

29 September 2022

REPORT OF GENTOO

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The following report provides an update from Gentoo for the Washington Area Committee from July to September 2022.

2 Background

- 2.1 Area Committee agreed that regular updates from Gentoo would be presented to each Committee meeting to enable members to be up to date on current Gentoo developments, projects and priorities.

3 Update on Neighbourhood Services

- 3.1 You should all have received emails from the Neighbourhood Coordinators with their contact information and invitations to their next quarterly multi agency Estate Inspections and would really welcome your input and attendance on these.
- 3.2 At last committee we shared with you that further work was required in allocating our properties more efficiently and I am pleased to confirm that steady progress has been made with this and our void property numbers continue to decrease on a weekly basis.
- 3.3 Peabody Report, following the publication of the death of a Peabody Housing association tenant whose body lay undiscovered for such a long period of time, Gentoo undertook a piece of work to look into the 'lessons learned' from Peabody's failures to identify concerns for this tenant earlier. Due to our processes in relation to gas safety, income collection and property inspections we are confident that such a landlord failure would not happen in one of our tenancies.
- 3.4 We have placed further staffing resource into the local teams to support our tenants who maybe struggling with the cost of living. The staff are primarily supporting customers with budgeting those on Universal Credit / low incomes and referring tenants on to a number of support agencies such as the Green Doctors, they are energy efficiency experts who identify waste that costs people money, in turn making homes cheaper to heat and reducing the amount of electricity or gas that tenants use. They also look at support from Northumbria Water for their water bills, and benefit maximisation.
- 3.5 Gentoo have entered into an agreement with other Housing providers called 'The Bread & Butter Thing'. The Bread-and-Butter Thing (TBBT) is a charity that makes life more affordable for people on a low income. Their mission is to create a fair solution for people in poverty and their long-term aim is to address the premiums that people in poverty pay for food, loans, energy and other everyday essentials, simply because of their personal circumstances. It works by collecting surplus food and staple goods that often end up going to waste from supermarkets, factories, and farms and distribute them at a discount price through community hubs. For just £7.50, shopping bags can be filled with an average of £35 worth of items made up of quality, nutritious food. Each week tenants can access three bags of produce, including fresh fruit and vegetables, chilled goods, as well as cupboard staples such as pasta and cereal.

- 3.6 An initial discussion has been held between staff from Gento, the Council and Voluntary Sector Alliance to look at approaches to social value to see how we can work together to maximise the impact of any investment to meet the needs of our communities. This information is being discussed with the contractors appointed to deliver our programme of works and together we are developing and agreeing a list of interventions to address some of these local needs. Projects/services identified to date which will make a positive difference include crisis intervention relating to food and fuel poverty, food and cooking initiatives also linked to developing community allotments, projects to tackle young peoples' mental health issues, raising aspirations of young people, employment and training opportunities. Our contractors are also very keen to offer volunteering opportunities for their staff to get involved in campaigns and "team challenge" type activities. We are able to monitor the activities and projects the contractors support via TOMs Social Value portal which will also provide the social value generated via this investment.

4. Investment & Renewal

- 4.1 The programme to remove Washington District Heating is ongoing, 1020 properties are included in the programme including owner occupiers.
- 4.2 A window replacement scheme is up and running within Washington, Sekura and Straightline being the contractors. No concerns or complaints from tenants who are benefitting from these upgrades to their homes. 680 properties have been completed, 717 are outstanding with a target completion date of February 2023.
- 4.3 External garage decoration is planned for Springwell garages between October 2022 – March 2023. Bell Group are the contractor completing these works.
- 4.4 Low Rise Communal decorating is planned between September 2022 – March 2023 several blocks across Washington will be included in the programme, letters will be sent shortly to advise those tenants whose blocks will be included. Bell Group are the contractor completing these works.
- 4.5 Modernisation works of kitchens, bathrooms and rewire works are due to start in November 2022 in Biddick area. Customers included in this programme are being consulted on works.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 Note the content of this report.

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