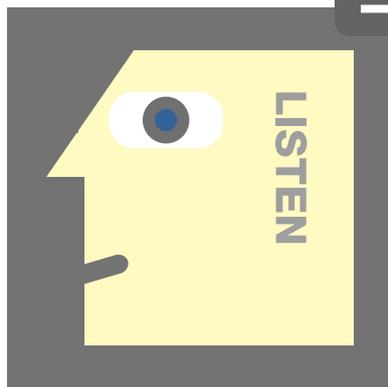
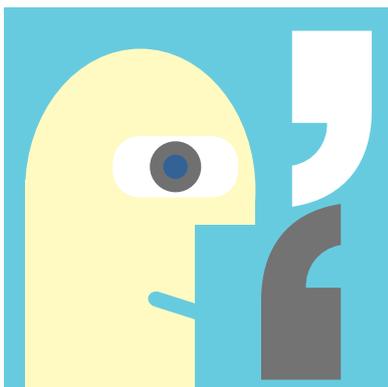
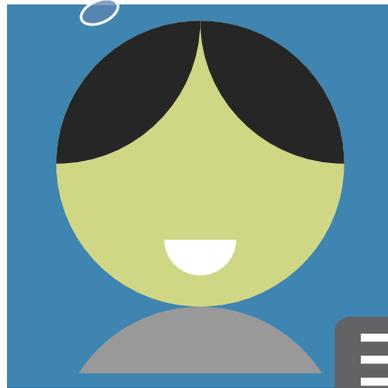
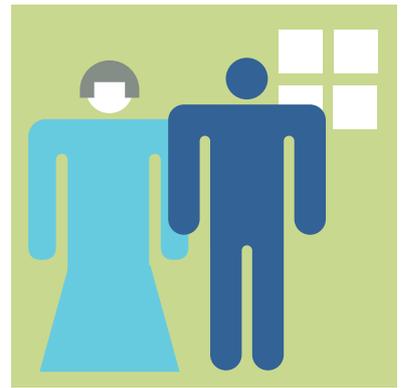
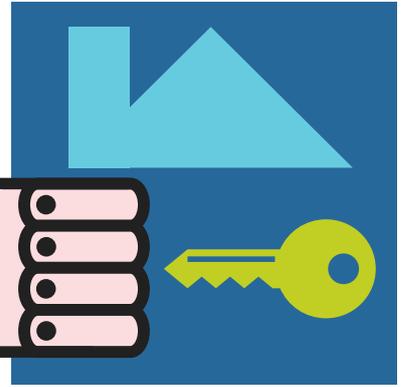
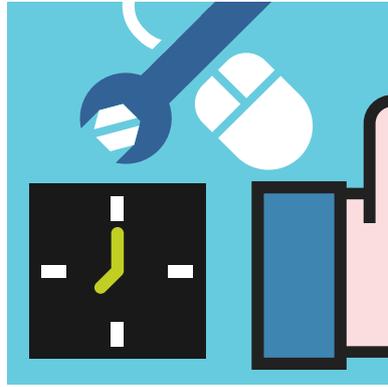


Our 5th Annual Report to our customers - 2014



Ability



A year of challenge and change



Thank you for reading our review of the year for Ability customers. It's been a year of challenge and change.

Government cuts have really begun to bite. This has affected our ability to build new homes and to deliver quality Care & Support services.

We've begun to address the challenge of providing more for less by focussing on what makes Ability different. We are concentrating on our core purpose of 'promoting independent living', and on our positive values. Customers, as always, are at the centre of our thinking. In this report we tell you how we are doing and whether or not we are matching our service promises to you. Mostly we are, but in some areas we need to improve.

Customers are helping us to identify how and where we can improve. We have survey results that tell us that overall 85% of you are satisfied. Meanwhile our customer-led Q-Team has been visiting some Care & Support services looking for ways to improve them.

As the year ended, our repairs contractor went into administration, meaning we had to find a new one very quickly. We'll now be working with Mears to get new arrangements in place as quickly as possible.

Thank you to all my colleagues and customers who have supported each other through change this year.

David Williams

David Williams

Our year at a glance



Customer satisfaction survey

We now carry out surveys every quarter. We had the results from the first survey and have had some very positive responses from you, particularly around your neighbourhood and the value for money you get for your rent. You also say our staff are friendly and approachable and that you trust Ability. You also provided useful pointers for areas we need to improve, such as repairs, listening to your views, keeping you informed and the quality of your support. We will make sure we learn from your feedback and make improvements.

Read more on page 9



Tenants at our Wokingham supported living development celebrated 10 years of living independently, with a fantastic garden party.



Q-Team service visits

Our team of trained customers carried out 3 service visits during the year, asking you to give them feedback and make suggestions. They came back to us with strong plans for improvements.

Read more on page 5

Great new kitchens

We fitted individually planned new kitchens for all the tenants at Balfour Drive in Liss.



Peter said: "I love the fact my kitchen was personalised to suit my needs. For example, the set of movable drawers and a pull-out drawer worktop – very modern!"



The launch of AbilityPOSITIVE+

We launched a fresh approach to customer service at our staff conference in April.

AbilityPOSITIVE+ is about having staff with positive attitudes and the right knowledge and skills to take our services forward.

New homes round-up

CROYDON

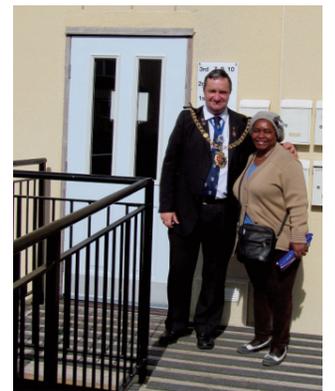


A very happy Croydon customer gives his new home the 'thumbs up'. This is one of 7 brand new self-contained flats that were completed in August.

READING

In the summer, we completed 9 supported living flats in Reading. The one and two bedroom flats are for tenants with learning difficulties and physical impairments.

HASTINGS



The Mayor of Hastings, Councillor Alan Roberts, officially opened our new development of 10 supported living flats.

Several of the tenants previously lived in residential care, but they are now living independently with support.

Involving you

Our customer involvement offer

- We deal with complaints clearly, quickly and fairly.
- We have a range of ways to get you involved in improving and shaping services.
- We treat all our customers with respect.
- We're committed to making our services accessible to all.

Involving you: The Customer Panel

We actively involved 12 customers from Housing and Care & Support in our Customer Panel. Three new members joined and Stuart Rees became the Chair.

The Panel met 3 times to give us feedback on our performance, our policies and procedures, and the pattern of complaints we receive. They also took part in training sessions.

Panel members strongly influenced our work. For example, they reviewed our housing development plan, our pets policy and the yourAbility support agreement.

They asked for improvements to our adaptations policy, helped make our support plans more person-centred and assisted in staff training. We also discussed our new business plan with the Panel who provided useful feedback.

Panel members chose which projects should get a share of the £25,000 in our Improvement Fund (see page 11).

Panel members helped us interview 8 applicants for jobs in 6 services. They also worked with us on our new website and visual identity.

Responding to complaints

During the year, we received 44 complaints and resolved 42 of them - 20 within our 10-day timescale.

What you complained about

Support services	17 (39%)
Repairs	20 (45%)
Anti-social behaviour	4 (9%)
Estate management	2 (5%)
Rents	1 (2%)

We also received two complaints from a local MP and one from the Housing Ombudsman. They related to rents, repairs and anti-social behaviour.

We brought key staff and Customer Panel members together for a series of workshops, to talk about common complaints and how best to resolve them. For example, 10 customers told us we didn't take enough action on their housing problem, while 8 weren't happy with staff attitudes.

Customer Panel Chairman's report

Since being invited to become Chairman of the Customer Panel, I have only managed to attend one of the two Panel meetings.

Having a combined meeting to begin with and then to split into two groups, one for Housing and the other for Care & Support, has been a great success.

During the combined meeting we hear about how various initiatives have progressed.

For example, the Q-Team has been busy interviewing residents in two services. It was obvious that the residents appreciated the personal touch of the Q-Team visits.

We were also updated on developments in the complaints procedure and given an insight into the **AbilityPOSITIVE+** initiative, which is intended to address the attitude and behaviour of Ability's staff.

When the meeting subsequently splits, each group can focus on priorities relevant to their particular needs.

One further benefit of being part of the Customer Panel is the opportunity to meet Ability staff face to face. No matter how much developments in technology give us a variety of ways to communicate, I still believe that face-to-face discussions are best.

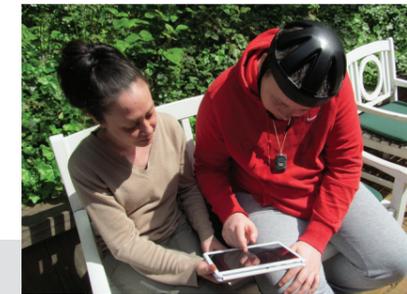
Stuart Rees

We are tackling these problems with better complaints handling by the Housing team and better communication with customers – helped by a new Housing Information and Performance Officer.

When a property is undergoing complex repairs, we are managing this more closely.

The launch of **AbilityPOSITIVE+** and new staff training is designed to improve staff attitudes.

Q-Team member, Nigel carries out an interview with the aid of a touch-screen tablet.



Involving you: The Q-Team

The Q-Team currently has 5 members. The Team visits services to get face-to-face feedback from customers. During the year, the Q-Team visited services in Earley (near Reading) Merton, Hillingdon and Woking, speaking to 27 customers and taking written feedback from another 5.

Before visiting our Hillingdon service, Q-Team members were trained to work with learning disabled tenants. They used a touch-screen tablet with five customers, to make giving feedback easier.

The Q-Team shares their reports and action plans with customers and they discuss them with the Team Leader or Service Manager for each service.

Overall, customers said they wanted more information about local facilities and better communication with staff.

They wanted more input into customer meetings, and for the meetings to include formal updates on repairs, and training sessions.

They also wanted more choice around their support plan, a choice of key worker where possible, and a say in the way their communal areas are used and decorated.



Over the next year

- We aim to recruit 3 more customers to the Customer Panel and 2 to the Q-Team.
- We will set up a complaints sub-panel.
- We will run more training sessions – we particularly want more customers to help us recruit staff.
- The Panel will choose new projects to fund.

Respectful and accessible services

We developed a new 'consent to care and treatment' tool, with Easy Read words and pictures, to explain to customers what they can expect.

We drew up a new 'mental capacity evidencing' checklist, to make sure customers understand their treatment. The form was approved by an experienced GP and a learning disability nurse.

Prompted by the Customer Panel, we now provide Easy Read versions of this Annual Report, *Window* magazine, our tenancy agreements, support plans and capacity assessments.



Your home

Our home service offer

- All our homes meet the Ability Standard - which is higher than the Government's Decent Homes Standard.
- If you have a gas supply, we provide you with a gas safety certificate every year.
- If you have an emergency repair, we will come within 24 hours and make sure your home is safe.
- We will complete 9 out of 10 urgent repairs within 7 days and we set targets for improving this.

Meeting the Ability Standard

We continued improving the condition of our homes by bringing them up to the Ability Standard, which is higher than the Decent Homes standard required by the Government.

The Decent Homes standard says that all homes must be safe, in a reasonable state of repair, have reasonably modern kitchens, bathrooms and boilers, and be reasonably well insulated - but landlords don't have to meet all these standards at once.

With the Ability Standard we also concentrate on the 4 areas you have asked us to prioritise:

- security in your home
- health and safety in your home
- bringing down the cost of your fuel bills, and
- putting in adaptations to make your homes accessible.



During the year we spent **£718,000** on planned maintenance work including the **16 new kitchens fitted in Balfour Drive** (see article on Page 3) and replacement boilers at **24 homes in Poole**.

We are now well on course to bring all our properties up to the Ability Standard by the end of 2015. By then, we will have carried out work on 2 out of 3 of our properties in just 3 years.

EMERGENCY REPAIRS TARGET



Repairs and gas safety

- We were just one property short of achieving a gas safety certificate for every property we manage this year.
- We only just missed our repairs target for emergencies, with 99.8% being repaired or 'made safe' within 24 hours.
- We did really well against our urgent repair target, completing 95.8% of these jobs within 7 days.

New repairs contractor

The Mears Group took on all Ability repairs, gas servicing and planned maintenance from November 2014. The reason for changing our repairs contractor is that Richardson went into administration so were no longer able to provide the service.



URGENT REPAIR TARGET



Over the next year

- We now ask you about the quality of your home in our quarterly customer satisfaction surveys.
- We will carry out a 'stock condition' survey on a sample of our properties - so that we can draw up a planned maintenance programme. Planning work in advance is more efficient and cost effective.
- With our contractor partner The Mears Group, we're going to find out which of our customers could really do with aids and adaptations to help them stay independent.
- We aim to become more efficient at checking that we meet our health and safety responsibilities as a landlord.
- We plan to introduce a short satisfaction survey just on repairs each month.

Your tenancy

Our tenancy service offer

- We let our homes within 28 days wherever possible.
- We set our rents in accordance with the regulatory standard set by the Homes and Communities Agency.
- We support our tenants to look after their tenancy.
- We ensure that our homes are let fairly.



Letting our homes

For most of last year, we had trouble meeting our lettings target, averaging 69 days to re-let our empty properties. However, we improved towards the end of the year and saw letting times of 18-21 days - lower than our 28-day target. We achieved this by getting referrals assessed quickly and by getting our Housing and Care & Support teams to work better together.

Our lettings policy sets out how we choose who to rehouse. We monitor all new lets and we ask customers to give us feedback to make sure we're being fair.

Our rents

We set our rents using the Government's formula. In September 2013 and 2014, the formula meant raising our rents by inflation (using the Retail Price Index figure) plus 0.5%. In some cases, we also had to charge up to another £2 a week to bring rents into line with average similar rents in the area.

From next year, the Government formula changes. We will raise rents by inflation (using the Consumer Price Index figure) plus 1% - but we won't add anything else.

Supporting your tenancy

Our Housing Services Officers offer you support throughout the whole of your tenancy with us. This support is designed to help you manage your tenancy. For example, they can help you stay on top of your rent payments and order any repairs you need doing.

Last year, we also supported 54 customers as they moved into a new home.



Over the next year

- We will update our tenancy starter pack for new tenants.
- We will introduce a new, user-friendly, web-based 'access a home' facility. This will make it easier for people to approach us directly about the possibility of a home with Ability.
- We will work closely with customers to make sure they have the right sort of home for them and their families. We will offer more help to people who want to swap homes through a mutual exchange.

Your feedback: Customer satisfaction survey

Your feedback gives us valuable information that helps us improve our services.

We recently appointed a specialist company, Acuity, to carry out regular quarterly customer satisfaction surveys for us.

Acuity contacted the first 100 customers during October and November 2014 to ask them 12 simple questions. In total, 68 customers returned completed questionnaires and 32 gave their answers on the phone.

Customers surveyed	100
12 areas surveyed	% satisfied/agree
Satisfied with the service provided by Ability	85%
Satisfied with the quality of your home	86%
Satisfied with the quality of support you receive	83%
Your rent provides value for money	92%
Your service charges provide value for money	85%
Satisfied with repairs and maintenance	72%
Ability listens to your views and acts on them	88%
You are kept informed	80%
Friendly, positive, approachable staff	88%
Your neighbourhood is a nice place to live	92%
Ability has a good name in my area	87%
I trust Ability	88%

The repairs service scored lowest. The most common negative comment was that, "repairs need to be carried out more quickly".

What customers said about Ability...

A brilliant service for disabled people. Just a shame there's no more properties.

If I have a problem, I tell the staff and they deal with it right away.

It is good to get the help I need, as it helps me live independently.

Your neighbourhood and community

Our neighbourhood and community service offer

- We keep the immediate area round your home and the internal shared areas, clean and safe.
- We work with other partners in your neighbourhoods to make the area and what it offers, a good place to live.
- We respond promptly to complaints of anti-social behaviour and use a range of methods to deal with the problem.



Clean and safe

Our Housing Officers now make regular visits to our services, so they can carry out inspections. We expect them to know their areas much better.

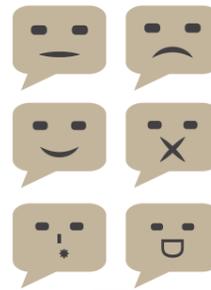
Sorting out anti-social behaviour

We're getting better at handling cases of anti-social behaviour, thanks to better staff training and better use of the legal remedies open to us.

Working with partners

We are now working more closely with all the staff and other organisations in your area.

For example, in Croydon we're acting as partners to a 6 week course on 'how to find a flat and maintain a tenancy' for people living in supported housing. The course is designed and run by people with experience of homelessness and mental health difficulties, together with staff from *SLaM Recovery College* and teams from *Croydon Council*. We are providing the training on housing options and providing further advice after the course.



Over the next year

- We're introducing probationary/starter tenancies for all our new customers. During the first year (sometimes longer) of your time with us, we'll be checking that you're a good tenant and neighbour. Providing things go well, you'll get a full assured or assured short hold tenancy at the end of this period.
- We will review our gardening and cleaning contractors, to make sure we're getting the agreed standard of service at a competitive price.
- We will strengthen local partnerships with other landlords, the police and local authorities to help solve problems like anti-social behaviour.
- In future, our Housing Services Officers will be able to make on the spot, local decisions that improve customer services.

Our Improvement Fund

Last year, we set up a new £25,000 fund for projects to improve life at our properties.

We asked for suggestions that would:

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



Projects funded so far include:

- garden furniture for our Woking service
- a 'calm room' for private meetings with staff, also in Woking
- sensor lights in Bournemouth and Poole
- a communal herb garden and a better disabled parking space in Bournemouth
- a garden upgrade for Surbiton.

Project focus



The 'calm room', Woking

Our customers in Woking requested a 'calm room'. The room will be a facility for customers to use for activities and meetings such as key-working sessions, CV workshops or any other meetings. It has comfy sofas and also a computer for customers to use for things like job hunting or bidding for accommodation with the local authority. This room is a valuable resource giving customers privacy without needing to be in their bedrooms.



Garden improvements, Surbiton

Another suggestion came from customers at our service in Surbiton who are wheelchair users. They have a large garden but were unable to access it fully because there was only a thin strip of paving, not wide enough for their wheelchairs. The patio has now been extended enabling them to enjoy the garden and the sunshine! There is still more work to come; we are also adding a sensory garden area to give the customers here further opportunity to enjoy their garden.

Your support

Our support service offer

- If you want one, we will work with you to design an Easy Read support plan.
- We will agree individual goals with you and work with you to achieve them.
- We will support you if you want to arrange social activities.
- We aim always to achieve good or excellent results when our services are inspected.

Better support plans

We can now provide your support plan in a variety of formats - our standard format, in Easy Read or in the language you prefer to use.

During the year, we changed our support planning process. Our aim was to make it even clearer to staff that agreeing your goals and supporting you to achieve them is one of the main purposes of a support plan.

More help with your social life

We encourage staff to support you if you want to organise or go to a social event or leisure activity. This year, we changed our policies to make it easier for staff to use their cars for this and to claim a fair mileage allowance.



We also carried out four of our own service quality audits and made some service improvements at the Reading Homelessness service as a result.

None of our local authority Supporting People providers inspected us this year, as they are currently reorganising.

Inspection successes

The Care Quality Commission carried out inspections at our registered services at Prospect Lane, Fiddlers Green, *yourAbility* Slough and *yourAbility* Hillingdon, giving us a clean bill of health in all areas. This was an excellent result, down to the hard work of our staff.



Q-Team visit to Hillingdon gets the 'thumbs up'

Over the next year

- We will introduce even more formats for support plans, including video, poster and audio versions.
- We will ask the Q-Team to carry out many more service visits, so we get the feedback we need to improve services further.



yourAbility service grows

We now provide support to more than **40** people through *yourAbility* - our service for people who hold a personal budget or fund themselves.

With *yourAbility*, you decide how and when your service is delivered and who provides it.

This means you:

- ✓ get more choice and control over the type of service you get, and the days and times for your support
- ✓ get better value for money because you can choose between different providers
- ✓ have support staff better matched with your preferences
- ✓ benefit from a more flexible service.

We are now offering *yourAbility* across more of our services, as well as to people who live elsewhere.

If you have friends who might like to choose us as their care and support provider, they can contact us by phoning **0118 9027162**, or emailing careandsupport@ability-housing.co.uk

A *yourAbility* customer tells his story



With *yourAbility* I get the support I need to live independently. The best thing is having a key to my own front door and I can come and go as I please.

Terry, a customer in Surrey

My name is **Shane** and I'm a *yourAbility* customer in Reading. I came to Ability in 2010 when I was quite unwell and at risk of losing my flat.

I like getting support from *yourAbility*. I haven't got anyone else and I trust them. I have built really good relationships with my keyworkers. They let me change my support depending on what I want and need.

I now feel more independent, more stable and get out more. I know they can help me in loads of different areas. Even when I'm making decisions which aren't good for me, they don't stop me, they just talk to me and support me, so I can make a choice with all the right information.

I like Ability as they support me in the areas I need and it is a warm, sociable and friendly environment.

Barry, a customer in Surrey

We have again, this year set ourselves challenging targets to make *yourAbility* available to more customers in the coming year.

Value for money

Our value for money service offer

- We will reduce costs further, to find more money to improve and build homes.
- We will renegotiate our repairs contract to get the best value.
- We will ask customers how we can get better value for money for estate services.
- We will assess and improve our value for money strategy.
- We will update our value for money strategy in consultation with the Board and the Customer Panel.

FACTS & FIGURES

In 2013-14, we spent an average of

£1,060
PER HOME

on planned maintenance and improvements

We delivered

274,000
HOURS

of care and support

What we achieved

- We worked with the Board and the Customer Panel to make our value for money strategy stronger. You can read the strategy on our website.
- We re-trained a smaller office administration team, to make them more responsive.
- We closed a loss-making registered residential care home and developed self-contained supported housing there instead.

Over the next year

- We will reduce costs further, to find more money to improve and build homes.
- We will renegotiate our repairs contract to get the best value.
- We will find out how we compare with other similar organisations.
- We will assess and improve our value for money strategy.

Governance and finance

The Board of Ability is responsible for monitoring our performance, making sure we remain financially viable, and discussing and planning our overall direction.

Our internal auditors (staff who check our services), as well as the Customer Panel and the Q-Team, make a significant contribution to the Board's work, by providing ideas and reporting back on our improvement progress.

This year the Customer Panel met with our Chief Executive David Williams, to talk about the new business plan we're developing and future plans. They provide feedback to the Customer Services Committee of the Board. In turn they ensure that The Board concentrates on customer issues and considers customer feedback in making decisions and deciding on priorities.

Each year the Board spends a day looking at ideas and possibilities for Ability's future. This year they resolved to focus more on our core purpose of promoting independent living and what makes us unique. They agreed to widen our service offer to more people, including those who don't qualify for local authority funding, and to ensure that our homes are occupied by those who need and use our support.

This year we have been recruiting new Board members and have identified three prospective members to bring a better balance of skills and experience to the Board.

Over the next year

- The Board will continue to oversee our work. The new members will be encouraged to learn as much as possible about their role and contribute their existing expertise.
- We will keep to our budgets and look for more cost savings and efficiencies.
- We will invest up to £120,000 to bring the rest of our properties up to the Ability Standard.





Ability

Coming soon

We have been developing our new website over the past year. We will launch it in January 2015. We think the new version is brighter, clearer and more user-friendly - we hope you agree!



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



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