



CORPORATE PLAN 2010

incorporating



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FOREWORD

Grand Union Housing Group came into existence in March 2008 following the transfer of 2,900 properties from South Northamptonshire Council to South Northants Homes. Other members of the Group are Aragon Housing Association and MacIntyre Housing Association.

Although the Group has only been operational for 2 years it has already established itself as a major operator in the region. We own and manage around 10,000 properties in Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire and the surrounding areas. We work in partnership with a number of other organisations and deliver both homes and services which benefit the community as a whole.

The purpose of this Corporate Plan is to highlight the ethos of the Group and set out our strategic aims for the next 3-5 years. It is supported by Annual Plans for Aragon, South Northants Homes and MacIntyre.

1 VISION, VALUES AND PHILOSOPHY

1.1 Introduction

Grand Union Housing Group is a strong regional Housing Group with a people centred culture, delivering excellent local services. The Group comprises independent housing organisations within an overall group umbrella which has;

- financial strength;
- customer focus;
- skilled and experienced staff and Board Members;
- an expanding range of services and products.

1.2 Vision

Our vision is *“to be recognised for the excellent homes and services that we provide and to be trusted, respected and valued by our customers, communities and partners”*.

Our “strap line” is *STRONGER TOGETHER*.

This reflects the strength of the Group and the importance of partnership working to achieve lasting success.

We aim to *“Deliver beyond expectations”*

1.3 Values

Our Values represent the framework within which the Group operates.

Our Values are:

- | | | |
|-------------------|---|--|
| Integrity | - | we will deliver our promises and be clear about what we can and cannot do. |
| Respect | - | we will respect our customers and everyone we work with. |
| Quality | - | we will always aim to provide excellent services and products. |
| Innovation | - | we will look for innovative solutions to resolve problems and deliver outcomes. |
| Listen | - | we will listen to our customers and partners and shape our services accordingly. |
| Teamwork | - | we believe we can achieve far more by working together |

1.4 Philosophy

We believe we have a responsibility to serve all sections of the community. We value the difference and uniqueness in people, our organisations and communities. We aim to keep our promises, be honest and reliable, and build living partnerships through the way we work.

The Group has a strong focus on valuing and respecting people. Our strategic objectives are supported and resourced by prioritising staff development and continuous learning. Everyone who works for and is involved with Grand Union contributes to the success of the Group.

We believe we are good at what we do. We are efficient and effective at delivering local services well. However we acknowledge we can always do things better and will be continually striving to do so by listening to what our customers say.

We intend to grow the organisation, but not for growth's sake. We want to build on what we have already achieved by utilising our expertise, particularly of stock transfer, supported and older person's housing, and rural housing issues.

We want to extend the range of services we provide, both to our existing residents and other customers and also other organisations. However we will only do this where we are confident we can provide a better service than others can. Quality is central to Grand Union Housing Group's philosophy. We pride ourselves in providing homes and communities where people want to live.

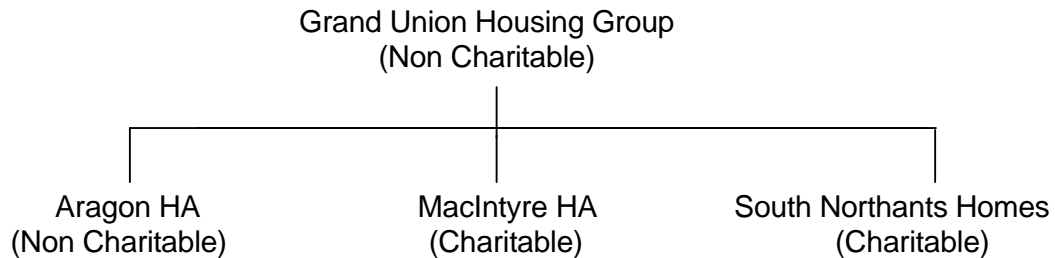
It is our intention that customers, stakeholders and partners of Grand Union:

- Have confidence that the Group has a responsible and caring approach, in which the interests of the customer and the community are paramount;
- Are reassured that they are dealing with an organisation that puts people first;
- Are able to rely on the commitment, knowledge and experience of Grand Union staff to deliver the level of service they expect. Indeed we want to deliver beyond those expectations;
- Have peace of mind they are dealing with an organisation they can trust, which is financially sound and well managed, but also innovative and solution focused;
- Feel fulfilled because they are offered choices that improve their quality of life and enable them to meet their aspirations;
- Feel secure because of Grand Union's quality standards and track record.

2 CONTEXT

2.1 Background

Grand Union Housing Group was formed in March 2008 following the successful transfer of 2,900 properties from South Northamptonshire Council to South Northants Homes. In total the Group has assets of almost £300m and an annual turnover of over £40m. It employs over 300 staff. The group structure is as follows:



This is the third Corporate Plan of the new Group. The Group strategies are set from a position of strength, with the aim of ensuring that the Group continues to grow and develop. The strategies are complemented by the plans set out in an annual document produced by each of the subsidiaries.

Grand Union Housing Group

Grand Union, as the non asset holding parent, provides central services to its 3 subsidiaries. Services include; Finance, IT, Human Resources, PR and Marketing, Development, Organisational Development and Office Services. The Group Board has overall responsibility for the group strategy, with operational matters delegated to the individual subsidiary Boards.

Aragon Housing Association

Aragon is the largest association in the Group. It was formed in 1994 following the transfer of 3,100 properties from Mid Beds District Council. A second transfer from the Council of 3,000 properties took place in 2001. It now owns around 6,500 properties, including; general needs housing, supported housing, intermediate housing, leasehold and market rented properties. Whilst it is one of the largest social landlord operating in Bedfordshire it also owns and manages properties in Milton Keynes and other surrounding areas.

MacIntyre Housing Association

MacIntyre's primary function is to provide specialised housing for adults and young people with learning disabilities. It currently owns/manages around 420 bedspaces throughout central and southern England.

South Northants Homes (SNH)

South Northants Homes was formed in March 2008 following the transfer of 2,900 properties from South Northamptonshire Council. Its properties include general needs, sheltered and supported housing and leasehold properties. During its first 2 years of operation it has made excellent progress in delivering the promises made to tenants prior to transfer and its aim over the next 3 years will be to continue to deliver these and more.

2.2 Position Statement

Grand Union Housing Group, through its 3 subsidiary associations; Aragon, South Northants Homes and MacIntyre owns and manages around 10,000 properties throughout Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire, Milton Keynes and Buckinghamshire. MacIntyre also has properties in London, Oxfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire, Herefordshire, Kent and Lincolnshire. We work at a Regional and Sub-Regional level and provide a range of solutions to meet a variety of diverse needs.

The Group is financially strong and we have recently secured £50m additional funding from our existing lenders, which means we can continue to provide much needed new affordable homes to meet local housing needs across the full range of tenures. We have developed a reputation for the delivery of new housing in rural communities, using rural exception sites and working closely with parish councils and rural enablers to identify local need.

We are committed to resident involvement, providing support to residents and their families in a range of projects from literacy to financial advice, organising social events and training in community skills. We consult widely and both Aragon and South Northants Homes have tenants on the Board plus a separate resident led Customer Committee, as well as other customer forums. We believe this track record of resident involvement will help us shape future involvement mechanisms.

All of Aragon's properties meet, and indeed most go well beyond, decent homes standards, while South Northants Homes and MacIntyre are making good progress in meeting the standard by 2012.

We recently completed a customer profiling exercise across the Group. This will give us a better understanding of who our customers are and enables us to tailor our services to meet their requirements. During 2009 the Group also undertook an independent tenants' satisfaction survey (STATUS SURVEY). This showed that 91% of Aragon's tenants and 86% of South Northants Homes' tenants are happy with the services they receive from the Associations. These results mean that both organisations are recording some of the highest levels of tenant satisfaction in the country.

During the next few years we want to encourage other regional based associations who share our aims and aspirations to consider joining the Grand Union Group. We believe we can provide sufficient benefits and economies of scale, whilst maintaining local independence to make membership of Grand Union an attractive proposition to smaller, locally based associations within the region. We are also keen to utilise our stock transfer experience to assist local councils who are considering the future of their housing stock.

2.3 Challenges and Opportunities

- **Economic conditions**
The economy has dominated the national picture over the last 18 months and will continue to do so for the next few years. Certainly the economic environment in which we operate is considerably different to what it was 2 years ago. The extent of the Government debt means that whichever political party finds itself in power in 2010, it will need to make drastic spending cutbacks, which are likely to impact on everyone. In particular we are likely to see a reduction in Central Government support for housing in the form of reduced capital grants, housing benefit and supporting people funding.
- **Housing demand**
The demand for affordable housing continues to increase. Housing affordability remains a huge problem with mortgage lenders demanding ever larger deposits and house prices in many areas almost 10 times average incomes. This continues to put huge pressures on housing organisations such as Grand Union. We will be campaigning at local, regional and national level to try to ensure that sufficient resources are allocated to housing, emphasising its importance to the health, social and economic wellbeing of the nation.
- **An increasingly ageing population, together with more single and single parent households**
For the first time ever there are now more people over the age of 65 than under the age of 18, whilst the fastest growing age group in the UK is people aged 80 and over. We need to consider how we can provide the right kind of housing and support to meet their needs.
- **Sustainability/Green issues**
The challenge is to provide homes that are affordable, that are built and designed to good quality standards and are environmentally sustainable. We will certainly be doing more in 2010 to improve the energy efficiency of our homes and continuing the work we began in 2009 to deliver more sustainable energy schemes.

- **Customer First**
This was a major project carried out in consultation with staff, Board Members and most importantly, customers. Its purpose was to review the way we currently deliver services to our customers and identify areas for improvement. During the course of this Corporate Plan we will be delivering the recommendations arising from this project.
- **Value for money**
Delivering value for money is more important than ever. We need to ensure that every pound we spend is spent wisely and for the direct benefit of our customers. At the same time we will be seeking efficiency savings wherever possible.
- **Regulation changes**
Regulation has changed with the formation of the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) and the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). The TSA recently announced its new regulatory framework with the emphasis on self regulation and customer engagement. The Audit Commission will continue to carry out inspections on behalf of the TSA and we will be expected to work closer than ever with our customers to ensure we are delivering the services they want, in the way they want them delivered. This will involve ensuring we make best use of our existing mechanisms but will also require us to devise new ways to engage with customers.

Grand Union is excellently placed to meet all these challenges. We will be working hard over the next few years to deliver homes and services that exceed our customers' expectations.

2.4 Alliances and Partnerships

Teamwork is very important within Grand Union as we want to make the best use of the skills and experience we possess throughout the Group. At the same time we recognise that we can't do everything ourselves and we therefore work with a number of other organisations. These include the following local authority partners:

- Central Beds Council
- Bedford Council
- South Northamptonshire Council
- Northamptonshire County Council
- Luton Borough Council
- Milton Keynes Council
- Northampton Borough Council
- East Northamptonshire District Council
- Aylesbury Vale District Council
- Wycombe District Council
- South Bucks Council
- Chiltern District Council

- Buckinghamshire County Council
- Hertfordshire County Council

We believe in real partnership working – understanding our partners’ problems and working with them to find solutions – not imposing our solutions on them. We believe partnerships are developed by listening first and being clear about objectives.

Some examples of our current partnership working include:

- Managing the tenure neutral Telecare service across Bedfordshire in partnership with our local authority partners and Tunstall Telecom;
- Project managed, in conjunction with our partners, the introduction of Choice Based Lettings throughout Bedfordshire;
- MacIntyre is currently delivering the reprovision of supported living and registered care homes to improve the lives of 48 people with a learning disability in Buckinghamshire;
- Our Community Development teams work closely with our local authority partners on a range of community based issues;
- South Northants Homes has introduced an Occupational Therapist service to speed up the aids and adaptation process. This is something we aim to roll out across the Group in the near future.

Other organisations and people with whom we work closely include:

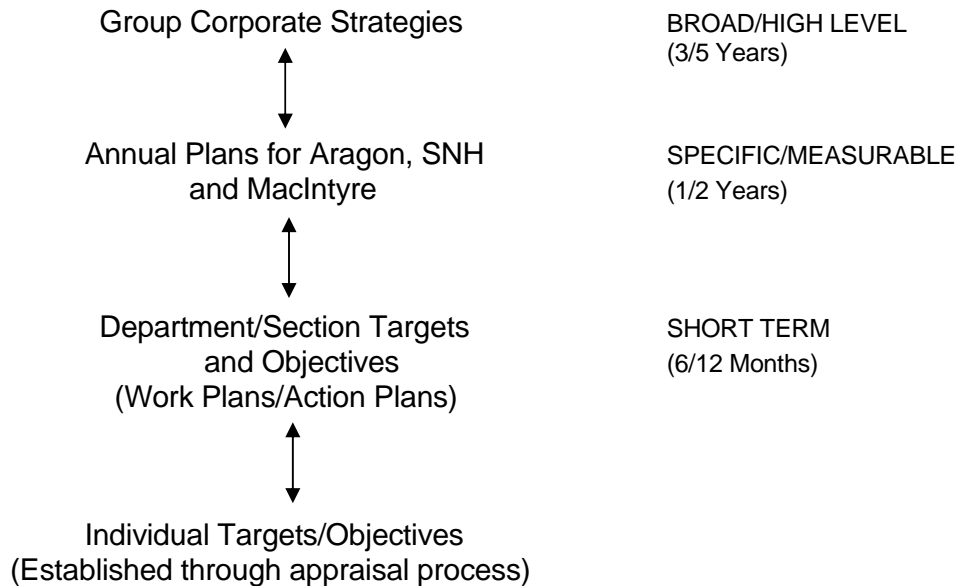
- Tenant Services Authority
- Homes and Communities Agency
- Funders
- Developers and Contractors
- Consultants
- Primary Care Trusts
- Parish Councils
- Relevant Police Forces
- Agencies within the voluntary sector

We also work in partnership with other Housing Associations, particularly on major development schemes.

Our partnership arrangements with developers and contractors continues to flourish. In 2009/10 we invested around £15m to improve our homes with a high proportion of that expenditure procured through partnering with local contractors. We also built over 150 new homes with the help of our local authority and development partners.

3 CORPORATE STRATEGY

The Group's Corporate Strategies are supported by the annual plans of each of the subsidiary associations, as shown in the following diagram:



3.1 Group Corporate Strategies

We have divided our Group Corporate Strategies into 8 main headings. These will be covered in more detail (with specific measurable targets) in each of the subsidiaries' Annual Plans. The strategies set out below aim to cover a 3/5 year period but will be reviewed on an annual basis.

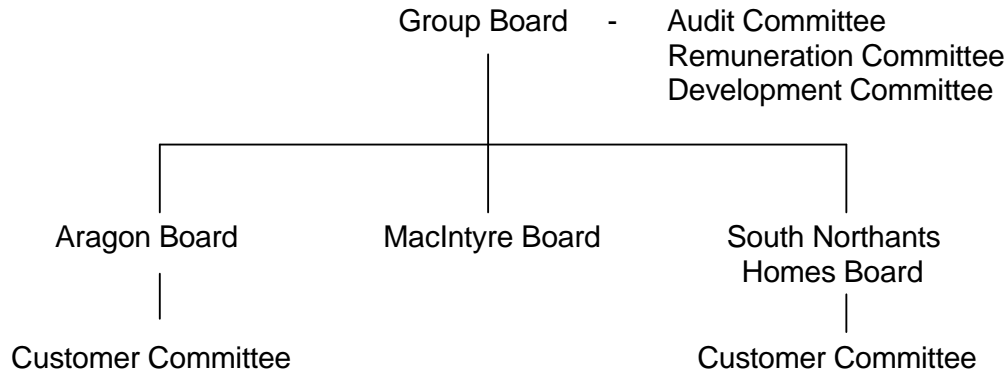
- **Customer Services** - our aim is to deliver excellent customer services that exceed customers' expectations. In particular we will be delivering the recommendations arising from the Customer First project.
- **Value for Money** - we aim to provide value for money services through effective procurement, partnership working and continuous review.
- **Inclusion** - we want to involve all our customers, partners and staff in shaping the services that we provide and will work to find a way to ensure everyone is given an opportunity to do so.
- **Managing our Resources** - we aim to maximise the use of all our assets to meet the needs of our customers, both current and future.

- **Developing Staff** - our people are the main resource of the Group. We aim to make best use of the diverse range of skills we possess and support staff across the Group to develop and work together for the benefit of our customers.
- **Developing and Maintaining Communities** - we will address quality of life issues and aim to improve the places and neighbourhoods where our residents live, as well as their immediate home.
- **Managing Risk** - we will be innovative and be prepared to take risks as appropriate, but these will be measured and carefully assessed.
- **Growth** - we aim to grow the organisation by utilising the resources and skills we have for the benefit of current and future customers.

4 GOVERNANCE

4.1 Group Structure

The Group structure is as follows:



The Group operates a Board Appraisal scheme. The purpose of this is to regularly review the various Board's strengths, weaknesses and effectiveness. All independent members are recruited by advertisement and selected by the appropriate Board based on their skills and experience. Training is also provided to all Board and Customer Committee Members across the Group.

4.2 Group Board

The Group Board is responsible for the strategic direction of the Group and has ultimate responsibility for the Group's activities.

It is supported by 3 Sub Committees:

- Audit Committee
- Remuneration Committee
- Development Committee

4.3 Executive Management Team

Leading and directing the overall business is an Executive Management Team consisting of:

Group Chief Executive	Alan Humphreys
Group Director of Finance	Graham Lennox
Group Director of Corporate Development	Phil Mitchinson
Managing Director – Aragon and MacIntyre	Aileen Evans
Managing Director – South Northants Homes	Paul Calland

The Executive Management Team meets formally every fortnight. Its discussions are minuted and actions agreed. As well as an Executive Management Team, Aragon and South Northants also have their own Management Teams, which consist of the heads of service.