



# CORPORATE PLAN 2022 - 2025

TO BE A GOOD LANDLORD

## CORPORATE PLAN 2022 - 2025

Formed in 1998 following stock transfer from Stoke on Trent City Council, EPIC (Empowering People Inspiring Communities Ltd.) is a not-for-profit Registered Provider of Social Housing, with charitable status.

We own just under 1400 properties and work closely with three local authorities together with a range of partners to ensure our homes help to meet the needs of local people in Stoke on Trent, Newcastle under Lyme, and Staffordshire Moorlands. Over a quarter of our portfolio is made up of family sized homes and we offer a mix of houses, flats, and bungalows together with a small number of commercial retail outlets for rent.

We let properties charged at either Social, Affordable or Intermediate Rents; we have an offer to include a path into homeownership through our Rent2Buy scheme.

### REVIEWING OUR FUTURE

EPIC has experienced a challenging two years initially due to the emergence of the Covid 19 pandemic in 2020 and the impact this had on our services and corporate plan. Subsequently in 2021 we experienced unprecedented and unplanned challenges in the first half of the year including a regulatory judgement downgrade and notice, resignations from our Board, and through a range of circumstances our entire senior leadership team leaving the organisation. The second half of 2021 brought a strengthening of the Board with four new board members, the formulation and adoption of a Governance Recovery and Improvement Plan (GRIP) and the appointment of an interim Executive Team. The Interim Executive Team has commenced the stabilisation of the organisation, implemented the fire safety plan, reviewed core building compliance and worked closely with the Board and the Regulatory of Social Housing (RSH) to deliver its Governance Recovery and Improvement Plan.

In December 2021, the Board undertook a lessons learned exercise, and a strategic planning workshop incorporating consideration of sector risks, which commenced a fundamental strategic review to determine EPIC's future strategy. This exercise identified a clear purpose **to be a good landlord**, and set the themes to form our strategic objectives.

The Board identified information it required to undertake a fundamental strategic review, which was both comprehensive, detailed and complex. The list of information is detailed at Appendix A.

This required the Interim Executive Team to undertake a full review and assessment of the organisation incorporating the evaluation of:

- ❖ the events of the past year
- ❖ historical operating mode and culture,
- ❖ current operating arrangements and practices
- ❖ the business environment EPIC operates
- ❖ operating environment risks
- ❖ sector risks
- ❖ future demands and pressures

This set of internally generated challenges, occurring alongside the Covid-19 Pandemic, instigated unplanned changes to the way our staff operate, and the services offered to customers to respond to the measures required in the pandemic: for example the implementation of an informal flexible working arrangement and the roll out of IT equipment to support these working arrangements.

It is essential that this Corporate Plan sets a clear direction for EPIC for the next three years through its purpose and strategic objectives to:-

- invest in the services and the homes it provides;
- Invest in its people;
- Invest in and improve organisational practices and infrastructure;
- All of which will be underpinned by improved and effective governance and leadership.

The fundamental strategic review (FSR) involved the modelling of the Long Term Financial Plan (LTFP) with inputs and assumptions covering the information requested by the Board to inform EPIC's future strategy.

The LTFP modelling, its assumptions and inputs enabled the assessment of EPIC's future viability over the life of this plan and beyond. The FSR considered issues beyond financial viability alone. It considered the organisation's ability to deliver across all aspects of service delivery and determined the organisational appetite to be a good landlord. In determining our strategy, we recognised that the appropriate delivery model for this plan to achieve our purpose and strategic objectives may change in the future. This will become apparent as we deliver our current objectives and develop others to respond to our operating environment and the related risks.

This process recognised the Board's long-term responsibility for the consideration of the appropriate delivery model to meet EPIC's purpose and strategic objectives.

This Plan is the output of the aforementioned Fundamental Strategic Review.

This Corporate Plan and strategy sets out EPIC's clear purpose, **to be a good landlord** and our strategic objectives of:-

- **SERVICES - providing inclusive and accessible services meeting local and regulatory standards**
- **ASSET MANAGEMENT - providing good quality & safe homes**
- **PEOPLE - valuing & investing in our people to deliver desired outcomes**
- **GOVERNANCE - operating as a well governed financially viable organisation and ensuring our services meet the required standards**

This Corporate Plan outlines our Vision, Mission, Values, and the delivery model, giving regard to the Regulator of Social Housing (RoSH) Value for Money (VfM) standard.

It is important to be clear that 'good' does not mean 'good enough' – it means good sound, safe, quality, responsive, modern and contemporary services where tenants are front and centre and fully integrated in what we do.

## OUR STRATEGY

EPIC's purpose and vision; to be a good landlord requires a strategy and a delivery model, which over the next 3 years will provide focus on our purpose, to strengthen and improve our core services, and ensure the continued stabilisation following on from a period of unprecedented challenges and related change.

Our FSR identified that we have clear and strong appetite to be a good landlord and to continue to do this as a stand-alone local provider. We do however recognise that strategic alliances and partnerships can be of value and more importantly, it is critical that we continue to undertake comprehensive and thorough strategic planning based on the environment we work in, and the risks it presents. We are open to the consideration of a future merger and have developed a set of criteria that we would use to inform our considerations. These are attached at Appendix B.

The term of this Plan will focus on the building and strengthening of our core business and our offer, whilst embracing and responding to the changes facing the sector in terms of consumer standards, building safety compliance and in the longer term aiming for zero carbon. We will not proactively seek merger opportunities, unless risks crystallise or our circumstances change to dictate this.

Accordingly, this Plan sets out the building blocks through our strategic objectives, and the related actions and goals which we will take to enable us to meet our core responsibilities, provide good services and make the changes required to be a good landlord in a drastically changing housing sector. These actions and goals are captured in our Delivery Plan, which is outlined in the final section of this Plan.

Towards the end of the life of this Plan, we will revisit as part of normal strategic planning process our future strategy beyond 2025 and set a new corporate plan to reflect this. The delivery plan will be refreshed annually through an annual strategic review process ensuring we stay alert to how we are performing, enabling us to respond to the changing environment and manage risk.

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## OUR VISION

### TO BE A GOOD LANDLORD

*helping to develop vibrant communities in the areas of our homes*

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## OUR VALUES

- **Fairness:** We treat people equally and make decisions based on facts not personal opinions.
- **Respect:** We treat people with respect, and act with courtesy.
- **Understanding:** We are empathetic, approachable and act professionally.
- **Integrity:** We are honest, dependable and do what we say we will.
- **Teamwork:** We work with our customers to ensure we deliver good services. We believe that using our combined strengths makes us a better organisation.
- **Excellence:** We take pride in what we do, and strive to improve services.

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## OUR MISSION

Working to be a good landlord by:

- Providing quality housing services
- Providing homes that are building safety compliant
- Providing an effective responsive repair service
- Providing a service developed with and influenced by our tenants
- Responding to our tenants needs and feedback
- Working in partnership with local landlords and community service providers

Our values and mission are fundamental to the implementation and delivery of this strategy and set our culture guiding how we will operate to deliver our vision.

Our values and mission drive the four strategic objectives that have been set for the next three years and have accompanying actions.

We will deliver our vision through our four strategic objectives:-

### SERVICES: PROVIDING INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE SERVICES MEETING LOCAL AND REGULATORY STANDARDS

How we deliver services to the satisfaction of our tenants and the outcomes we achieve are the foundation **of being a good landlord**. This requires effective delivery across work streams, which will include:-

- **Providing quality housing services** - We will provide customer focused responsive services meeting the needs of tenants and service users, agreed local standards and regulatory standards.
- **Providing inclusive and accessible services** – We will ensure that the services we offer are supportive, provide value for money and are fit for purpose.
- **Adopting the Tenants Charter** – We will adopt and meet the six commitments of relationships, communication, voice and influence, accountability, quality, and when we get things wrong we will proactively seek a remedy and implement any learning to improve services.
- **Measuring and monitoring of complaints** – We will invite feedback, respond swiftly and sensitively to reach a resolution, seek to put things right quickly when things go wrong and seek to learn and improve services from the feedback we receive.
- **Enhancing the accessibility of our services** – We will invest in IT to ensure it is fit for purpose and that our tenants and service users can access our services in the manner and time that suits them, through the methods they choose.
- **Sustainable tenancies** – We will focus and listen to the needs of the customer, working with them to ensure that they get the support and guidance they need to sustain their tenancy.
- **Systems and technology** - we will use technology to maximize efficiency and value for money, develop and provide, support effective customer services, and to manage effective contemporary services.
- **Playing an active part of the local community** – We will work with partners and take a proactive role in the development of vibrant communities' and support our local supply chain to ensure that more resources are targeted at local need.

- **Data and Information** - We will review our data and systems to ensure effective management information, and maintain accurate up to date data to underpin our services.

### **ASSET MANAGEMENT: PROVIDING GOOD QUALITY & SAFE HOMES**

The full gamut of areas forming asset management are fundamental to **being a good landlord** and manifest in number work streams, which will include:-

- **Ensuring safe quality homes** – We will prioritise investment in the delivery of our fire safety plan, and maintaining the decency. We will plan and programme required improvement and investment works, and deliver timely cyclical repairs.
- **Ensuring our homes meet the Decent Homes Standard** – We will develop and use our IT data asset management systems, and provide strategic capital replacement programmes to ensure our homes remain decent.
- **Delivering value for money** - we will seek best value and continual improvement, focusing on delivering efficiency, while maintaining quality, safety and customer service. We will operate a procurement strategy, which provides flexibility.
- **Being building compliant** - We will ensure our homes are fully compliant with all building regulation, and develop our technology to underpin our building safety and compliance strategy.
- **Assessing the viability of our assets** – We will consider the viability of our assets and consider strategies to rationalise and high cost or poor performing assets. e.g. conversion, remodelling or disposal.

### **PEOPLE: VALUING & INVESTING IN OUR PEOPLE TO DELIVER DESIRED OUTCOMES**

We recognise our people are essential to the delivery of this Plan and having the right people in the right place with the rights skills, operating within the appropriate organisational infrastructure and culture is essential to our success. Our approach will include:

- **Investing in our people to deliver desired outcomes** – We, will invest in a skilled, professional and adaptable workforce that enables EPIC to be agile and flexible to the changing needs of our tenant and service users.
- **Improving internal and external culture** – We will develop a culture of partnership working that is supportive, promotes personal learning and development and encourages people to do their best.
- **Engaging our residents** – We will actively develop communication with our customers, and listen to what they tell us and use this insight to develop and improve the services we provide. We will ensure that our service users are able to hold us to account and have clarity about communication mechanisms that have clear lines of feedback to Board.
- **Recruitment and retention** - We will recruit staff with the appropriate skills to deliver the future strategy, and ensure that appropriate performance management is in place, for all employees, at all levels. We will offer learning and development opportunities to maximize individuals’ potential.
- **Standards and performance** - We will operate to clear standards and require our people to be responsible for delivering to these.
- **Nurturing and embedding our Culture** - We will live our values and hold ourselves and each other to account to deliver positive outcomes for our tenants and service users.

- **Leadership and management** – We will recruit executives and managers with the appropriate skill and experience to develop and deploy a management framework and culture to; establish strong internal controls, effectively co-ordinate activities, and develop and invest in our people to enable them to deliver improved services to our tenants and service users. We will adopt approaches to maintain professional skill, and improve learning and development.

## **GOVERNANCE: OPERATING AS A WELL GOVERNED FINANCIALLY VIABLE ORGANISATION AND ENSURING OUR SERVICES MEET THE REQUIRED STANDARDS**

Effective good governance is fundamental to the delivery of our vision and providing services in the best interest of our tenants, service users and other stakeholders. Providing effective stewardship of the organisation and its assets, both now and in the long term, is essential in order to deliver and operate in accordance with regulatory standards and legislation.

Our approach will include:

- **Being well governed**– We will implement our Governance Recovery and Improvement Plan to strengthen our governance, and seek a review of our regulatory judgement to achieve G1 within the life of this plan.
- **Meeting the Consumer Standards** – We will put in place a plan to ensure we meet the forthcoming regulatory requirements of the consumer standards.
- **Improving the financial position** - We will maintain a viable long term financial plan (LTFP), focus our resources on our core services and investment in our properties, undertake robust stress testing of our LTFP tailored to the delivery our strategic objectives.
- **Ensuring we operate within our Financial Golden Rules** – We will review and maintain up to date and relevant internal golden rules with appropriate performance monitoring in order to ensure clear oversight and maintain covenant compliance and viability.
- **Option appraisal** - We will develop option appraisal mechanisms/tools to inform any decisions to change our services or asset base.
- **Strategic planning (Delivery Model)** - We will maintain strategic alertness, through sector and environmental scanning to ensure we operate a strategy and delivery model to best deliver for tenants and service users.

## OUR MEASURES

We will measure our success through a suite of key performance indicators and a set of clear goals delivered through the actions in our delivery plan.

We will undertake a base line survey of tenant satisfaction in year one of the plan, and each subsequent year, to track trends. We recognise that this may not demonstrate a straightforward upward trajectory as the wider economic impacts on our tenants and service users during the life of this plan are far greater than the service we alone provide.

PERFORMANCE INDICATOR	MEASURE/ TARGET
<b>Services</b>	
Number of anti-social behavior cases p.a. (relative to the size of the landlord) % stock	5%
Satisfaction with landlord's approach to handling anti-social behaviour	80%
Communal areas meeting the required standard	100%
Percentage of communal area safety inspections carried out	100%
Satisfaction that the landlord keeps communal areas clean, safe and well-maintained	80 %
Number of complaints (relative to the size of the landlord) p.a. (upheld %)	50 (10%)
Complaints responded to within the Complaint Handling Code timescale	100%
Satisfaction that the landlord makes a positive contribution to neighborhoods	80 %
Rent collected (%)	97.5%
Current tenant arrears as a % of rent debit	2.5%
<b>Asset Management</b>	
Number of Homes that do not meet the Decent Homes Standard	0
Repairs completed within timescale (%)	98%
Satisfaction with the repairs service (%)	95%
Satisfaction with the time taken to complete the most recent repair (%)	95%
Valid Gas Safety Certificates (%)	100%
Number of assets with valid Fire Risk Assessment	100%
Number of fire safety high priority actions outstanding past the due to be completed date	0
Number of assets with asbestos management survey	100%
Number of assets with valid Electrical Installation Condition Reports	100%
Number of assets with Legionella Risk Assessment	100%



Satisfaction that the home is well maintained and safe to live in	90% and 100%
Average number of days to turnaround void properties	28 days
Rent loss on void properties (%)	Less than 2%
<b>People</b>	
Average number of sickness absence per FTE (days)	Less than 5%
Number of reportable accidents	0
Board member attendance (% cumulative)	90%
Staff satisfaction	70%
Multiplier between lowest and highest paid role	Less than 5
Leavers (voluntary) of staff establishment	Less than 10%
Recruitment campaigns successful first time	90 %
<b>Governance</b>	
Operating Margin (%)	Greater than 3
Minimum Cash Reserve	£650k
Interest Cover Covenant met	130% or above
Headline Social Housing Cost Per Unit	Not to increase annually greater than RPI.
% or GRIP actions on target	100%
Regulatory Judgement	G1/V1
NHF code of Governance 202	Adoption and adherence

## CORPORATE DELIVERY PLAN

Ref.	Action	Measure /Outcome	Owner	Completion		
				22/23	23/24	24/25
<b>SERVICE - providing inclusive and accessible services meeting local and regulatory standards</b>						
CS1	Develop and deliver an action plan to ensure EPIC meets the requirements of the consumer standards and all legislative requirements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Increased customer satisfaction</li> <li>– Compliance of consumer standards</li> <li>– Improved service delivery &amp; performance</li> <li>– Increased tenant engagement and satisfaction</li> <li>– Regulatory judgement - G1/V1/C1</li> </ul>	HMD			
CS2	Review, improve utilisation, upgrade & fully implement Civica Cx system (Housing) and improve the online service offer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Increased efficiency</li> <li>– Reduced bureaucracy</li> <li>– Reduced cost</li> <li>– Customer focused agile workforce</li> </ul>	HMD (HBSS)			
CS3	Improve and verify Information Systems (IS) and Management Information (MI) systems inc. EDI data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Audit of IS and MI systems</li> <li>– Target driven, robust and holistic performance framework</li> </ul>	HMD (HBSS)			
CS4	Continuation of IT infrastructure upgrade programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– New telephony</li> <li>– Enhanced broadband</li> <li>– Improved cyber security</li> <li>– Enhanced resilience</li> <li>– Increased capacity and flexibility to deliver agile operations</li> <li>– Increased flexibility for channel shift</li> </ul>	HBSS			
CS5	Update and implement policies and procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Improved service delivery and consistency of service</li> <li>– Efficiency in operational delivery</li> <li>– Reduction in upheld complaints</li> </ul>	HMD			
CS6	Improve the customer journey and increase customer engagement in service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Outcome focused customer engagement framework overseen by the board and customers</li> <li>– Improved service delivery with customer at the centre of decision making</li> </ul>	HMD			

Ref.	Action	Measure /Outcome	Owner	Completion		
				22/23	23/24	24/25
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Reduction in service failure and learning from complaints</li> <li>– Increased customer satisfaction</li> </ul>				
<b>ASSET MANAGEMENT - providing good quality &amp; safe homes</b>						
CAM1	Fire Safety Compliance Implement the Fire Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Essential work completed end March 2022</li> <li>– Phase 2 of works scheduled in 22/23 completed Oct 2023</li> <li>– Achieve and maintain compliance</li> </ul>	AMBCD			
CAM2	Building regulatory compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– All common area Asbestos Management Surveys in place with Action Plans for remedial works</li> <li>– Management Asbestos surveys for dwellings; ongoing programme to provide 100% Asbestos Register</li> <li>– Gas servicing compliance maintained</li> <li>– Electrical common areas complete, domestic programme</li> <li>– Legionella risk assessments in place</li> </ul>	AMBCD			
CAM3	Formulate and Implement property Investment programme (maintaining Decent Homes Standard)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Maintain all properties at decent homes standard</li> <li>– Non decent programmed and addressed in 2022/23</li> <li>– Future consideration for a Decent Homes Plus standard (Letting Standard).</li> </ul>	AMBCD			
CAM4	Asset viability Assessment - Develop Option Appraisal strategy to include environmental and social economic factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Identification of asset viability to inform investment and disposal</li> </ul>	AMBCD			
CAM5	Formulate and Implement Policy for obtaining zero carbon by 2050	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Sustainability Strategy developed 2022/23</li> </ul>	AMBCD			

Ref.	Action	Measure /Outcome	Owner	Completion		
				22/23	23/24	24/25
CAM6	Implementation of good Contract Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy and procedures for Contract Management in place Apr 22/23</li> <li>Delivery of efficiency</li> </ul>	AMBCD			
CAM7	Implement of compliance management and asset database system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain compliance</li> <li>Deliver efficiency in management of compliance</li> </ul>	AMBCD			
<b>PEOPLE - valuing &amp; investing in our people to deliver desired outcomes</b>						
CP1	Implement revised staffing structure to deliver core operational services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased staff satisfaction</li> <li>Increased tenant satisfaction</li> <li>Delivery in accordance with proposed Consumer standard metrics</li> <li>Reduction in upheld complaints</li> </ul>	CEO			
CP2	Implement agile working policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased efficiency</li> <li>Reduced costs</li> </ul>	CEO			
CP3	Recruit leadership and management appropriate to strategic objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delivery of key corporate plan objectives to meet legislative and regulatory requirements</li> </ul>	COB			
CP4	Implement and deliver staff training and development programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased organisational capacity</li> <li>Service delivery meets consumer standards</li> <li>Improved performance</li> <li>Increased staff satisfaction</li> </ul>	HBSS			
CP5	Review terms and conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased staff satisfaction</li> <li>attract and retain key staff</li> </ul>	HBSS			
<b>GOVERNANCE - operating as a well governed financially viable organisation and ensuring our services meet the required standards</b>						
CG1	Implement GRIP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regulatory compliance</li> <li>regulatory review</li> <li>Regulatory judgment G1/V1</li> </ul>	COB (CEO)			
CG2	Regulatory Grading review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>G1/V1?</li> <li>Compliance with regulatory standards</li> </ul>	COB (CEO)			
CG3	Tender of employment law advice service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure service is reflective of EPIC's needs</li> <li>Ensuring Value for Money</li> </ul>	HBSS			
CG4	GDPR – Enhancing and embedding compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All data held, reviewed and cleansed</li> </ul>	HBSS			

Ref.	Action	Measure /Outcome	Owner	Completion		
				22/23	23/24	24/25
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Data registers established</li> <li>– Retention logs maintained</li> <li>– Outdated documents destroyed</li> </ul>				
CG5	Tender Internal & External Audit Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– External and Internal auditors appointed</li> <li>– Governance compliance</li> <li>– Ensuring Value for Money</li> </ul>	CSD			
CG6	Tender Insurance services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Insurance provider appointed July 22</li> <li>– Ensuring Value for Money</li> <li>–</li> </ul>	CSD			
CG7	Upgrade Civica Financials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Increased stability</li> <li>– Increased efficiency less manual interventions</li> <li>–</li> </ul>	CSD			
CG8	External rent and service charge review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Maximisation of income</li> <li>– Assurance re: Compliance with rent standard</li> </ul>	HMD			
CG9	Review of Financial Regulations & Procurement Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Improved internal controls</li> <li>– Clarity of regulations to all staff</li> <li>– Improved management decisions &amp; clarity</li> </ul>	CSD			
CG10	Implement Board lessons learned (not in the GRIP or already implemented)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Informal meetings of the Board dinner/ lunch)</li> <li>– Attendance and seminars and networking within the sector</li> </ul>	COB (CSD)			

**Key:**

COB Chair of the board

CEO – Chief Executive Officer

CSD – Corporate services Director

AMBCD – Asset Management and Building Compliance Director

HMD - Housing Management Director

HBSS – Head of Business Support Services

( ) – key secondary lead

CS - Corporate Services

CAM - Corporate Asset Management

CP – Corporate people

CG – corporate governance

INFORMATION BOARD CONSIDERED TO UNDERTAKE ITS FUNDAMENTAL STRATEGIC REVIEW,

- Financial worst case scenario
- 10 year (long term) financial profile + stress testing (inflation, policy change)
- Capacity to address increased stock condition and key sector risks
- Customer Offer – cost of delivery
- Identify Skills/ Operational capacity gaps (Leadership and governance) – ability to recruit to senior posts?
- IT systems and Data quality issues
- Criteria for consideration of merger
- Local landlords-are they better than us at core service delivery
- Financial and organisational capacity to deliver services to tenants
- New normal of service delivery
- Supply chain key risks and resilience
- VfM metrics
- Communications strategy with tenants

## CRITERIA FOR MERGER

As part of its Value for Money (VfM) Standard, the Regulator of Social Housing requires Registered Providers to demonstrate that Boards have considered the costs and benefits of alternative commercial, organisational and delivery structures, which was undertaken as part of our Fundamental strategic review informing this Plan.

A merger is one possible example of such an alternative way to deliver our services.

This Corporate Plan setting out our strategy for the next three years recognizes the importance of being able to respond to change and crystallization of risk and therefore as part of our strategy we are open to the option of merger as delivery model. This Plan focuses on strengthening EPIC as a good landlord and as such we will not actively pursue merger opportunities during the life of the plan.

Having an open outlook to future delivery models means it is important to set out what our criteria for merger would be and what characteristics we would consider in assessing a potential partner.

In considering possible merger opportunities it is essential to stay focused on questions centered around tenants and service users (our beneficiaries) and how they are best served. The end here should be a clear focus on 'impact' as a component of Value for Money rather than in merger / cost reduction per se.

Impact may range in nature from direct (impacts directly our existing tenants and service users), through expansion (impacts directly new tenants and service users in new geographic or new service areas) to indirect (a stronger financial structure may allow us to reduce overheads, cross-subsidise certain services which in turn may impact our beneficiaries).

An important step would also be to determine the characteristics of any potential merger partner for EPIC, on the basis that any search for such a partner is likely to be conducted more efficiently if there is clarity on what we are seeking before we start.

Our criteria for merger would be based upon our priorities in terms of our vision and strategic objectives:

Our vision: To be a good landlord.

Our strategic objectives:

- Services - providing inclusive and accessible services meeting local and regulatory standards
- Asset Management - providing good quality & safe homes
- People - valuing & investing in our people to deliver desired outcomes
- Governance - operating as well governed financially viable organisation meeting our services required standards



And within this context we would ask:

**Would a merged organisation significantly improve the overall impact for our core beneficiaries?**

Considering this in the short, medium and long term.

In considering characteristics of merger partner related to our vision and strategic objectives, we would consider:

Area	Key question	Issue
Culture	How strong is the cultural fit between the two organisations?	Organisations with cultures which are close are more likely to bind into a single new culture more naturally and quickly.
Structure	What structure is proposed? Is this a full merger or some sort of alliance or shared services?	Whilst greater benefits may be possible with a full merger and complex arrangements are hard to maintain.
Senior Managers	How do the two senior teams overlap? Is one CEO approaching retirement? Can we fill any gaps or weaknesses between us?	Two strong CEOs are unlikely to be able to find a route through this one! There will be an inevitability of redundancies at this level.
Board	Are we proposing the new Board is made up of members from each or that we form an entirely new team? How strong are the two Boards?	It is important that the combined operation has a sense of whole rather than factional infighting. There will be an inevitability of redundancies at this level
Geographies	How strong is the geographic separation / overlap? How is it proposed the physical operations are controlled?	A high overlap may result in the greatest efficiency savings
Systems	How well invested are the underlying business systems in each organisation?	There may be opportunities to roll the "better" system in each operation out to the other creating some quick wins
Other	Are there any other specific factors which might make a merger easier / more problematic	Pension and/or TUPE issues; Conflict; Contract or income continuity.

These criteria and characteristics set a two-stage approach in consideration of a merger (or other alliance)

**Stage 1: Would a merged organisation significantly improve the overall impact for our core beneficiaries?**

If the answer is no, then progression to stage 2 wouldn't occur

Stage 2 – a high level assessment in matrix with a weighting on the areas considered to be most important e.g. culture.