

ABILITY ANNUAL REPORT

2020/21

Promoting Independent Living



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Sally Reay (Chair) Annual Review

It's exciting to be contributing to the first annual report since I was appointed Chair of Ability Housing Association in March 2021.

Since then, I have sought to develop and strengthen our governance structures, with the recruitment of six non-executive directors (NEDS). These appointments bring a wealth of experience to Ability - ranging from housing finance and asset management to customer engagement and marketing - and has helped us to focus Ability on its strategic priorities and the opportunities and challenges we are likely to face in the immediate future.

The benefits have been particularly evident in Ability's response to the government's housing white paper - a charter for social housing. The executive, with guidance

from the board, have developed our organisational response to this paper, placing our residents at the front and centre of the services we deliver going forward. We are committed to ensuring Ability's residents are involved in the management and development of their organisation at the local, area, and organisational level; the relaunch of our customer committee will be a core part of this process.

Finally, I would like to say a heartfelt thank-you to all our front-line staff who have worked throughout the pandemic, and especially to those in our care and support services, whose dedication, selflessness and customer focus has been amazing, and upon whom our residents and customers have depended so greatly during this most challenging of times.

Sally Reay (Chair)

Welcome by Jeff Skipp, CEO



It has been another challenging year for Ability Housing Association. While the health and wellbeing of our customers is always a priority, the ongoing Covid 19 pandemic meant adapting our operations to care for tenants, staff and contractors to keep service levels high - this was once again our main focus during the year.

We achieved this by continually monitoring our provision and good communication and partnership with customers. This included maintaining welfare calls and keeping in close contact with residents during lockdown periods to ensure we could tackle together any issues they felt were impacting on their independence.

Heartfelt thanks to all our residents for working with us so constructively throughout the pandemic, and for your understanding and patience when we have had to change our working practices to mitigate the associated risks.

During the year we developed and began to implement our new customer strategy for housing, which will improve our service offer. The focus of this is closer working and engagement with our residents, developing a meaningful relationship with each person and tailoring our housing management and support services to their needs.

As part of this strategy, we are bringing our repairs call centre in-house in 2022. The centre will continue to manage repair calls, issue jobs to contractors and monitor completion of these; but will also be a first contact point for all residents on any housing matter, whether repairs, housing management or support -

a 'one-stop shop' approach.

We believe this development will deliver an enhanced service to residents, support good communication and improve the service Ability Housing Association provides its residents.

This is just one of many exciting improvements we are planning over the next 12 months. We will be working even more closely with our residents with aim of enhancing the services we provide in a way which is tailored to them.

Yours sincerely

Jeff Skipp, CEO

Ability Positive values: at the heart of everything we do!

We work to our Ability Positive values and provide some excellent support across our services. We are working at improving how we record the great outcomes some of the people we support have achieved - and to celebrate their success whenever we can.



Case studies bring to life the impact we can have on individuals' lives and we want to be able to celebrate and promote these successes showcasing the achievements our customers

and residents make and the positive difference Ability can and does make to the people we serve.

Overview of the Year



It was another challenging 12 months for Ability's staff and tenants. Our priority when coping with Covid-19 was once again to maintain the health and safety of our customers, staff and contractors, while ensuring that quality of service levels was kept high. The pandemic meant this was a test but, through good communication and a clear focus on the wellbeing of customers and staff, we managed to achieve a workable balance between the two.

We increased our communication with tenants during difficult lockdown periods, which included continuing with customer welfare calls throughout the year.

Last year we committed to developing a Customer Strategy that identifies our customer offer in Housing Management, Repairs and Maintenance, Customer Engagement, and wider Customer Services functions, including a contact centre. We worked with customers and colleagues to develop this, and made the following commitments to improving Ability's customer experience:

- We will communicate well and resolve problems
- We will ensure the good state of your home
- We will provide a supportive, proactive, and responsive Housing Management service
- We will have meaningful engagement with our customers
- We will provide a supportive and personalised service to our customers

These commitments are the basis of our customer offer. One of the outcomes of these was the rollout of an Intensive Housing Management (IHM) Support Plan, which is now used by Housing and Support Officers to work with customers to define how they engage with our Intensive Housing Management Service in a measurable way. Our Housing and Support Officers also began the process of a full tenancy audit.

You can read more about Ability's customer strategy in our 'Plans for the Future' on page 14.

We changed the structure of our Property Services Team, increasing our capacity to analyse the performance of our services and implement improvements. This resulted in new ways of monitoring repairs and an enhanced response to repairs issues. We have also begun the process of re-procuring our Repairs and Maintenance contract.

With Covid-19 restricting our ability to meet with our customers individually and in groups, the way we engage with customers and

support our customer panel has evolved. This has involved virtual options and ensuring we offer these to all customers.

With the increase in our online engagement with customers, we are now offering both virtual and in-person contact to deliver some of our services and identifying the support our customers need.

Ability's Customer Panel now also meets virtually and has been working to extend its remit - benchmarking our performance against the standards set out in the Customer Strategy.

The rollout of the Pyramid Housing System has developed with the implementation of the complaints module and the use of the property and repairs module for gas safety. This has allowed access to more accurate data, improved workflows and has greatly enhanced Ability's complaints management offer.

Housing Management

Over the last year we have reviewed how we deliver services, which included making changes to our teams to make sure we provide the best possible service to each of our customers.

Accordingly, we have introduced new roles in our property team aimed at continually improving our repairs service and making sure we deliver on our promises. There have been changes within the Housing Management team, too, to ensure our teams are supported in delivering their services.

We have introduced a new process of completing tenancy audits with our customers. We will visit tenants in their homes to check its condition, and ensure we have up-to-date information on our customers, including how they prefer to communicate with us (telephone, email etc). During these visits we also discuss our Intensive Housing Management Service with customers and agree how best we can work with them going forward.

We have completed stock condition surveys on all our homes and thank all our customers for their help with this. The information from these surveys enables us to understand how we schedule our planned works, including kitchen and bathroom replacements.

We were really pleased to have completed our programme of replacing 14 kitchens across several sites. We also completed six full window and door replacements, two wet room replacements and 38 boiler replacements.

The kitchen replacement programme was completed by MCG who were very professional and friendly throughout and who worked around our residents' needs and appointments. Residents were very complimentary during the works. One wrote in, saying: We had the guys here today doing the doors and windows. They did an absolutely brilliant job, they started at 7.45am and finished at 2pm. I just wanted to let you know how well they did. They were very professional, helpful, tidy, and cleared up after themselves."

Another spoke to their Housing & Support Officer, who said: "I have just had a courtesy call to a tenant having her windows done this morning and she was absolutely singing the praises of the service she has received from the window company. She explained that they have been going above and beyond and nothing has

It also gives us the information we need to consider our next steps in working towards achieving net zero emission homes by 2050, in line with the government's target.

been too much trouble. They have been really respectful about moving her items and putting back up her blinds and so on. She said she really cannot fault anything."

We will continue our programme of planned works next year.



99.7% of our properties gained an electrical certificate



We received 139 reports of anti-social behaviour



45 property service complaints



100% Gas Safety



PERFORMANCE KPIs

All of our residents were contacted during each lockdown to ask whether they required any additional support, and frequency of contact agreed on a weekly or fortnightly basis if requested.



Resident contact (support calls) 100%



We completed 3,267 repairs



9 complaints relating to housing or estate management



Properties in the year across Care & Support, Supported Housing, and general need.



97.5% compliance achieved across all areas.



HSOs Estate Inspections 85%

Customer Case Studies



Living at Layton Court: PV's views and outcomes

PV came to Layton court July 2018 after many years in a residential setting.

She says: "I moved into a flat at Layton Court on July 16 2018. I felt happy I had my own place here and there was no one to watch me all the time.

"I received support in setting up my utility bills, purchasing items for my flat, managing my finances, maintaining my property by repairs, and ordering and taking my medication".

"I meet my key worker for support, who also checks that I am ok. She has been great - she helped me to purchase and set up my mobile phone and went with me to Ikea and purchase a rug and lamps.

"I find the support here excellent and very useful. The staff treat me like an adult and they listen to what I have to say - I like that they think my views are important.

"I feel very safe and secure living here with the cameras and staff on site 24 hours a day."

Ability is now supporting PV in her wish to move on to a flat within the community and in December 2021 she viewed an Ability property.

"I have been here a long time and am ready to move on," she said. "I can not wait to get my flat and purchase a cooker, bed, fridge and sofa."

Once the move is complete PV will have achieved her goal of independent living.

JC at MHFS: Finding work, building confidence

JC has achieved some significant milestones over the past two years, with her support worker, who helped her explore her interests and what kind of volunteering would suit her.

Once JC had decided she wanted to work in a charity shop, she and her support worker made a plan and set realistic goals. The first of these was to visit local charity shops and to make a list of the ones she liked, so they could contact them by telephone, in person or by email to see what opportunities they had.

After they found the perfect opportunity at Cancer Research, JC agreed to a trial day, and soon afterwards started to work at the shop three days a week.

The experience has built JC's confidence immensely and helped her to explore further personal activities. Her support worker encouraged her to get in touch with Brookfield College, where she has started a Level 1 horticulture course.

RH at Hayes Park Lodge

RH was referred to Ability in 2018. After refusing her mental health medication she became unwell – and had a bad foot condition, which meant she was unable to walk properly. She isolated herself in her flat.

Hayes Park Lodge staff organised a professionals' meeting with social services and her care coordinator, looking at her risk assessment and support plan. A new plan was agreed, but before it could be implemented, RH was admitted to hospital.

After her discharge in February 2021, staff built up a rapport with RH – and she started to take her medication. They built on this progress and with encouragement she started to take part in walking activities and to socialise with other people.

RH's improved mobility enabled her to participate in regular walks and manage to lose more than 20kg in weight. This in turn has boosted her confidence and helped her to socialise more with others.

She went on a holiday to Brighton with support staff in August 2021, a long-standing wish, which gave her a sense of great achievement.

Staff have supported her search for volunteer work on a weekly basis, and she was offered a voluntary position working at the Scope shop in Hayes Town for two hours a week. She was so successful and enjoyed the role so much that, within a week, her hours were increased. She now works in two different charity shops (Scope & YMCA) in Hayes Town for four days a week.

She says: "I am extremely happy that I have a daily routine and I do something good for the community. It reminds me of when I was mentally okay, and I used to work. Now, I have started believing that I can do it again, and possibly be independent in the future. I am happy."

RH also joined the gym in Hayes and in December 2021 went on a further holiday to Dubai.

Customer engagement



At Ability we are committed to ensuring resident engagement is embedded in the organisation and is the cornerstone of everything we do.

In 2021 we reviewed how we engage our customers – as this has been unavoidably disrupted by the pandemic. As restrictions have eased, our Housing and Support Officers have once again started carrying out tenancy audits with the view to engaging customers, identifying any support needs and implementing Intensive Housing Management Support Plans.

We also launched a new customer panel after identifying residents in our communities who wished to become involved in influencing and shaping the services that we provide.

Ability Housing Association are committed to listening to feedback from our customers so we

can provide a fair, decent and, when required, bespoke service. The aim is that the customer panel work with us to determine how resident engagement should evolve, and to be key contributors in determining our strategy for this going forward.

The key areas that Ability are looking to develop with its customer panel include:

- Estate inspections and involvement in estate improvements
- Scrutiny of Ability's performance
- Consultation on key operational policies and procedures
- Reviewing platforms and methods to improve the effectiveness of Ability's communications to residents
- Resident involvement in handling complaints to promote change and improvement

In December 2021, we held the first meeting of the customer panel, where members discussed their vision and aspirations for the group. The meeting was very positive with some great ideas shared for how Ability can take things forward and improve the services provided to customers.

Over the coming year, this project will grow and evolve, with the aim of enlisting additional panel members, too. We are keen to have a fair, balanced customer panel with representation from residents from across our communities and would urge any customers wanting to get involved to get in touch at:

housing@ability-housing.co.uk

Complaints and Compliments

November 2020 - October 2021

In January 2021, The Housing Ombudsman published a review of their code. This recommended parameters for response deadlines and processes for handling customer and tenant complaints. These new rules meant we needed to make some adjustments to Ability's complaints policy and procedure.

The most noteworthy change Ability made was to decrease both our response times and the number of stages through which a complaint would be processed and investigated. We reduced our 28-day response deadline to ten-days for stage 1 of a complaint (when it is first reported), and a 20-working day deadline for stage 2.

In line with the Ombudsman's code, we also amended our procedure from a three-stage process to a two-stage process. The first stage is a complaint being investigated by service leads; while the second is when this first stage is escalated and investigated by a member of SMT.

Ability also introduced an informal stage, where any staff member can log and respond to/resolve issues that can be resolved by themselves within five working days..

Ability also designed and built a new complaints case management system within Pyramid. We launched this on July 1 2021, training all staff on the new policy and procedure, and the new Pyramid module. This new module captures complaints, and also compliments from our customers and tenants. This means we can now compile all the feedback we receive into reports and take action to improve the quality of the services we provide.

From November 2020- October 2021 Ability received:

- 10 informal complaints
- 104 stage 1 complaints
- 14 stage 2 complaints

Between the launch of the new Pyramid Module in July 2021 to the end of September 2021, Ability logged 38 compliments.

Some of the trends include:

- Contractors need to explain to customers what repair works are involved and will be completed during their visit
- Contractors must ensure that they communicate with Ability and its customers honestly about meeting agreed job deadlines, any delays, and ensure that works are completed to the expected standard
- Care & Support staff to communicate with FS customers should they be delayed or need to rearrange a support session





Care and Support

Ability is developing a revised Care and Support strategy during the year, complementing our customer strategy in housing and setting out our future plans.

This will cover:

- Our operational model - which will place customers at the centre of everything we do
- Workforce recruitment and retention – ensuring a values-based workforce that is focused on delivering quality outcomes for our customers and looking at retaining and recruiting staff in sufficient numbers for the future
- Training and development – ensuring our colleagues and teams are well-trained, embracing our Ability Positive values and behaviours, setting out clear careers pathways, and providing personal development opportunities
- Customer engagement - ensuring customers are fully involved in the development of their service
- Growth and development – How we will increase the reach and scale of our services across London and the south of England

The single largest challenge facing Ability - and the care sector in general - over the coming year is being able to recruit and retain sufficient staff numbers, with the right skills and motivations to maintain and deliver safe, quality services to the people we serve. This is followed closely by, and is inextricably linked to, the challenge of funding.

The government's social care plan, utilising the NHS and Social Care National Insurance Levy to improve funding in social care will not solve these issues quickly enough. While the plan to prioritise funding towards the NHS for the first three years, supporting post pandemic recovery within our health services, is much needed, social care cannot wait three years for significant investment if we are to maintain safe and quality services for the people we serve. The Health Foundation (2021) estimate that just to meet future demand from an ageing population for the existing system, will cost an additional £6.1 billion by 2030/31.

Some 70 per cent of our organisational Care and Support expenditure is on staffing. We are dependent on high-quality, well-trained people to deliver the safe, personalised services our residents and customers are entitled to and deserve. With the national staffing crisis in social care worsening this will become even more challenging to deliver without significant investment.

The Care Quality Commission annual report - The State of Health Care and Social Care (CQC, 2020/21) says:

“Workforce planning is a major priority and challenge for local systems and providers. Recruitment and staff retention continue to be severe problems. In adult social care, the situation is serious and deteriorating. There must be a sharp focus on developing a clearly defined career pathway and training, supported by consistent investment that will enable employers to attract and retain the right people”.

We will continue to work with local authorities, engage with the Department of Health and Social Care “Made with Care” recruitment campaign and seek to work with local partnerships and colleges to maximise our recruitment opportunity. However, without the investment to increase wages and terms and conditions that are on a par with those in the retail and hospitality sectors, recruitment in social care will remain an ongoing risk and challenge for our organisation and sector as a whole.



Recruitment and Training

We maintained a strong focus on staff recruitment during the lockdown period and as a result we were able to fill 94 per cent of senior and support worker posts.

However, as the economy has opened up again, competition for staff has increased from the retail, hospitality and other sectors which are able to pay a higher salary. This, combined with the fatigue and burnout some staff experienced during the pandemic, has meant we have experienced challenges in recruiting and retaining staff, particularly during the second half of the financial year.

We are therefore exploring different forms of recruitment, targeting communities and individuals who may not have previously considered a career in care and support. We have focused on a value-based recruitment model for many years, where we first and foremost seek staff with the right attitudes and behaviours - and we will be building on this to promote ourselves to a wider audience.

However, as has been discussed in the national media and by trade organisations such as the Voluntary Organisations Disability Group (VODG),

there is a national staffing crisis in care and support, and intervention from government is needed urgently. As an industry we need to raise the profile of care and support and promote a career in the sector as a valued occupation with higher pay and improved terms and conditions. Until this happens, the challenges with recruitment and retention are likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

As important as recruiting staff with the right attitudes and behaviour, is the right training and development ensuring staff and managers have the right skills and knowledge to deliver quality interventions with our customers. Our commitment to staff training includes a thorough induction, completion of the care certificate in a timely manner for those new to the sector, and mandatory and bespoke training for all support staff.

Our training and development programme uses both e-learning and face-to-face training, ensuring staff have broad preparation for their role.

We have also enhanced our management and leadership training with an increased focus on supporting managers to gain Level 5 Health and Social Care qualifications and for senior support workers to gain Level 3, further enhancing management and leadership competency across Ability.

Our plans for the future...

Housing

To successfully deliver our new customer strategy we have recognised that we needed to bring our call centre in house. Crucially, this will reduce customer effort by providing them with one point of contact to resolve their queries.

In addition, it will allow customers to book appointments with Housing and Support Officers, and direct appointments with our Repairs and Maintenance contractors - significantly expanding our offer to customers.

The contact centre will also deliver a digital offer to customers in allowing customers to complete functions such as requesting their rent balance or reporting a repair using their mobile phones.

This enhanced offer of a contact centre supports our five customer commitments and will be launched in the next financial year as part of the customer launch of our Customer Strategy.

We will also be appointing and mobilising our new Repairs and Maintenance contractors to complete the procurement process started this year.

The stock condition data obtained this year will also be used to refresh and support our Asset Management Strategy, as well as informing our approach in working towards the 2030 EPC C, and the 2050 net zero target.

Finally, we will be working with our current Customer Panel to develop and expand its role to include scrutiny of our performance.

Care and Support

We will develop a revised Care and Support strategy during the year, complimenting the Housing Customer strategy and setting out our future plans - covering:

- Our operational model - placing the customers at the centre of everything we do
- Workforce recruitment and retention – ensuring a values-based workforce focused on delivering quality outcomes for our customers, as well as retaining staff and recruiting in sufficient numbers moving forward
- Training and development – ensuring our colleagues and teams are well trained, embracing our Ability Positive values and behaviours alongside providing personal development opportunities and setting out a career pathway
- Customer engagement - ensuring customers are fully involved in the development of their service
- Growth and development – increasing the reach and scale of our services across London and the South of England.



The single largest challenge facing Ability and the care sector over the coming year is how to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of staff with the right skills and motivation, to maintain and deliver safe, quality services to the people we serve. This is closely followed by and inextricably linked to this issue of funding.

The government's social care plan, utilising the NHS and Social Care National Insurance Levy to improve funding in social care, won't be implemented quickly enough. The plan to prioritise funding towards the NHS for the first three years supporting post pandemic recovery within our health services is of course needed, if the social care sector is to maintain safe and quality services for the people we serve, we cannot wait three years for significant investment.

The Health Foundation (2021) estimate to meet future demand from an ageing population using just the existing system, will cost an additional £6.1 billion by 2030/31.



Ability's year in figures

By Peter Gardiner

Finance Facts & Figures

• Average spend on responsive repairs to each home:

- £1,002 up from £853 last year as we became more accustomed to living with Covid

• Average spend on planned repairs to each home:

- £976 up from £866 last year as we expanded the planned works delivery.

Turnover:

- £10.3m down from £10.8m last year following the departure of a number of properties at the end of 2019-20

• Turnover from Care and Support

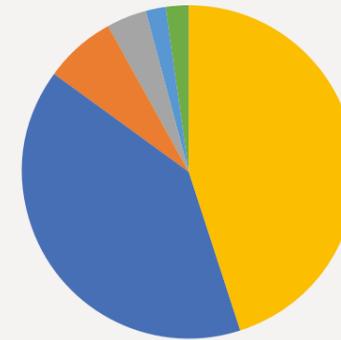
- Down to £5.2m from £5.8m due to the ending of three contracts.

- Donation of a flat by a private charity added £0.2m to our assets

- Overall investment in your properties of £1.5m during 2020-21

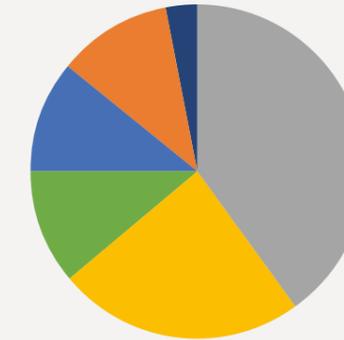


Breakdown of costs



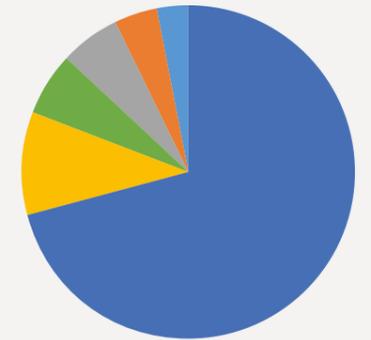
Ability Housing - Where does our income come from?

- 45% - Care & Support Contracts
- 40% - Housing rents (net)
- 7% - Housing Service charges
- 4% - Amortised Housing Grant
- 2% - Care & Support Covid Grants
- 2% - Charitable donations



Ability Housing - Where do we spend our housing income?

- 40% - Providing your Property
- 24% - Maintaining your property
- 11% - Services
- 11% - Central Management
- 11% - Housing management
- 3% - Surplus for re-investing
- 0% - Bad debt



Ability Housing - Where do we spend our Care & Support income?

- 71% - Care & Support staff
- 10% - Providing your Property
- 6% - Covid costs
- 6% - Care and Support Management
- 4% - Operating costs of our schemes
- 3% - Surplus for re-investing



COMMITMENTS

VALUES

We engage actively for feedback

We listen actively to our customers, colleagues and partners to help improve what we do and how we do it.

We value differences

We respect and value the individuality of each person.

We focus on ability not disability

We focus on what each person CAN-DO.

We demonstrate integrity

Our culture is one of openness, honesty and personal accountability.



BEHAVIOURS

Seek first to understand

I will listen actively to ensure I have the best possible understanding.

Think: CAN-DO

I will focus on what is possible and think about what I CAN-DO.

Give a positive response

I will work with you to agree a positive outcome, without excuse or blame.

Personal ownership

I will take full responsibility for making sure the agreed outcomes are achieved in good time.

Board Members

(as at 30th September 2019)

- Sally Reay (Chair)
- Dominic Wallace
- Gina Small
- Jai Dosanjh
- Dritan Uka
- Mandy Dunstan
- Tim Jennings
- Vimal Gaglani
- Lynsey Bradshaw

Executive Directors

- Jeff Skipp, CEO
- Peter Gardiner, Director of Resources & Deputy CEO
- Lucy Sivasundram, Director of Operations (Housing)

Auditors, solicitors & bankers

- Auditors: Beever and Struthers
- Solicitors: Devonshires
- Bankers: Barclays Bank PLC

Registrations

- Company number: 01261380
- Charity number: 271547
- Registered with The Regulator for Social Housing for England & Wales, Number LH2174

Report production team

- Lucy Sivasundram, Ability team
- Copy Editor: Dominic Weaver, Twelve
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