

The background of the slide is a photograph of a sunset over a vast field of tall grasses. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow and long shadows. The sky is filled with soft, golden clouds. In the foreground, there are large, overlapping curved shapes in shades of green and blue.

# Further together

Grand Union's plans for 2020-23



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"We have the power to change things for good. We build more homes, stronger communities, better lives. What we do matters."

Grand Union Housing Group

# Introduction

In 2015, we set out our strategy – our 2020 Vision. It was all about working together more effectively so that we could do more. In 2018, the members of Grand Union Housing Group decided to go further, and to come together as one legal entity. In taking on this significant challenge, we aimed to transform the way we delivered our services, and release financial strength to build more homes for the customers of the future. But importantly, we also wanted to improve transparency. We wanted our organisation to be one where the Board was able to gain a clear line of sight across the business, and where customers' voices could be heard clearly, and responded to.

Looking back, at the beginning of 2020, we've achieved so much. We consolidated into one organisation, as planned, in October 2018. And in June 2019, our approach was recognised as our unified organisation received the highest ratings for governance and viability following a rigorous In-Depth Assessment by our regulator. As part of Moody's annual credit rating, we retained our A3 stable outlook. Just 12 months after our consolidation, we brought all our colleagues together into our beautiful modern K2 offices in Milton Keynes. Supported by new IT infrastructure, and a new agile approach to working, we've seen a real change in how easily colleagues can collaborate and support each other.

Less than 12 months in, our new way of working received a tougher test than we could have imagined. The Covid-19 pandemic has affected everyone involved with Grand Union. It's touched on every aspect of what we do, and we can be proud of how we've risen to the challenge, transforming our service delivery overnight. We've really seen how each of us has been driven to do more. And we've definitely been in it together; working alongside members of our communities to make a real difference.

Our response to the pandemic has reinforced the benefit of our approach to managing change. From the start of our consolidation, our projects have been led and delivered by Grand Union's leadership team. We've worked with external consultants, to get support where we've needed it. But we've used each project as an opportunity to learn and to develop our colleagues and capabilities.

During the crisis, the importance of a home that really meets each person's needs has become clearer than ever. As we come out of the current difficult period and plan for the next three years, it's clear that we'll need our new skills and our organisational strength. We operate in an area of planned economic growth, and we have a responsibility to help ensure that everyone in our communities benefits from the opportunities that brings. That means playing our part in tackling the housing crisis by building new homes at scale and at pace, and making as many as possible available at genuinely affordable rents. It means supporting our customers to achieve their potential through education and training, employment and getting involved in their communities. And it also means supporting the people who work for Grand Union. We can't expect our colleagues to give their best if they don't know we're there for them when things are difficult.

The national context for our new strategy is widespread change, coupled with a loss of trust - justified or not - in many of the institutions that we've traditionally expected to support us through change. What we do matters, because we provide the stable homes that offer a haven for people living busy, modern, and often difficult lives. Our customers often have little choice but to rely on us, and it is absolutely critical that we deserve their trust in the small things, like keeping appointments, as well as the big things like supporting them to gain qualifications and work. Our new strategy is aimed at deserving and retaining the trust of our customers, our colleagues and our wider stakeholders. It's underpinned by the values that shape our organisation's culture and guide everything that we do.

"If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go further, go together"

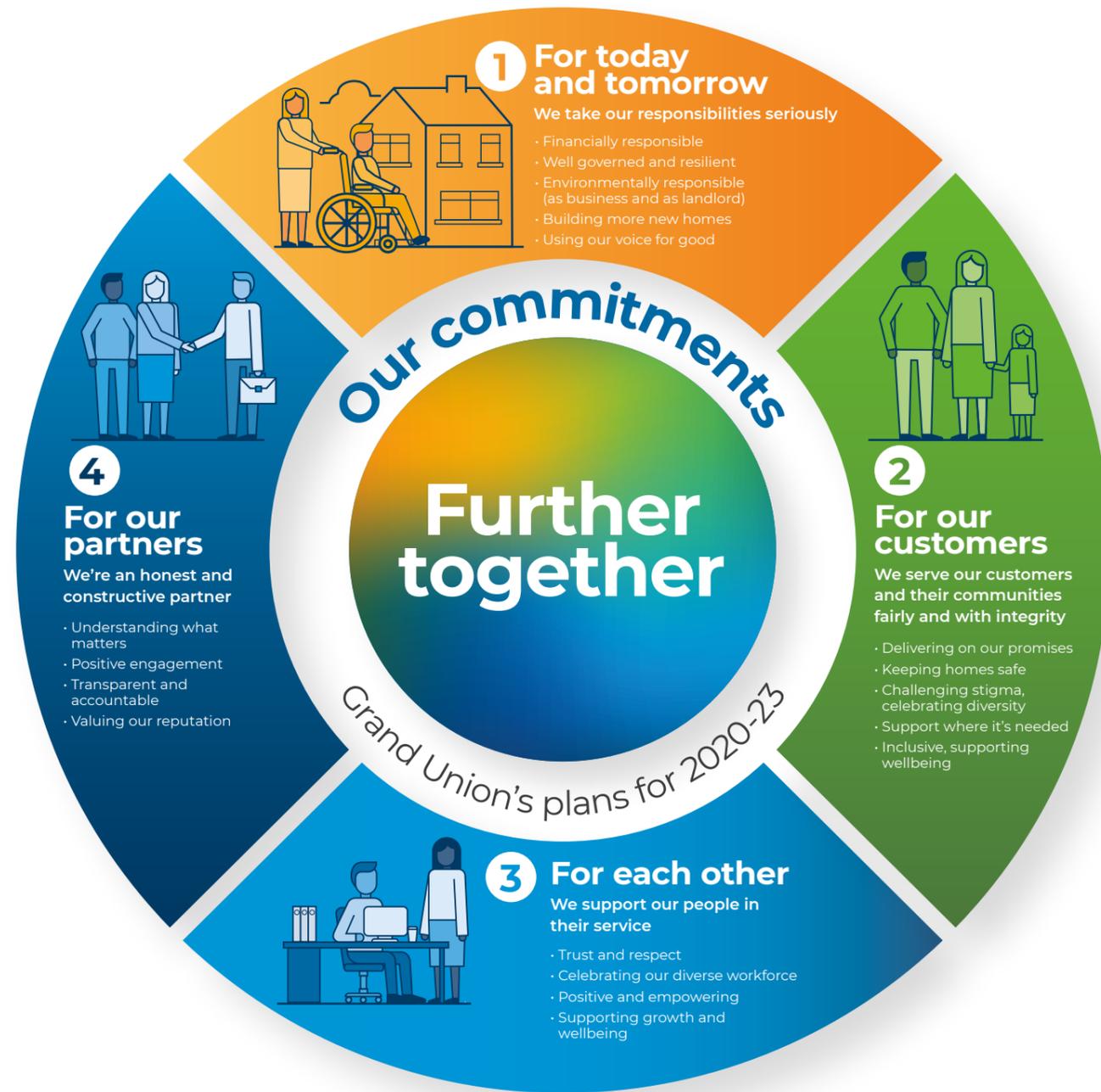
African proverb

# Our plan on a page

Over the coming pages, our strategic plan is set out in more detail, and our values are explained in Enablers of success, along with some of the other things that will help to ensure we deliver.

Grand Union is an organisation you can trust and our strategy is based on four clear commitments, which each have a number of dimensions.

- We take our responsibilities seriously – for today and tomorrow
- We serve our customers and their communities fairly and with integrity
- We support our people in their service
- We're an honest and constructive partner



We're **driven** to do more. We empower staff to achieve more and help us evolve into a more efficient, flexible and ambitious organisation that has a positive impact on our customers and communities.

We're in it **together**. Our can-do attitude and collaborative approach help us achieve our goals and provide what our customers, colleagues and partners need from us.

We **deliver** on our promises. We're committed to making a difference to people's lives and by acting with integrity, being open minded and taking ownership, we can be trusted to do what we say we will.



# Context

This strategy has been prepared at a time of change for the UK. The global pandemic came hot on the heels of political transition, with housing policy not yet fully formed. Government policy in response to the disease has included unprecedented support for businesses and for individuals, including the homeless. It's not yet clear how much of this will survive the crisis period, or what interventions can be expected in a housing market hit by the widely-expected deep recession.

Generally, we're expecting home ownership and Right to Buy to remain cornerstone policies. But we're waiting to see the level at which social rented housing - often more popular at local government level than at Westminster - is acknowledged. And we're still waiting for the Government response to feedback on the social housing green paper, which was designed as a comprehensive review of social housing. Years on from the tragedy at Grenfell Tower in London, we're also still waiting for clarity on fire safety. Many housing providers, including Grand Union, are responding proactively to guidelines before legislation is introduced. We want to make sure our customers and their homes are as safe as they can be.

Despite the political climate, there have been positive steps. The landmark legislation on housing standards, and the commitments on private tenancies and on domestic abuse will help to clarify responsibilities and shape our own work in these areas. And the strategic partnerships between housing associations, Homes England and, increasingly, local authorities, are a positive development. Grand Union's own work to deliver more land-led development schemes is starting to deliver, enabled by our strong financial standing, despite a difficult operating environment.

It is fair to accept that we are operating in a time of 'housing crisis'; the National Housing Federation estimates that **340,000 homes need to be built every year** to meet the ever-increasing need. The Chartered Institute of Housing has calculated that at least **90,000 of these homes need to be at genuinely affordable social rent**, to halt the financial drain of temporary accommodation and housing benefit/Universal Credit.

Welfare reforms continue to hit the poorest hardest and our customers often need support to navigate the new systems, where errors are common for complex claims. Our own research has also shown that our customers' chance of prosperity varies, depending on which town they live in.

We're also increasingly aware that the housing crisis is matched by the climate emergency. With **14% of emissions coming from our homes**, there's an urgent need for a more sustainable approach to meeting people's needs, and the added benefit is that our environmental solutions can help keep customers' fuel bills down.

Looking forwards, it's clear that there will continue to be a need for additional support with benefits, access to employment, and the needs of an ageing population. We'll continue to explore ways that technology can support our customers directly, and through the automation of routine transactions. This will ensure our skilled colleagues remain available to provide one to one help with more complex or sensitive matters.

On leaving the European Union, as things settle, we will be able to operate with increased confidence and certainty. But we know there will also be challenges, and we'll be focusing on ensuring we have access to the skills, information and materials we need to deliver on our commitments.

# Our commitments in more detail

In the following pages, we describe our commitments in more detail, together with the projects and action plans that will help us deliver on them. For each of our commitments, we've identified the achievements that will tell us whether we're achieving our ambitions.

Much of this detail was initially identified through round table discussions with colleagues across Grand Union, as well as an awayday with Board members, customers and colleagues.

In the coming months we'll be developing the detail further. This will include establishing a number of key strategies, such as our **Environmental Sustainability Strategy**, and testing them in our business plan, to make sure we're getting the balance right.

Detailed performance measurements will be identified within each strategy.



# 1 We take our responsibilities seriously – for today and tomorrow

Grand Union is responsible for the homes and neighbourhoods of more than 27,000 people. We take that responsibility very seriously, and we understand that a strong organisation is essential, to ensure our stewardship continues for future generations. We're confident of our financial strength, but we're not complacent. In the coming years, we'll be improving our reporting to make sure we are budgeting accurately and operating efficiently. We're aiming to optimise our core operating costs, so that we can continue to provide the targeted additional services that some of our customers need.

Effective governance is also a key feature of strong organisations. We've made great progress since consolidation, with our detailed governance framework, updated schemes for delegations and improved support for Board members. Improvements in financial and performance reporting will help to achieve the strong oversight and transparency that our group consolidation was designed to achieve. This includes accountability to our customers and other stakeholders. We'll also be improving our reporting on important areas such as GDPR breaches and centralising the way we report on delivery of projects and actions arising from this plan, to achieve greater consistency, complementing the improvements in project management that have started already. The governance review that's currently underway will identify further improvements, for implementation during the life of this strategy.

Our responsibility isn't confined to our own organisation though. Like other businesses, we're looking at our environmental impact, and we're committed to becoming a zero-carbon organisation. But our ambition isn't restricted to energy use. We're also planning to enhance biodiversity and reduce our water usage and waste production. As a landlord, we have opportunities to go beyond our day to day operations. Our **Environmental Sustainability Strategy** will change the way we manage and invest in our homes and estates for good. We'll be aiming for positive environmental impacts in terms of both the properties and

the estates, including improvements in the amount and management of green space. Together with our **Sustainable Rents Strategy**, our investments will help to make our homes genuinely affordable for our customers.

Our commitment extends to future generations, as well as our existing customers. Alongside delivering the services people need, we'll be optimising our business plan to deliver more new homes, including high environmental standards, with as many as possible available at genuinely affordable rents. We know we achieve the best quality new homes on developments where we're in control. So we'll continue our move to a more land-led approach, including regenerating existing assets that may be outdated or unsustainable.

And we'll also extend our impact beyond our existing communities. We know that our customers, colleagues and partners value our willingness to engage and influence at regional and national levels. The 'social distancing' measures that were introduced in response to the global pandemic have made the importance of home clearer than ever. On housing standards, homelessness and welfare reform, we mustn't go back to the way things were.

As an authoritative voice on issues from tenancy management to new investment, what we do matters. We'll build on the profile that we've achieved through our Chief Executive's year as President of the Chartered Institute of Housing, to make sure that our voice, and our customers' voices, get heard.

## New homes:

New funding deals will allow us to build **1,900** new homes



Our commitment	What success looks like
<b>For today and tomorrow</b> <b>We take our responsibilities seriously</b>	We'll be a financially strong organisation, delivering on our social purpose and our environmental responsibilities. We build great homes where people can live great lives, and we use our influence for the benefit of our communities.
• <b>Financially responsible</b>	• We make sure that we remain a sustainable business by meeting the targets we set in our <b>Value for Money</b> and <b>Treasury</b> strategies.
• <b>Well governed and resilient</b>	• Our decision-making is transparent and evidence-based and supported by timely and accurate reporting in line with our <b>Data Strategy</b> . Our Board has the skills and support they need to set our strategic direction and manage strategic and operational risk.
• <b>Environmentally responsible</b> (as a business and as a landlord)	• Our <b>Environmental Sustainability Strategy</b> includes targets for reducing our environmental footprint which are reflected in both our <b>Asset Management</b> strategy and our <b>New Business and Development Strategy</b> .
• <b>Building more new homes</b>	• Our <b>New Business and Development Strategy</b> sets out how we'll deliver on our environmental commitments and use the development potential of our existing assets to build more great homes.
• <b>Using our voice for good</b>	• We're delivering our new <b>Corporate Communication Strategy</b> , setting out how we'll use our voice to support change for good.

## 2 We serve our customers and their communities fairly and with integrity

At Grand Union, we understand that our customers are our main source of income, supporting everything we do from service delivery to new homes. It is our responsibility to serve each of them fairly and efficiently, and to deserve their trust by delivering on our promises. This includes keeping their homes safe and in good repair and working with others to make sure the neighbourhoods we're responsible for are great places to live.

We want our properties to be places that people are proud to call home; where they can build great lives. Too often, our customers' pride in their homes and communities can be undermined by the stigma that's associated with social housing. We want to play our part in removing this stigma. Increasingly, we'll aim to reflect the approach to service delivery that people expect in other aspects of their life – online, and available 24/7, supported by customer insight and automated delivery. We know this isn't for everyone though, and we'll work with our customers to make sure we maintain traditional contact routes where they're needed and retain their trust through this change.

Delivering great customer experience starts with great customer engagement. We have invested in new software that allows us to hear the customer voice across key customer journeys. We are now able to analyse what our customers tell us, including verbatim, in real time, and proactively resolve customer problems before they become complaints. Over time, this insight will help to build up a detailed picture of areas for improvement, maximising the value of customer feedback across a range of channels.

This will enhance strategic and tactical decision making, drive a more customer centric culture and ensure consistently high-quality services that meet the changing expectations of our customers.

Our core landlord services are fundamental to this commitment, but we also know that some of our customers need more from us. Whether it's ensuring our services are genuinely inclusive or providing specific support for tenancy sustainment or training and employment, we're committed to going the extra mile. For example, our in-house occupational therapy service continues to develop new approaches to facilitate prompt and cost-effective adaptations, including integrated planning with major works programme, to optimise investment. Working together with the housing teams, our occupational therapy service matches applicants to suitable properties, improving the use of vacant homes that have been previously adapted. We plan to expand this service to cover our whole operating area.

We're also committed to continuing our role in providing specialist and supported housing for people with additional needs. We work with partners to deliver services to people with mental health challenges, domestic abuse survivors and others in a residential setting that meets their needs. This creates a great opportunity for us to learn more about making our mainstream services more inclusive and ensuring they support – rather than undermine - wellbeing.

Although targeted and additional services are important, most of our customers manage their homes and tenancies without specific support. Our role is to provide an environment in which they can flourish and take advantage of the opportunities offered by a growing regional economy.

This means delivering high quality homes and services, but it also means delivering the genuine affordability that enables people on modest incomes to remain free from benefits and in control of their own lives. In 2020, we'll be looking at our current and future rents, and the costs of heating our existing homes, aiming to achieve sustainable rents and sustainable homes.



Our commitment	What success looks like
<p><b>For our customers</b>  <b>We serve our customers and their communities fairly and with integrity</b></p>	<p>Our customers trust us to provide advice and support when they need it. They know we're on their side.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Delivering on our promises</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our customers know that they can rely on us to deliver. We're always clear about our promises.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Keeping homes safe</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We can show how all our customers' homes meet the safety standards we've set in our <b>Asset Management Strategy</b> and comply with statutory health and safety requirements.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Challenging stigma, celebrating diversity</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our Single Equality Statement goes beyond the legal requirements. We expect everyone to treat all our customers with respect, and we don't work with contractors that don't. We speak up if people treat our customers badly.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Support where it's needed</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our customers turn to us when they need support, and we make sure they get the advice or practical support they need. Our <b>Independent Living Strategy</b>, <b>Financial Inclusion Strategy</b>, and <b>Community Investment Strategy</b> clarify our approach.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Inclusive, supporting wellbeing</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We understand our customers and their different needs and we use technology intelligently. Our <b>Wellbeing Strategy</b> makes clear that when there are obstacles to overcome, we make sure we're always part of the solution and never part of the problem.</li> </ul>



## Our customer offer

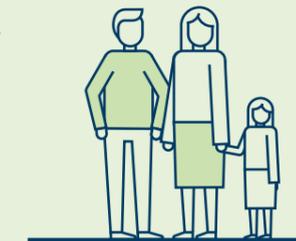
### More homes

- We provide homes to rent or buy that you can be proud of
- We make it simple for you to move into your new home



### Stronger communities

- We help communities to thrive
- We listen to you and act on what you tell us
- We sort out problems quickly



### Better lives

- We make it simple for you to do business with us
- We provide you with access to services when and where you need them
- We keep our promises
- We give you a voice



### 3 We support our people in their service

Our people are absolutely critical to Grand Union's success, and we're proud of their skills, creativity and commitment. During a time of considerable change, they've continued to focus on delivering the services our customers depend on, at the same time as getting involved with planning for more change, including this strategy.

As an employer, we aim to repay the trust that's placed in us by providing an empowering and supportive working environment.

All colleagues are based in our new, modern office in Milton Keynes, which was designed with colleague input to support collaborative, agile working. We moved in at the end of September 2019, and we've been delighted with how colleagues have developed new capabilities to support agile working and found solutions to every challenge.

Colleagues are trusted to work remotely and encouraged to consider an appropriate work/life balance, including getting involved in wellbeing activities. Social housing can be a challenging environment to work in, and we're evolving our support to ensure that our colleagues are able to retain the empathy that often draws people to our sector in the first place. The emphasis on physical and mental health is partly in response to levels of absence that we'd like to reduce, and we'll be monitoring this closely.

This emphasis includes recognising the contributions of our diverse workforce, and ensuring that everyone has the support they need to fulfil their potential with Grand Union.

It's important to retain and develop the colleagues we have now, and we also place great importance on developing our future workforce, including future leaders. We'll be evolving our management development to build on our successful coaching approach, as well as continuing to encourage innovation right across the business. This will include thinking about the future world of work, and considering the expectations of colleagues who'll be entering the workforce in the next decade.

We want to make sure that our 'offer' as an employer remains attractive. This is particularly important in light of the growth in employment opportunities planned for our region. Like much of the social housing sector, we've an eye to our ageing workforce and we understand that we need to attract young people into the sector and our organisation. We've learned from our very positive experience of apprentices and graduate traineeships, and we'll be looking to build on this experience with a range of meaningful recruitment and development opportunities for those new to our sector.

We've also learned a great deal about change, as a result of the very constructive engagement with our Customer 2020 programme. Genuine and open two-way communication has been an important part of our success. We'll ensure that this is embedded within our day to day business, and that the way we manage change allows us to continue benefitting from our colleagues' insight and engagement.

Our commitment	What success looks like
<b>For each other</b> <b>We support our people in their service</b>	People choose to come to Grand Union because they know they'll get the support they need to fulfil their potential and we're in it together. Our <b>People Strategy</b> outlines our approach.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Trust and respect</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We know we can rely on each other so we ask for and give help when needed.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Celebrating our diverse workforce</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We all understand how diversity makes us stronger and we learn and benefit from each other's different backgrounds and experiences.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Positive and empowering</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We know that what we do matters and we are driven to enable each other to reach our potential and deliver on our promises.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Supporting growth and wellbeing</b> (includes Apprenticeships)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We look after each other and we love to see our colleagues grow and flourish.</li> </ul>



## 4 We're an honest and constructive partner

Grand Union Housing Group works with more than 30 local authorities, and we also have key partnerships with suppliers, developers and colleagues across the social housing sector.

All of these relationships are important to us, and we will continue to work with each of our partners to ensure that Grand Union remains a positive choice. This includes making sure our communications are clear and transparent, and delivering on our promises. We'll look after our reputation across both traditional and social media including responding to, and learning from, constructive criticism.

Grand Union includes three Large Scale Voluntary Transfers (LSVT) from local authorities, and we continue to have a strong presence in these areas. We take a collaborative approach here, as we do elsewhere. However, we recognise that our customers and others expect us to step up and take a lead when it's appropriate, and we're happy to do so. We understand that we have a special responsibility to these communities, and that we owe a special accountability. This extends to taking a more proactive approach to engaging with elected representatives, both local and national.

We've also identified a number of other areas where we believe our involvement can be particularly impactful. Along with our LSVT communities, these form our key stakeholders. We'll keep an eye on their priorities, to ensure we're supporting where we can, and we'll take our role of critical friend seriously – sharing our experience and promoting our customers' wellbeing.

Our commitment	What success looks like
<p><b>For our partners</b></p> <p><b>We're an honest and constructive partner</b></p>	<p>Different organisations choose to work with us because they trust us to share our expertise and help them to get things right.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Understanding what matters</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We spend time understanding our partners' priorities and values, so we know how we can help.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Positive engagement</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We're proactive as well as responsive in our stakeholder management. We bring our focus on solutions to every partnership.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Transparent and accountable</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We share information 'warts and all' because we understand that being held to account makes us better.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Valuing our reputation</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We're proud that people think well of us, and we'll work hard to make sure we don't lose their confidence in line with our <b>Corporate Communication Strategy</b>.</li> </ul>





## Enablers of success

The changes that Grand Union has experienced in recent years, and the deliberate choices we've made, have shaped the kind of organisation we are in 2020. We're positioned well to continue our evolution and deliver change for good.

For example, we've developed our approach to managing change through our experience of the Customer 2020 programme, and that learning will stay with us as we continue our journey. And the design principles we developed will continue to help us shape our business around the needs of our customers. We expect our customers to hold us to account, and we welcome their challenge.

At the point of finalising this strategy, we had not yet emerged from the coronavirus crisis. Although there are more lessons to be learned, we've discovered that our values really do reflect who we are. We've grown in confidence, and we know that we have the capability and resilience to cope with sudden shocks. And it's clear that the technology we put in place for our unification has played a critical role, in terms of our ability to maintain services and provide the extra support that some of our customers have needed.

## Technology

Capturing the power of technology is central to delivering our corporate plan. Our use of technology will be based on strategic approaches developed in partnership with our customers. These will be based on a clear ethical position, including transparency around the use and design of systems and accountability for the outcomes. We will design our systems around customer journeys and ensure that our inclusive approach empowers customers as well as achieving operational efficiencies.

- As a first stage, our **Digital Strategy** will set our plans to move to paperless/self-service delivery. Robotic process automation will support customer self-service for routine transactions, freeing our colleagues to tackle more complex needs, including working face to face with customers who are unable to self-serve or who require extra support. We plan to deliver the majority of this strategy by 2021.
- Our **Innovation Strategy** will follow this and will address our approach to optimising both asset and tenancy management through our use of emerging technologies, such as crypto currency, wearable technology and the internet of things. The **Innovation Strategy** is intended to deliver a culture change that will be embedded beyond the life of this corporate plan.

Each of these will be underpinned by a **Data Strategy** that supports "data driven activities", including enhanced decision-making, across the business by ensuring:

- Effective data governance
- An efficient data architecture including efficient data exchange between systems and the data warehouse "single version of the truth"
- Improvements in data management e.g. data quality
- Exploiting Business Intelligence to move from reporting to complex analysis and artificial intelligence
- Strong data security.

The **Data Strategy** is already underway, with the current plans due for completion in 2021. However, the focus on data integrity will be retained as a core activity as new risks and opportunities continue to emerge.

## Culture and values

As our culture continues to evolve, we'll be focusing on a number of specific aspects, including our open and effective communication style. Externally, our evidence-based approach will help us to influence our operating environment. Internally, effective two-way communication will support open and supportive relationships between Board members, customers, and colleagues, including the Executive team.

Fundamentally, our culture is formed and supported by our values as an organisation.

- We're **driven** to do more. We empower staff to achieve more and help us evolve into a more efficient, flexible and ambitious organisation that has a positive impact on our customers and communities.
- We're in it **together**. Our can-do attitude and collaborative approach help us achieve our goals and provide what our customers, colleagues and partners need from us.
- We **deliver** on our promises. We're committed to making a difference to people's lives and by acting with integrity, being open minded and taking ownership, we can be trusted to do what we say we will.

We'll develop clear expectations connected to our values, explaining the behaviours we want to see from everyone involved with Grand Union.

We'll retain the focus on our effective governance and robust customer scrutiny.



For more information, contact us:

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