

Member Spotlight

September 2024

 **gentoo**

**Member Spotlight - Gentoo Group**

We asked Lewis Walmsley, Customer Engagement Lead at Gentoo Group to share some of the work they are currently doing.

If you'd like to contact Lewis about any of the below, click [here](#)

Give us a little known fact about your organisation.

In November 2023, we created a newly formed Customer Committee which is made up of six customers who meet bi-monthly to shape how we deliver services across Sunderland and ensure all customers are at the forefront of the Gentoo's decision-making process. They hold us to account by ensuring Consumer Standards are being met, value for money is being achieved and excellent services are being delivered to households across Sunderland.

Tell us about a time that engagement has made a difference to your services or communities?

We want to ensure all aspects of customer engagement is meaningful and beneficial to customers and residents across Sunderland. We strongly believe customers know best and understand we need to ensure we listen and act to the feedback received.

One example of how we put this into action is the introduction of Neighbourhood Walks. Customers told us about concerns with the appearance of their local area and they wanted to see the Neighbourhood Co-ordinators provide a more prominent approach within their estates. The walks take place across the city on a quarterly basis and provide an opportunity for Gentoo and key stakeholders including Northumbria Police and Sunderland City Council to work together to proactively identify areas for improvement. They are attended by Gentoo colleagues from both the Housing and Property Teams who work in the local area. We believe this allows local customers and residents to get to know the teams that work in the neighbourhood and become familiar with any ongoing issues/problem areas.

The walks allow us to gain valuable feedback first hand that we can act upon and help make our neighbourhoods a better and safer place to live.

We advertise the walks for the calendar year on our website. You can find the link on our [here](#):

We know not everyone who would like to attend the walks is able to, that's why customers can also provide feedback on their neighbourhood within their own time and fill in an online feedback form.

We also advertise the walks locally, as we are aware residents who are not necessarily Gentoo customers, may want to get involved.

Another example of customers influencing the services we deliver, was the creation of our Customer Drop-in sessions. As part of our Complaints Deep Dive which took place earlier this year, our involved customers told us we need to be more accessible and ensure we hear from seldom

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heard customers.

Following this feedback, we created drop-in sessions across neighbourhoods within the city where customers can come and talk to us either on an afternoon/evening regarding any aspect of their tenancy. We then track all concerns customers raise with us so we can identify trends and review if specific processes need to be reviewed.

So far, these have been hugely successful with customers commenting how beneficial it is to come and speak to a staff member face to face rather than over the phone.

What are you currently working on when it comes to engagement?

We are currently completing our Quarterly Deep Dive on Empty Homes, as we want to gain a customer's perspective on our lettable standard, to ensure this is fit for purpose.

To ensure we engage with as many customers possible, we have advertised 5 sessions across Sunderland. So far, these have been hugely successful with more than 30 customers attending, some engaging with us for the first time, and I believe this is because full autonomy has been provided to our customers. They choose the type of properties they want to visit as well as the addresses of those homes which are empty. We also show them a mix of empty homes, including those where keys have recently been returned from a customer, as I believe this can provide a different perspective regarding the amount of work we complete to make a property ready to let.

Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive and we have received plenty of recommendations which will lead us into the second phase of the deep dive. We will also be moving this project online and asking for further customer feedback for those who may not have wanted to attend a face-to-face session.

Why did you decide to join Tpas?

We have been a longstanding member of Tpas and believe it is a really useful platform to share and learn good practice from other providers. We also find the training sessions they provide beneficial, particularly for those staff who have recently joined the business. We are also creating an Engagement Strategy and will be asking Tpas to review this to ensure it is fit for purpose.

What is your top engagement tip?

Having a hybrid approach to engagement is essential. Not all customers want to engage face to face, however may feel comfortable providing their views via an online platform.

Also, ensuring you can evidence your customer engagement and the results this has provided is vitally important, particularly with the introduction of the new consumer standards.

What is the one thing you are really proud of when it comes to engagement?

Over the last 18 months I have noticed a cultural change across the organisation, with colleagues taking a more customer focused approach to ensure we improve services for our customers. One area, is the work our Building Safety Team have completed, ensuring our customers are engaged



with and aware of the latest building safety regulations.

The overall work completed across the organisation has reflected in our latest Regulatory Judgement where we have just been awarded a C1 under the new consumer standards.

This would also not be possible without our involved customers continuing to ask the how and why, particularly when it comes to how we deliver services. The Regulator had the opportunity to see this in action during one of our Customer Committee meetings, as well as during a Scrutiny Session.

It's important we build on this and continue to involve customers in decision making, particularly when a service is going to impact them.



