

Promoting Independent Living

# ANNUAL REPORT 2015-2016



Ability



# Hello



## Welcome to our Annual Report for 2016.

For the first time, we have combined our reports to customers and stakeholders.

We have also changed our

publication date, so that we can provide more up-to-date financial information.

Having joined Ability on 1 July 2016, I spent my first 3 months getting to know the organisation, visiting services and speaking to customers and colleagues. Above all, I was struck by the positivity and shared values across our services.

At the official opening of Cavell House in Farnham, in September, I found the four new flats as good as any I have seen – spacious, accessible and adapted to support independent living. The tenants were as impressed with their new homes as I was and went on to describe how the support staff listen and act on their wishes, enable independent living and respect individual choices.

My ambition for Ability in the coming months and years is to build on our strong foundations. We will focus on the quality of our services and ensure that we work together to prioritise the quality of the customer experience.

**Jeff Skipp**

## Celebrating new Hillingdon services



Quentin (right) pictured with his Support Worker Johann at the Hayes Park Lodge lunch party.

Quentin was one of the customers from our Hillingdon services who came to our outdoor lunch party at Hayes Park Lodge in September. Customers were joined by local staff and some of our service commissioners.

We now support 135 people with mental health needs in the borough, after winning 3 new support contracts during 2016.

As a new customer living at Hamlet Lodge, Quentin said: "I like how Ability work. Since the service opened they've been really helpful. Some people don't leave you alone, but I'm independent. Someone comes every morning for a chat. When it's Johann, we have a really good chat and that's the important thing."

# ABILITY Highlights

## IN 2016



Colin (centre front) celebrates the official opening at The Lodge, with other customers from our Farnham services.

## Re-opening The Lodge in Farnham

Colin welcomed visitors to his home when we held an official launch event at The Lodge in Farnham. He said: "It's like a palace. I'm so happy living here!"

After the Mayor of Waverley, Cllr Chris Storey, declared The Lodge officially open, customers from all our Farnham services joined in the fun with staff and local service commissioners.

Before re-opening the building in April 2016, we spent 6 months converting it into 4 self-contained flats. 3 of them are wheelchair accessible. The Lodge was formerly a shared house for people with complex physical and learning disabilities, but local needs had changed.

Colin and the other new customers at The Lodge are supported by staff based next door at Cavell House.

## Award win for the Q-Team

Carron Cleversley was delighted to accept two awards for Ability at the Customer Scrutiny Inspection (CSI) Awards in Manchester on 27 October.

Carron is a member of the Q-Team – our customer-led quality auditing team – which won 'Excellence in tenant inspection and mystery shopping' at the event. Ours was the only entry to make the shortlist, because the judges were so impressed.

The judges also gave us a highly commended award for 'Excellence in communication' – a category we hadn't entered – after reading about how we train staff to use Makaton, following a Q-Team recommendation.

Carron took the mic to say it was a privilege to be part of the team. She said she was very happy to be an Ability customer.



Carron shows off the Q-team's award plaque, with CEO Jeff Skipp (to her right) and other members of the staff team.

We set high standards for  
your home and repairs service

## YOUR Home



## Facts & Figures



Nick (left) and Andy (right) are Morgan Sindall multi-trade operatives.

### Meet our new contractors

Nick and Andy are part of the Morgan Sindall team that began repairing our homes in April 2016.

Andy has been working on Ability homes for about 5 years – because he worked for Richardsons, then Mears, before joining Morgan Sindall.

He says: “I know some of the customers really well and we have enjoyed getting to know each other over the 5 years. It’s been great staying on this contract so long. When I go out on a job, I do everything I can to get the repair done and to make sure it stays fixed.”

Nick is new to Morgan Sindall. He says: “Each day is different and each job is different. I really enjoy the variety. It’s been good getting to know the customers and hearing their stories.”

### The repairs service – more work needed

In our last report, we said we would work with our new contractors to improve our repairs service. Unfortunately, this hasn’t gone as well as we hoped.

Our CEO Jeff Skipp says: “I know our repairs service has been causing customers some frustration. This has been down to teething problems as we changed contractors from Mears to Morgan Sindall. However, this is our Housing Department’s top priority. I would like to assure tenants that we are working with Morgan Sindall to solve these problems.”

### Improving your homes

All our homes meet the government’s Decent Homes Standard. Many also meet the higher standard we set for Ability.

Last year, we replaced ageing kitchens, bathrooms and boilers in homes that became vacant.

### Property MOTs

To give ourselves better information, we started carrying out property MOTs to check their condition.

By the end of January, our team had spent 3 days giving properties their MOT, with help from customers. They looked at the Titnore Nursery site, 3 sites in Essex and 2 in St Albans.



Dan Wrixon from Morgan Sindall carrying out a recent property MOT in Waltham Abbey. Assisting him is Trina, whose son John lives at the service.



When we changed contractors, we had to make a fresh start with collecting repairs information. The figures below only include repairs carried out by Morgan Sindall.

### Meeting our home service offer

Morgan Sindall carried out **2,109** repairs for us between 22 April and 30 September and **90%** of customers were happy with their repair.

**83%** of emergency repairs were finished within our 24-hour target.

**41%** of urgent repairs were finished within 7 days (target is 95%).

**55%** of routine repairs were finished within 21 days (target is 95%).

**99%** of our homes gained a gas safety certificate (target is 100%).

Our performance was disappointing because it dipped as we got settled with our new contractor. It was much better by the end of the financial year and we are working to improve it further.

### During 2016-17

- We will continue to work with Morgan Sindall to bring the repairs service to a higher standard.
- The Customer Panel is helping us to find new ways to get customer feedback about repairs. We will work with Morgan Sindall to get them to start collecting immediate customer feedback on their hand-held devices.
- We are keeping better records about the condition of our properties.
- Morgan Sindall will start our new planned replacement programme in February 2017. It includes:
  - installing **3** new heating systems
  - replacing **17** kitchens
  - replacing the windows and doors at **20** properties
  - redecorating the communal areas at **16** properties and the outside of **27** properties, and
  - carrying out electrical testing at **55** properties.



We aim to let homes quickly and fairly,  
to meet government rules on rents and  
to offer good tenancy support.

# YOUR Tenancy



Tanya (seated) gets advice from her Supported Housing Assistant, Helen Mephram.

## More housing support

Tanya, who lives at The Lodge in Farnham, is really pleased we met our promise to appoint new Supported Housing Assistants. Our 3 Assistants – Hannah-Kate Lampard, Helen Mephram and Theresa Dockery – work alongside your Housing Services Officers to offer more support to customers who are struggling to manage their tenancies. Customers like Tanya are giving us great feedback about the

service. The 3 staff can help them get repairs done, sort out their rent payments, make a Housing Benefit claim or work out their finances. They can also refer them to other agencies if they need more specialist help. The Assistants will also hold general rent and maintenance surgeries. Tanya says: “My Supported Housing Assistant is Helen Mephram. I talk to her about my service charge

and she answers my questions, explains what it includes and helps me to understand. “Helen helped me to set up my direct debit to pay my rent, which makes things easy. I see her once or twice a month, which is good. I find it really easy to talk to Helen and ask her questions. I asked about having pets and now I have permission to have a bird and a guinea pig. It’s good to have her here.”



## A new home for Will

Will moved to Wishbone Way in September 2016. He says: “I was living with my parents, but my dad became ill. Over time I became my dad’s main carer which was a lot of responsibility. “I’m 30 now and wanted my own space, so I contacted social services and told them the situation. They showed me a few places I could move to and one of those places was Wishbone Way. I liked it here

because of all the open space. The flat was really big and looked quite bare, but I could see how I could fill it and make it my home. “It was very stressful when I first came here because it was such a big change, but now I’ve settled in and I like it. I like my own space and coming here made me feel I could be myself. I can make my own choices about what I do and when.”

# Facts & Figures

By the end of the year, we housed **698** people in **33** local authority areas.

## Meeting our tenancy offer

We continued to let our homes as fairly as possible.

## Working toward faster lettings

In last year’s report, we promised to improve our letting times. Over the year we brought down the time it takes us to re-let empty homes to an average of under 17 days. However, our target was 10 days, so we still have work to do.

## During 2016-17

- We recruited a new member of staff at the start of the current financial year. Revenue and Lettings Officer Paul Greenough is now working to speed up our lettings.
- We will recruit another 3 Supported Housing Assistants over the year.



We work to make sure your home and neighbourhood are clean, safe and good places to live, and we promise to tackle anti-social behaviour.

## Customer Benefits

# YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD AND community



*"We hosted a BBQ for our friends and family. It was a really good day. The furniture was definitely money well spent!"*

## Improvement fund award for Genesis House

Customers who live at Genesis House in Staines, pictured above, are really pleased with the new garden furniture and barbecue they gained in July. The items were chosen by customers and bought with an award from our improvement fund, with the approval of the Customer Panel.

Ramon said: "We have tables, chairs and some recliners, which is great for the summer. We also got a big BBQ, which we had fun assembling ourselves. We then hosted a BBQ for our friends and family. It was a really good day. The furniture was definitely money well spent!"

The Panel also awarded funding for:

- garden furniture for Elva Court in Bexhill-on-Sea
- benches for each of the 4 communal gardens in Talbot village in Poole, and
- pots, plants and raised beds for an easy-to-access vegetable patch in the garden shared by Cavell House and The Lodge in Farnham.

To be successful, all of these improvement ideas had to:

- benefit customers
- have some lasting value (so not a party or day trip)
- cost between £100 and £2,500 in total, and
- not need expensive ongoing maintenance.



Raised planters for the Cavell House garden.



## New local plans

As we promised last year, we worked with customers to create local business plans. These plans will help us to:

- continue assisting people to live independently
- make sure services remain financially viable
- check that services meet local needs
- check the condition of properties and plan large-scale maintenance
- continue to add to customer satisfaction and wellbeing, and
- find ways to grow so that we can offer more homes and more care & support.

## Facts & Figures

During the year, we drew up local business plans in 7 areas. We spoke to 43 tenants and 30 Care & Support customers. We asked what they thought of our services.

We found that:

**100%** of Care & Support customers were satisfied with the service.

**81%** of tenants were happy with their home, and

**78%** of tenants were happy with the repairs service.

Although most people were happy, 6 people told us they were unhappy with our handling of anti-social behaviour, so we need to look at this in future.

In some areas, like Swindon, we saw ways to improve our existing service. In other areas, including West Sussex, we planned to meet changing local commissioning priorities.

## During 2016-17

- We are currently using a new priority list to plan Property MOTs in each area.
- We will work with customers to draw up 10 more local business plans. We aim to cover St Albans, Merton, Essex and Hillingdon.

Our customer engagement and empowerment promises are about treating you with respect, making services easy to access, involving customers in our work and providing a quick and fair complaints system.

# Involving YOU




Customer Panel Chair Stuart Rees is pictured talking to Jane Harrison (Chair of the Ability board) at the AGM.

## The Customer Panel – improving our work

- During the year, Chair Stuart Rees and the rest of the Customer Panel:
- checked our services and helped us improve
  - scrutinised our Housing and Care & Support Key Performance Indicators
  - chose projects to benefit from the improvement fund
  - helped us review our complaints work
  - helped us think about ‘co-production’, where customers, staff, families and neighbours work together as equals to provide services, and
  - decided we should try out a peer support scheme.

## The Q-Team – collecting your feedback

- Aroona, James and the rest of our award-winning customer-led Q-Team had a very successful year collecting your feedback and making recommendations.
- In January 2016, they met 3 customers at Cavell House and 16 of the customers we support in Farnham.
  - In June 2016, they joined staff for training in how to talk to people who have autism or Aspergers.
  - In the summer, they visited Fiddlers Green, our registered care home in Surbiton.
  - They also went to Hamlet Lodge, our new mental health move-on service in Hillingdon.



Q-Team members Aroona (in the checked shirt) and James (centre front) pictured with customers and staff during the Hamlet Lodge visit.

## New ways to get involved

In last year’s report we promised to find creative new ways for you to get involved.

We introduced Property MOTs and got customers to help us check the condition of their homes.

In the past year, customers have taken part in recruitment panels – including helping us to choose our new Chief Executive. We’re now looking for volunteers from every service to help us recruit local staff.

## A better complaints process

The Customer Panel helped us meet our promise to simplify the complaints process.

We now ask staff to resolve complaints locally when they can and always to aim for the best outcome possible. We trained staff from Ability and our repairs contractors, Morgan Sindall, to make sure they understand our approach.

This year, frontline staff received 20 complaints. They resolved the majority within our target of 10 working days. 4 complaints were a bit more serious. They were all resolved by senior staff, with 3 meeting our target of 28 working days.

9 out of 10 housing complaints were about slow repairs. 6 of these were about repairs started by our old contractors.

# Facts & Figures

## During 2016-17

- During the current year, the Customer Panel is prioritising the repairs service. Morgan Sindall now come to every Customer Panel meeting.
- We are developing a better system for following up on repairs complaints.
- We will carry out more property MOTs.
- We will carry out surveys in all our Hillingdon services in January. We will use different versions and formats, including Easy Read.
- We are improving the way the Housing Team communicates with customers, with new template letters and training in plain English.
- Support workers are now being trained in working with people who have autism or Aspergers.



We will support your social activities and help you to work towards your personal goals. We aim for good results whenever our services are inspected.

# YOUR support



## New services and old

Last year, we faced the challenge of local authority budget cuts. We also had to work to keep up our rental income. But we had a good year overall.

- We continued to support customers to maintain their independence. We are proud that very few customers end their stay with us negatively.
- We won new contracts in Hampshire and Hillingdon.
- We opened new accommodation-based services in Woking and Farnham.

We were sorry to say goodbye to our service in West Sussex. Sadly, our commissioners could no longer afford to fund people who are not eligible for social care.



## Good inspection results

All our services registered with the Care Quality Commission continued to be fully compliant.

Last year, our services at Hillingdon, Slough and Surbiton were rated 'good' across the board after visits by the CQC. The reports were positive about how we promote choice, dignity and independent living. A Hillingdon health and social care professional told the inspectors: "I would say for the most part the quality of care is excellent. Between my visits I have witnessed marked improvements in service users."

Local authority review visits also consistently gave us glowing results. Yew Tree Lodge was recently judged to be 'outstanding' by Hillingdon Council.

## Supporting each other

We launched a pilot peer support service in Hillingdon. Peer support encourages customers to build relationships with each other, so they can share skills and life experiences.

Staff worked hard to promote the service. They used social media to set up links so that customers could start to organise their own activities without our support.

Customers are now getting involved in more social activities, education and voluntary work.

A customer said: "We think it's great! It's got us out more and helped us to make new friends. It's really good for people who want to mingle and socialise."



*"I would say for the most part the quality of care is excellent. Between my visits I have witnessed marked improvements in service users."*

Hillingdon health and social care professional



## Wendy moves to Rosedene

Wendy moved to our Rosedene service in March 2016, when she and 2 friends moved from a group home in Woking.

She says: "It was a big change coming here. It was hard at the beginning because I have never lived independently before. But I got lots of support to help me when I was settling in and I still get the support I need."

"It's still sometimes hard here because it's so different. When I find it hard, I talk to the staff or go and sit in my own space and read a book. I'm quite a quiet person and enjoy time on my own practising my writing or reading detective books. I really like reading. Staff come to the library with me so I can choose new detective stories to read."

"I like everything at Rosedene. My support worker Kirsty helps me with all sorts. I'm more independent living here and Kirsty helps me with that. I do more of my own cooking, but still have support when I need it. My favourite meal to cook is shepherd's pie."

"Kirsty has a great sense of humour. If you're down and she comes in, she really builds you up and helps me to feel positive and laugh. We often have a good laugh together."

## Facts & Figures

Our gross income for Care & Support grew by **£1m** in the year to September 2016 – to a total of **£5.3m**.

**99%** of our customers were able to continue living independently.

## During 2016-17

- We will use our newly formed continuous improvement group to achieve good or outstanding in all our care & support services.
- We will use our peer support service, Q-Team and Customer Panel to involve more customers in the design and delivery of the service we provide.

We make sure our regulators rate our services as good or outstanding.

# GOVERNANCE AND finance



Board Chair Jane Harrison (centre front) and fellow Board members take part in this year's strategy day.

## Governance matters

Board Chair Jane Harrison says: "It has been a year of change at Ability. David Williams left the organisation after 24 years – the last 14 years as our Chief Executive. I would like to thank David on behalf of the Board for his commitment and dedication over the years and to wish him every success for the future.

"We appointed a new Chief Executive, Jeff Skipp, from 1 July 2016. Jeff has significant experience in care and support having been Chief Executive of Deafblind UK and prior to this

Director of Care and Support at The Papworth Trust.

"The Board remains committed to continuing as an independent organisation that provides homes for people who wish to live more independently. To ensure the success of this decision in a difficult economic climate, we will need to look at new ways of working, making sure we are as efficient and effective as possible, whilst ensuring our customers remain central to everything we do."

## The financial year

Donna Marshall, Finance Director and Company Secretary, says: "We had a steady year, with our turnover increasing compared to the year before. Our operating surplus also rose as a percentage of turnover, from 7.6% the previous year to 9.5%."

*"...customers remain central to everything we do."*

Jane Harrison, Board Chair

# Facts & Figures

£732

Average spent on responsive repairs to each home (£840 the previous year).

£815

Average on planned maintenance to each home (£551 the previous year).

£1.4m

Spent on development and improvements to existing homes (for example, new kitchens and bathrooms).

£10.1m

Turnover at year end (£9.2m the previous year).

£8.6m

Housing-related costs (£7.9m the previous year).

£1.39m

Operating surplus (£1.17m the previous year).

## Value for money savings

In line with the promises we made last year, we became more efficient and reduced our costs during 2015-16 by:

- raising our operating surplus as a percentage of turnover to 9.5%, at a time of increased cost pressures
- reducing our overhead costs from 12% of turnover the previous year to 9% – so that we can continue to improve and develop homes
- retendering our repairs contract, which should give us annual savings of 10%
- completing the sale of a hostel and a shared flat we no longer needed, to raise funds for investment
- comparing ourselves to other similar organisations – the data went to the Board.

We involved customers in our value for money work, by getting them to define what the term meant to them in addition to saving money. Customers also helped us with the retendering of the repairs contract, by helping us think about the service they expected and the cost.

## During 2016-17

- We will survey our care & support customers early in 2017 – we will report back on the findings later in the year.
- We will hold an official opening for Wishbone Way in Woking in the summer.
- We will open a new service at Whitley Rise.
- We will become more efficient and give better value for money, by:
  - joining a benchmarking group of similar landlords to improve comparison data
  - holding central costs to 9% of turnover
  - working to speed up letting times so that we lose less rent because homes are empty, and
  - drawing up a new asset management strategy to make sure we are making the most of our stock.



#### Board members

at 30 September 2016

Jane Harrison (*Chair*)

John Daley

Wendy Crichlow

Ian Lines

Nicola Philip

Adrian Polisano

Vince Mewett

Jane Minter

Karen Hillhouse

Sally Reay

#### Executive directors

Jeff Skipp

Donna Marshall

*Chief Executive*

*Finance Director and Company Secretary*

#### Auditors:

Grant Thornton UK LLP

#### Solicitors:

Devonshires

#### Bankers:

Barclays Bank PLC

#### Registered Office:

The Coach House, Gresham Road, Staines, Middlesex TW18 2AE

**Company Number:** 1261380

**Charity Number:** 271547

Registered with the Homes and Communities Agency, Number LH 2174

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**We always like to hear from our customers, please get in touch...**



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