

4th December 2024**REPORT OF GENTOO****1 Purpose of Report**

1.1 The following report provides an update from Gentoo for the West Area Committee for the period September 2024 to December 2024.

2 Background

2.1 Area Committee agreed that regular updates from Gentoo would be provided to each Committee meeting to enable members to be up to date on current Gentoo developments, projects, and priorities and to ensure members are fully aware of their opportunities to work collaboratively with Gentoo.

3 Update on Neighbourhood Services**3.1 Christmas Campaign:**

To help support customers and families who may struggle over the festive period, we have launched our annual Christmas campaign 'Your Gentoo Christmas' with three exciting appeals. The neighbourhood teams can nominate families they are working with to benefit from a Christmas dinner (delivered on 24 December), a Christmas gift (colleague contributions), or a theatre visit to see the pantomime, Jack and the Beanstalk (Saturday 14 December).

3.2 Gentoo Family Fun Day 2024:

On Monday 23 December, we are hosting a Christmas Fun Day at the Foundation of Light. Families will be invited to enjoy the activities on offer such as Football, Inflatables, Gingerbread Decorating, they will also have the opportunity to meet Santa.

3.3 Partnership working with the Housing Options Team:

Due to the increasing challenges our city is facing with demands for housing, prioritising those in most need, the rise in the number of homeless assessments pending and costs to place people in temporary accommodation, Gentoo and our partners from the Housing Options Team are working collaboratively to address these issues. The teams meet weekly and have seen some real progress in identifying better working practices, understanding the needs of those in temporary accommodation and wider policy improvements from both organisations.

For information at the time of drafting this report, Gentoo currently have over 33,000 applicants on their housing register with 650 of applicants being in a priority band. We have had 1,225 empty homes available to allocated since April 2024.

3.4 Talk Money Week November 2024:

The week was an opportunity to help people have more open conversations about their money. Gentoo held drop ins across the city's community sites, working in partnership with organisations such as Fiscus and NE First Credit Union.

3.5 The Blackie, Resident Consultation:

Due to poor feedback from a previous consultation during the summer, we have been working in partnership with the local councillors and designed a further survey to understand the demand for a playpark in the area. We will be canvassing the surrounding estates prior to Christmas, asking customers to complete the surveys. We will review outcomes in January to then determine next steps.

3.6 Cold Weather assistance to customers:

Gentoo are working with the City Council to distribute Winter Warm packs to vulnerable customers over the winter months. The packs include thermal hats, thermal gloves, thermal socks, insulated hot water bottle, thermal travel mug and fleece throw. Packs for children will also be available shortly.

This approach complements the wider offer of our newly updated vulnerability support programme, which includes a priority approach for customers with vulnerabilities based on mental and physical health, isolation, long-term illness, old age, and those in financial difficulty. The programme will launch in December with a media campaign – Committee will receive regular updates once this has commenced.

Committee to also note that Gentoo are working with partners such as Sunderland and Washington Mind (for Mental Health support) and the Wise Group (HEAT programme) to assist with grants towards utility bills. Gentoo also has a new local crisis support fund to support the campaign which gives local Neighbourhood teams the scope to assist customers with tenancy sustainability in difficult circumstances.

4. Property, Investment and Renewal

4.1 Asset Plan 2024/2025: see appendix 1.

4.2 Property Update: update from Steve Lowther, Head of Property see appendix 2.

4.3 Nookside Boundaries:

Contractor on site is MGM Construction Ltd, works are ongoing and slightly ahead of schedule. Unfortunately, site cabins were broken into, so they have been moved to the front of the flats on Hollinside/Hampstead Road.

4.4 Grindon Blocks, communal flooring:

An assessment of flooring in communal blocks has been conducted across the city, and eleven blocks in Grindon will benefit from new flooring in their entrances after the Christmas break. Consultation with residents to agree the floor colour choices is being arranged.

4.5 Silksworth Rooflines:

Works began at the end of September 2024, the contractor on site is BELL group. Unfortunately, works were delayed in November due to some issues with scaffolding, however now back up and running and more detailed surveys once they were on site, has identified some of the properties require additional works to their gable ends and verges, this has been added to scope of works. We are looking to complete the roofline works by Christmas 2024 and the full roof replacements (approximately twenty properties) starting in January 2025. All customers that need additional works have been notified.

5. Recommendations

5.1 Note the content of this report.

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