight on our communities and have a negative impact on customers' lives. We take prompt, appropriate, proportionate and decisive action to deal with ASB before it escalates, striking a balance between prevention measures and early intervention plus support and enforcement.

We work in partnership with organisations including Sunderland City Council, Northumbria Police, Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service, Wearside Women In Need, Safer Sunderland Partnership and others. Gentoo also works in community partnerships such as SARA (Southwick

Altogether Raising Aspirations), SAIL (Sunderland Altogether Improving Lives) and HALO (Hetton Aspirations Linking Opportunities).

In January 2024, Gentoo also welcomed Kim McGuinness – at the time, Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner (prior to being elected the inaugural North East Mayor later in the year) at one of our high-rise buildings, Aberdeen Tower in Lakeside Village, Silksworth, to discuss how the force deals with ASB whilst also giving customers a chance to voice their concerns and share how ASB has impacted upon their lives.

Across 2023-24, examples of tackling ASB included

- Tackling ASB around Bonfire Night as part of the Darker Nights campaign. Gentoo colleagues visited hot spot areas, made sure customers brought in wheelie bins and identified gardens with a build-up of combustible waste.
- Being part of the Back on Track multi-agency school diversionary project to tackle motorcycle disorder, with sessions delivered in Hetton and Easington Lane schools.
- Tackling youth disorder in Witherwack, where groups of youths were targeting bus services, causing distress to drivers, passengers and residents. This saw buses temporarily re-routed and services affected. Gentoo colleagues worked with Northumbria Police, Sunderland City Council, Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service, local councillors and Stagecoach to take action against those involved.
- Erecting security fencing in an area of bungalows in Hylton Lane after pockets of ASB was reported.
- Blanket checking of all applicants in the Easington Lane area of the HALO project working with police through the 'Clear, Hold, Build' tactic which aims to eradicate criminal networks in communities.
- Working with partners during Houghton Feast to deter youths who were setting fires in the area and causing extensive harassment and damage to public transport.
- Achieving success in tackling ASB in Sulgrave with partnership working and closure orders.

370 new category 1 ASB cases reported

91 Notice of Seeking Possession

95 Pre-Notice of Seeking Possession

16 Acceptable Behaviour Agreements

377 category 1 ASB cases closed

10 evictions





Charity Partners

At the beginning of 2023, we chose Sunderland Mind and Sunderland Foodbank as our corporate charities for the year.

Throughout the 12 months, we supported both with a series of fundraising activities. A total of £7,018 was raised for Sunderland

Mind and £5,222 for Sunderland Foodbank as well as a number of food donations.

In 2024, we are supporting Sunderland-based children's charity Love, Amelia, which provides support to families experiencing poverty and hardship across the North East.

Aspire to aid

2023 marked the 20th anniversary of our Aspire grants scheme, which has seen more than £220,000 awarded to local volunteer and community groups in Gentoo neighbourhoods across Sunderland since the programme launched in 2003. Across 2023-24 more than £20,000 in Aspire grants was given to 44 groups.

The grants of up to £500 have benefitted organisations such as art, music and drama groups, local football clubs, resident and community associations and toddler play groups.

Pins and Needles Knitting Group, based in Hendon, who create items such as children's cardigans, hats, blankets and



toys which are sold for charity at local craft fairs are just one of the groups who have benefited from a grant in the last 12 months. The donation kept them in wool and materials to continue meeting.



Caring around the calendar

The Gentoo Christmas campaign for 2023 once again saw colleagues and partners join forces to help families over the festive season in Sunderland.

Colleagues combined to donate a huge 547kg worth of food – equating to 685 meals – to Sunderland Foodbank. Among items donated were Christmas dinner must-haves, toiletries, household items and baby food. This has been our largest donation to Sunderland Foodbank to date.

In addition, we also teamed up with Bell Group to deliver more than 150 Christmas dinners to those customers most in need. Colleagues delivered these in person to customers who might not have been able to enjoy a Christmas dinner otherwise or who were spending the day on their own. Since 2018, Gentoo has delivered more

than 800 Christmas dinners to customers.

The wider Christmas campaign also saw Gentoo arrange for 200 customers to attend Sunderland Empire's annual festive pantomime, Beauty and the Beast. Our colleagues also teamed up with partners to donate more than 1,300 festive gifts to families. These included a variety of toys for children as well as clothing for all ages.

Our annual Easter campaign also saw colleagues and contractors collecting hundreds of items of food to create more than 80 Easter hampers, filled with essential food items, toiletries and chocolate treats. These were then delivered to customers across Sunderland by our Neighbourhood Coordinators. We also donated a further 219 meals to Sunderland Foodbank at Easter.

We are a great place to work

Investing in people

Our colleagues are key to how we perform. In 2023-24, they designed the values which drive how we operate as our new Corporate Strategy was launched.

We are committed to the continuous improvement of our workplace culture. A series of focus groups to review and improve our workplace culture were held at the beginning of 2023, involving more than 100 colleagues, and then revisited towards the end of the year to look at how to build on the recommendations.

We welcomed 17 new apprentices in one of our biggest intakes so far, with roles including gas, plumbing, electrical, joinery, plastering, roofing, bricklaying, business

administration, building surveying, housing and accountancy. A further expanded intake will happen in 2024.

A series of Lead Together coaching programmes were arranged for Gentoo people managers to further improve the working environment for everyone, while our Colleague Forum continues to raise and discuss issues that are important to colleagues which are fed back to senior management to ensure everyone's voice is heard.

Towards the end of 2023-24, a Great Place to Work initial survey was conducted with colleagues to measure how we are performing in improving the work culture at Gentoo, with a more detailed survey carried out at the end of 2024.



A digital transformation

In 2023-24 we launched Salesforce, our new digital housing solution, to improve the service we provide to our customers.

During the year we launched the first stage of our CRM system, 'Customer 360' and end-to-end fire doors inspection and repairs process.

As a result, we are now able to log customer interactions in one place, improving the customer experience with the Group at every interaction. The launch of the end-to-end fire doors process is transforming the way we inspect and repair fire doors, continuing to ensure our customers are safe in their homes.

The next phase of the programme saw Gentoo using Salesforce to case manage how it deals with reports of damp and mould in customers' homes.



We spend our money wisely

Financial overview

2023-24 was another year of challenge for the UK social housing sector.

The combination of ongoing inflation, capped rent increases and the challenges of prioritising investment in our customers' existing homes, maintaining building safety and improving their energy efficiency are challenges Gentoo continues to navigate.

The ongoing cost of living challenges faced by our customers are reflected in increased demand for Gentoo to provide good quality services as standard.

The year saw our track record of delivering our stock investment budget commitments continue, with £39 million of enhancements delivered to our existing homes. Our responsive maintenance services continued to navigate a range of challenges during the year, including

ongoing cost inflation and increased customer demand. Good progress was delivered in addressing repairs backlogs.

Our Affordable Development Programme likewise faced a challenging year. Increased build and financing costs, planning and operational challenges all combined to reduce the number of affordable homes completed during the year. Expectations are for increased completion numbers in 2024 with a



number of schemes that have experienced delays proceeding to completion.

The Group's market sales subsidiary, Gentoo Homes, delivered 112 sales during the year. The subsidiary continues to operate in a very challenging market place, with costs impacted by inflation and sales by a challenging mortgage market.

The Group's operating surplus of £41m is a significant increase on previous years. This increased surplus helps us to increase the level of investment we are able to make in our current customers' homes and in new homes for the customers of tomorrow. We have achieved it through good income collection and by improving the efficiency of our day to day operations.

We spent £30m during the year on interest costs, leaving a retained surplus of £12.1 for the year. Our performance

during 2023/24 helps us to demonstrate our financial strength and stability to key stakeholders, including our funders, investors and regulator. It also allows us to maximise our investment in existing and new homes in the coming years.



We are well governed

Putting customers at the heart of decision-making

In November 2023, we created a brand-new Customer Committee to place customers at the forefront of our decision-making process.

The committee meet bi-monthly to help shape how services are delivered, giving direct feedback to Board members to ensure customer standards are being met and value for money is being achieved.

Through the committee, customers are guaranteed a voice as they are consulted on key matters, offering advice and guidance from a customer perspective and making sure Gentoo listens and acts on feedback.

Since forming, the committee has helped refine how Gentoo deals with cases of damp and mould, bringing in a more customer friendly procedure with an empathetic approach to dealing with reports. They have also worked with us to communicate with customers on important topics such as rent, providing advice on what information customers require and how it should be presented.

Members of the committee also attended the launch of the North East Housing Partnership in November, with Gentoo joining forces with 16 fellow providers of social housing across the new North East



Mayoral Combined Authority, working together to bring significant change for all of their customers.

2024 has been a year of change for social housing. The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) has established a new way to assess how social housing landlords are performing in terms of providing good quality homes and services. Along with new customer standards, a new set of Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) have been compiled to help customers understand how well Gentoo and other landlords are doing. In 2024, the RSH concluded Gentoo was delivering the outcomes of the four Consumer Standards - the Neighbourhood and Community Standard, the Safety and Quality Standard, the Tenancy Standard and the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard - and confirmed the highest grading of C1. Gentoo also continues to meet the Governance and Financial Viability requirements with gradings of G1 and V2, respectively.

Delivering the most efficient services for customers

Two of our priorities are to be well governed and to spend our money wisely, operating efficiently and responsibly, and investing wisely.

We believe that in order to achieve our goals, we must operate as a compliant, efficient and effective social housing provider.

We embed a comprehensive approach to value for money throughout all areas of our business and use procurement processes to ensure we deliver high quality products, systems and services to our customers.

As a registered provider of social housing, we are required to comply with the current Public Contract Regulations 2015, which as of October 2024, will change to the Procurement Act 2023.

The new regulations will make it easier to get best value from public procurement and introduce greater flexibility, which should represent a real opportunity for social landlords, like Gentoo, to secure better value for money.



To ensure we are prepared for compliance, we have carried out a review of our approach to procurement and made sure colleagues understand the new changes and what they mean for both Gentoo and the housing sector. We have already completed training, amended and adapted processes and systems, and retendered contracts where appropriate.

Last year, we introduced a new supplier relationship management (SRM) framework, to ensure that supplier relationships are managed well and to help us understand the risk and impact a supplier has to Gentoo.

Each of these tiers have different requirements for how the relationships should be managed and what due diligence needs to be undertaken in accordance with the risk associated with the tier.

Our supplier base is divided into 4 tiers:

Tier 1

Corporate Partner

Tier 2

Business Critical

Tier 3

Core

Tier 4

Transactional

Looking ahead to 2024-25

Building for the future

2024 saw the opening of the 'Gentoo Trades Academy' which sees 14-16-year-olds study towards a specialised construction qualification alongside their GCSEs.

This new partnership with Sunderland College and Bishop Chadwick Education Trust will help bridge the gap between education and the world of work and is regarded as a trailblazing in terms of housing organisations.

Pupils will develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours to move on to a T-Level or an apprenticeship and progress into a career in the construction and housing sectors.

It will initially be based at Sunderland College's City Campus before moving to the new Housing Innovation and Construction Skills Academy when it opens in 2025.

2024 also saw Gentoo take on a further 27 new apprentices across a range of trade, housing and business roles.



Moving the dial

In 2024, Gentoo's goal is to Move the Dial for customers at every opportunity.

Our customers are telling us that most of the time we get things right, however there are times when we also get things wrong. Listening to understand and putting ourselves in the customer position is key to us Moving the Dial.

At the start of 2024, colleagues came together at a number of special roadshows to discuss how we could improve the services delivered to customers.



As part of a commitment to delivering the best services, around 850 colleagues received specialist customer complaint training during 2024, to help ensure customers' issues are dealt with and resolved as quickly as possible and in the right tone.

We will do this in three ways:

Goal 1

We'll improve our customer experience, ensuring we always provide the best service we can through a consistent tone of voice.

Goal 2

We'll start work on our commitment to deliver new standards that help us provide an outstanding repairs and maintenance service.

Goal 3

We'll help our managers and colleagues have brilliant conversations, helping everyone work better together for each other and our customers.

We aim to be open and accountable and publish our performance on our website so our customers can understand how we are performing and hold us to account. For more information visit **www.gentoo.com/performance**

If you have any questions relating to anything in the report, please email **communications@gentoo.com**