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**FACTSHEET**

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# STRONGER2GETHER: CUSTOMER FAQs

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## Effect on customers

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### **Who would be my landlord?**

If the merger were to go ahead, technically, your landlord would change to Grand Union, but the new organisation would soon have a new name that would reflect the partnership.

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### **Would my rent and service charges go up?**

No. Your rent and other charges wouldn't change because of the merger. They'd only change once we've completed our usual yearly review. If you rent your property your rent is reviewed in line with the Government's Rent Standard (which states how social housing landlords like us set and increase rents).

If you're a Shared Owner your rent is reviewed in line with the mechanism contained within your lease. Service charges are calculated and reviewed inline with the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985.

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### **Would how I pay my rent change?**

This depends on how you pay.

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If you pay by Direct Debit, nothing would change.

If you pay by Standing Order, you may need to complete a new Standing Order mandate and return this to your bank. We'd let you know the details about this in plenty of time though. It may however be a good opportunity to change to paying by Direct Debit. This is a much easier way to pay your rent and service charge.

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### **Would my tenancy or lease terms and conditions change?**

No. There wouldn't be any changes to the terms of your tenancy or lease. Your rights would not be affected by the proposed merger.

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### **Would the merger affect my Welfare Benefits or entitlements?**

No. Your Welfare Benefits and entitlements would not be affected by the merger. These would only change in the event of any changes to your personal circumstances.

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### **How do I give my feedback on the proposal?**

We're holding a six-week consultation period with both Longhurst Group and Grand Union customers to get your views on the proposed merger. All customers will receive a letter by Wednesday 24 July informing you that the consultation has begun. It'll remain open until Wednesday 4 September and will provide an opportunity to tell us what you think about our plans.

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You can do this in one of three ways:

- 1 Online by visiting the dedicated consultation page on our website and completing a form.
- 2 Over the phone by calling 0800 111 4013 and selecting the customer consultation option
- 3 Or you can provide handwritten feedback by completing the form at the end of your letter and returning it to us using the prepaid envelope enclosed.

Please be aware that any feedback given outside of these official channels won't be taken into consideration.

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### **Would the way I contact you change?**

No, nothing would immediately change. You'd still call us on the same number as before although we will have a new name to reflect the partnership. We'll keep you informed throughout and give you plenty of notice before any changes are made.

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### **Would the care and support I receive change?**

No. The merger itself wouldn't mean any change to the care and support you receive – although we'd hope to improve these by joining together.

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## Benefits of the merger

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### **Why are Longhurst Group and Grand Union looking to join together?**

Longhurst Group and Grand Union believe that we'd be better and stronger together. As one organisation, we'd be able to achieve more and do

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even more for our customers and the communities we serve.

With a combined total of 37,000 homes, we'd see the advantages and benefits of being both local and large – driving efficiencies while retaining our focus on delivering great local services.

More benefits of becoming one organisation:

- We'd be more financially secure and able to do more in the future
- We'd have more money to invest in improving existing homes and building new ones
- We'd be able learn from each other and work more efficiently
- We'd be able to deliver better services and improve customer experience.

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### **Why now?**

The current operating environment for housing associations is very challenging. There are increased demands on the social housing sector, inflation, interest rates, the cost-of-living crisis and a shortage of skills.

Both Longhurst Group and Grand Union are robust, well-governed and successful organisations built on strong financial foundations.

Coming together now would further improve our resilience, financial strength and capacity for the future. Ultimately, together, we could do more.

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### **What are the main benefits of a merger?**

We think there are a lot of benefits to us joining together. However, the main benefit would be that we'd have more money available to reinvest into improving our existing homes, neighbourhoods and services – particularly repairs – and building more new homes.

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### **Are there any downsides to a merger?**

We don't think so. We're both community-driven organisations that provide affordable homes and services to improve people's lives and enhance our local communities. As a single, bigger organisation, this wouldn't change. In fact, we firmly believe that coming together would help us to do even more.

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### **Would the merger change how services are delivered?**

Initially you wouldn't see many changes. However, in time, we aim to deliver best-in-class local housing services through a purposely redesigned new organisation driven by best practice and customer needs. In short, we'll be a better landlord that aims to provide you with a great customer experience.

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### **Where do both associations operate?**

Longhurst Group and Grand Union have homes in many of the same and neighbouring regions. Longhurst Group owns and manages over 24,000 homes across the Midlands and the East

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of England. Grand Union provides over 13,000 homes across Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Hertfordshire. Together we'd have over 37,000 homes.

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### **What would happen to the repairs service?**

Currently both organisations deliver their repair services slightly differently. We employ three contractors, with each contractor responsible for a specific geographic region. They are Ian Williams in the west, Morgan Sindall Property Services in the east and Fortem Solutions in the south. Meanwhile, Grand Union has its own in-house team to deliver its service.

Both organisations know that there's work to do to improve the repairs service that our customers receive. The merger would provide us with the opportunity to invest significantly more in this area and find the best way to deliver a high-quality customer centric repairs service.

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## Details of the merger

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### **What's the process for the merger?**

As previously mentioned, we will hold a six-week customer consultation period which runs from Wednesday 24th July until Wednesday 4th September.

After this has been completed, all customer feedback will be considered and used to help create a final business case. This will go to both Boards during September to review. If approved, we'll give further details on the next stages of the process, which would include more ways for

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customers to get involved in helping to shape the new organisation.



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### **When would it happen?**

If everything goes ahead, we'd hope to come together as a single organisation by the end of this year or early 2025.



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