

**22 September 2020**

**REPORT OF GENTOO**

**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 The following report provides an update from Gentoo for the West Area Committee from March 2020 to September 2020.

**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. Changes to Neighbourhood Services**

- 3.1 Following the national Coronavirus lockdown a number of changes have taken place which affect our customer access arrangements. As previously advised, Silksworth Office relocated to the ground floor of Akeler House at Doxford International Business Park and opened to customers on 8 June. The office at Silksworth will be demolished and Gentoo has recently submitted a planning application to Sunderland City Council to build 13 affordable rented homes on the site. Gentoo's office at Havelock has reopened on 8 June to customers on a pre-arranged appointment basis. We also took the decision to close cash payment facilities at Athenaeum and Galleries Offices due to the increased risk of Covid-19 transmission handling cash now poses. In addition, as well as a gradual decline in this method of payment in recent years, the vast majority of customers paid by alternative means without difficulty during the enforced lockdown period.
- 3.2 All of our local Neighbourhood Coordinator contact details are published on Gentoo's website, and during lockdown they contacted almost 100% of their customers to advise of their continued availability for advice and support in relation to their tenancy. Our teams are currently working partly from home and partly within our offices providing the full range of housing services, as we continue to manage the social distancing guidelines to prevent the spread of Covid-19. Whilst our Allocations service, including the advertising of vacancies online via HomeHunt was temporarily suspended during lockdown, the full service recommenced on 27 May. Viewings are carried out mainly on a '1 to 1' basis and we now offer a remote, digital sign up process, again to minimise the risk of Covid-19 transmission.

**4. Investment & Renewal**

- 4.1 Works on the first phase of Chester Gate delivering 118 new homes, were paused in order to allow a review into the impact of Covid 19 on house building and the housing market. Subject to Gentoo board approval in September, works will recommence as soon as possible to conclude the groundworks element, and enable

the commencement of plot foundation works in October. The new highways access from Chester Road, undertaken by Sunderland City Council is complete.

## **5. Recommendations**

5.1 Note the content of this report.

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