

News and views from Ability

# Window

## Sessile Court welcomes VIP visitors



*David Fox, Assistant Director of Ability Care & Support, welcomes Cllr Corthorne to Sessile Court.*

**In July**, we welcomed Councillor Philip Corthorne, when he visited our newest supported living flats, at Sessile Court in Hayes.

The Councillor, together with Sunny Mehmi, who is a Service Manager with the London Borough of Hillingdon, was invited to meet some of our staff and customers.

Sessile Court opened in April and it has 14 self-contained flats. The scheme has been designed to give customers a safe and comfortable environment, where they can live as independently as possible. Customers benefit from round-the-clock support from our Care & Support staff.

During the visit, David Fox, Assistant Director of Ability Care & Support, introduced the Councillor to his team and took him on the tour of Ability's share of the building.

Cllr Corthorne also visited Clifford Staff at home to view his attractive one-bedroom flat and find out more about living at the scheme.



*Customer Clifford Staff (right) shows Cllr Philip Corthorne round his home in Sessile Court.*

**INSIDE: Ability's new business plan**  
**Customer Panel news**  
**Fun time puzzle page**



## Welcome to your summer edition of Window... a lot has happened since the last edition!

We've welcomed some new faces in the management team at Ability, agreed a new long-term business plan, opened a brand-new supported living project in Hayes, taken on some new supported living services in Waterlooville and have been busy catching up with repairs with Mears after our previous contractor, Richardson collapsed. We've also launched our new website, which includes some new online services and an all-new housing register.

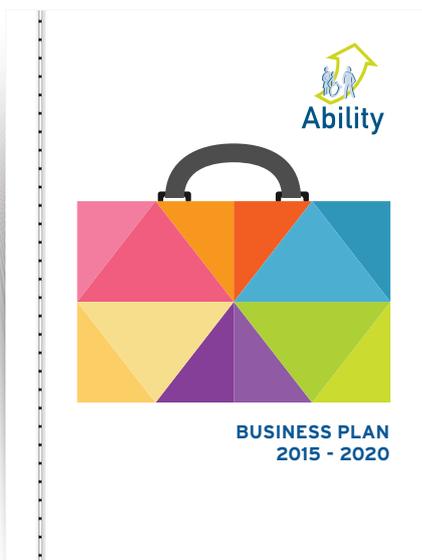
You can read about some of these activities in this newsletter, or on the website or even on Facebook. Above all, I'd like to welcome all our new customers.

I very much hope that you will enjoy reading about what is going on at Ability and other customers' stories. We'd love to hear your stories too.

These are exciting and challenging times for housing associations and for care & support providers. My hope is that all Ability colleagues will stay focused on the core Ability values and behaviours that we call 'AbilityPOSITIVE+ Commitments'. These commitments say that we'll engage positively with our customers and listen carefully to make sure we always have the best possible understanding of your needs and expectations of us.

David Williams  
Chief Executive of Ability Housing Association

## About our new business plan



Our business plan sets out what Ability wants to do for the next five years, how we will do it and how we will pay for the things we plan to do. Our new plan has just been agreed by the Ability board.

This time our plan is all about Ability's purpose of '*Promoting Independent Living*'. Our vision is for a world where there are no barriers to independent living.

### Here are some of the things we plan to do:

- build more new homes – at least 10 each year
- focus on providing supported living
- provide more support services in our homes
- provide a more local and intensive housing management service
- make our yourAbility service available for more people in our communities, and reduce our costs by working more efficiently.

Above all, we will make sure that all of our staff apply our AbilityPOSITIVE+ Commitments in everything that they do.

## ‘Speed networking’ at the Ability AGM

We brought our Board members, customers and staff together in a great new way, at our Annual General Meeting in March.

We used an idea similar to speed dating to give 10 customers from the Customer Panel and Q-Team the chance to meet 10 members of the Board face to face.

In blocks of 10 minutes, customer groups ‘visited’ Board groups to find out more about their role. They asked questions about the future of Ability and wanted to know if we would be building new homes in future.

The session went really well and we got great feedback. Board members and customers all said they would have liked even longer to get to know each other.

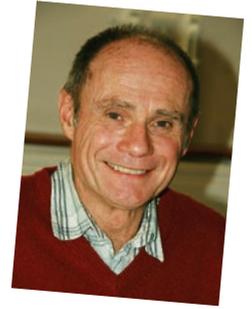
Foster Opoku-Otchere, who is a member of the Q-Team said: “It was brilliant! Fantastic! We should do it every time. I really enjoyed talking to the Board and understanding better what they do.”



Customers, Board members and staff get to know each other better at our latest AGM.



## CHAIR'S UPDATE



We caught up with Stuart Rees to find out what the Customer Panel has been doing since the last issue of Window.

“We haven’t really had a Customer Panel meeting as such, but we had the AGM, where we met with Board members and it was very informative. In future, we are planning to coincide Customer Panel meetings with Board meetings more,” Stuart said.

“On the 12th of May, the Customer Panel was invited to Mears headquarters – that was very interesting as well. They’d just moved to Gillingham.

“We were introduced to the people who take the repairs calls and to the operatives. It was very useful to meet them face-to-face.”

Stuart was looking forward to the next Customer Panel meeting, due the following week.

“I’ve only chaired two meetings so far, but I’m a bit intolerant of committee meetings

where there are two conversations going at once! So I hope that we discuss the matter in hand, without getting sidetracked,” said Stuart.

We really appreciate Stuart’s experienced input. He has chaired meetings in the past – back in the days when he was still a primary school teacher.

In the meantime, we left Stuart to go back to weeding his garden, in the lovely summer weather.

You can read more about the Customer Panel’s visits and events throughout this issue of Window.

## It's official! Ability provides great care and support

In the past few months, we gained several new care and support contracts – showing that councils are pleased with the services offered by Ability Care & Support.

We also had a very successful Care Quality Commission inspection in Kingston.

This is all good news for Ability and our caring frontline staff – and good news for customers too.



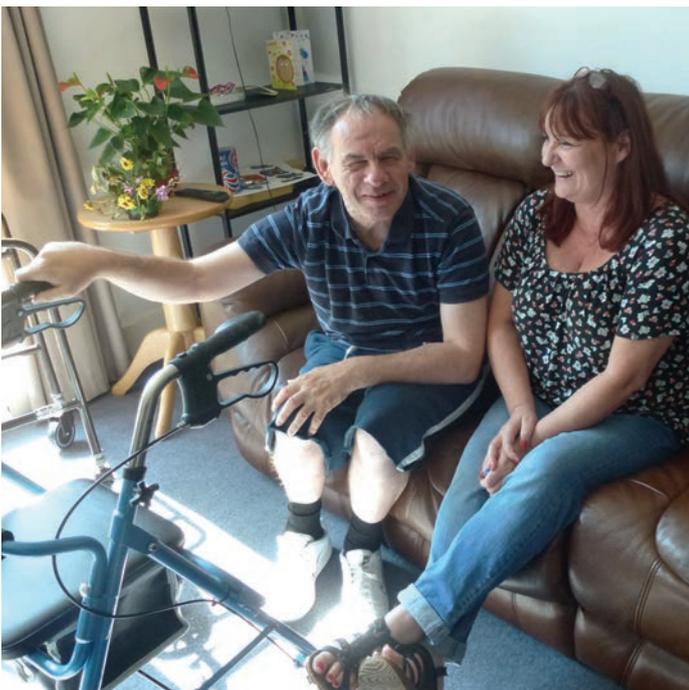
### New contracts in Hillingdon

In May, we won two important care and support contracts in the London Borough of Hillingdon.

We now provide round-the-clock care and support to customers living at our purpose-built block of self-contained flats in Hayes. We also won another five-year contract to continue running the service at Ruislip.

We set a very high standard at Ruislip, by showing it is possible to give customers with high needs much more independence, by assisting them to live in supported housing. When we launched the service in 2009, some people had doubts.

David Fox, our Assistant Director of Ability Care & Support said: "I am happy to say their anxieties were unfounded. The service has grown to be a great example of how this model can work for almost anyone."



*Enjoying life with support at our Ruislip scheme.*

### New services in Hampshire

In March, we began providing 800 hours of care and support every week to a new group of customers in Waterlooville.

We are pleased to say that the transfer went through pretty smoothly, thanks to hard work from our staff.

### Renewed contract in West Sussex

Our three-year contract with West Sussex County Council has been extended for another two years. Under the contract, we have been providing floating support since January 2013 to around 35 customers. Nine of these customers also live in Ability housing. Our manager, Sheila Mitchell, said: "This is an unusual contract, because we support customers with complex needs who fall between other contracts.

"We work very closely with the Housing, Health and Social Care Co-ordinator at the County Council."

Sheila and her team will now be providing this service until January 2018.

### Fiddlers Green gets 'good' inspection rating

Fiddlers Green, our care home in Kingston, was awarded 'good' in every category when the Care Quality Commission's inspection report came out in March.

The inspectors liked the way our manager runs the service and the way we treat our customers. They reported that we support people to make decisions about their everyday life and we ask for their consent.

Fiddlers Green is a good example of the way Ability believes good services should be run for our customers.

## Thumbs up for *your*Ability from Allison and Adrian

Allison Ingram and her partner Adrian Osbourne are singing our praises after moving in to their Ability home in Bournemouth in mid-June, with support for Allison from Ability Care & Support.

“It’s fantastic! If only I had known about Ability years ago!” Allison says.

Allison is one of our *your*Ability customers – which means that she chooses the support we give her and uses her personal budget to pay for the service.

“I have a carer who comes in the morning to help me in the shower – I’ve used this woman for years. But apart from that I had nothing – except when I first came out of hospital.



*Allison and Adrian outside their Ability home in Bournemouth.*

*“I now have three hours a week of support from Ability and it’s brilliant. They all make time for you and talk to you.”*

“Last week Dave wrote some letters and made phone calls and sorted out a file for me. This week he is helping me with a patch in the garden. I can decide each week as I need it.”

For Allison, the most important thing is not having to be over-dependent on her partner. “I want to keep my relationship with Adrian as a relationship – not make him my carer,” she says.

The couple are also delighted with their new home. “It’s brilliant! We had a few teething problems, as the gas boiler wasn’t working and the sump pump in the shower was broken.

“But I had to have hand rails and a shower, and the front door surrounding was coming away – and the same bloke came and did it all in a day.”

Allison is also enjoying getting to know her neighbours. “I’m over the moon. We felt at home on the first night.

“I’ve been in a wheelchair for 13 years now and it’s nice to live around other people with disabilities. I don’t feel like the odd one out. I already know a couple of people would help out if I needed it. It’s so much nicer!”

## *your*Ability

HAS LOTS TO OFFER

Our *your*Ability service now provides support to more than 40 people in the community who want to live more independently.

If you have friends who might like to choose us as their care and support provider, why not get in touch?

Email: [careandsupport@ability-housing.co.uk](mailto:careandsupport@ability-housing.co.uk)

Phone: 0118 9027162

## Customer Panel visits our repairs contractors

Two members of the Customer Panel visited the Mears Group head office in Gillingham in May.

**Stuart Rees** and **Carron Cleversley** were invited so they could see first hand how Mears run our repairs service. Stuart is Chair of the Customer Panel and Carron is on the Panel and the Q-Team.

Maddy Cox, our Customer Engagement Co-ordinator, and Nichole Waller, one of our Housing Services Officers, also took part in the visit.

Our visitors met Darren Barnard, who manages our repairs contract. They then met the call centre team who take our repairs calls.

Later, they met Tara, who is a gas engineer, and Andy, who is a multi-trade operative. Stuart and Carron were impressed when they looked in their vans – especially when they saw that Tara carries extra equipment so that she can help work on our empty properties if she has time between appointments.



Mears Contract Manager Darren Barnard (standing by the desk) takes Carron (standing next to him) and Stuart (seated right) to meet the Mears call centre team.

### A better repairs service

During the visit, Darren explained some of the ways Mears are working to improve our repairs service. For example, they are setting up teams of operatives in our key areas and making sure they send the right person to each job for a first-visit fix.

Mears will be giving out a landline number soon, so it will be cheaper to phone with a repair.

Stuart and Carron told Darren that the Customer Panel want to help set the minimum standard for repairs carried out to our empty properties. They will soon be visiting homes before and after they are worked on.

Stuart and Carron said how important it is for our customers to be able to trust their repairs contractors. We will be working with Mears to make sure their staff get the right training. Carron also suggested we could give Mears a list of individual customers' needs.

### What Stuart and Carron thought

After the visit, Stuart said: "It was good to meet people face to face and to have the opportunity to ask questions. I feel reassured with the way Mears are dealing with repairs. I also like the way they're actively seeking feedback and looking for ways to improve."

"I was really pleased to remake Andy's acquaintance. Andy was formerly a Richardson employee and he worked at my bungalow on a number of occasions."

Carron said: "I loved meeting everyone and seeing the vans. I feel confident Mears will keep improving now they've caught up on the outstanding bits and bobs."



Carron (seated) checks out gas engineer Tara's van.

## Q-Team visit to Waterlooville services

The Q-Team visited three services in Waterlooville in Hampshire, in mid-May – to get feedback from fellow customers.

Q-Team members Carron Cleversley and James Turley went to find out how things are going since we won the support contract at Waterlooville earlier in the year.

They particularly wanted to check that customers feel safe and are getting the flexible support they need.

Carron and James visited six customers at home on a Thursday. The following day, they visited eight customers at two different services. Our Customer Engagement Co-ordinator Maddy Cox and Support Worker Karen McCoy went with them.

On both days, the residents showed them round. Then Carron and James took a group to the pub for lunch. As well as being fun, this made it easy for people to share their views.

It was James's first Q-Team visit. He said: "I really enjoyed it. I feel like it's given me more confidence and I've made friends."

After a Q-Team visit, a report with recommendations goes to the Team Leader and Service Manager. Over the next year, they share the progress of their action plan with customers, relatives, senior staff, the Customer Panel and the Customer Services Committee.



James talks to customers in the pub.



The pub proves a good place to talk.

### What Carron and James found out

*"I feel very happy here. I didn't used to have a lot of freedom, but now I do. I feel I have the freedom to do what I want. Staff change my support times around me.... I can also choose which staff support me – they're always happy to swap."*

**Waterlooville resident**

*"I feel very reassured by today, I feel I've seen the human face of Ability and you really want to support my son."*

**Waterlooville customer's mother**

## Carron joins the call for new homes for Britain



Carron puts her signed brick on a petition wall calling for more homes.

Carron Cleversley from the Customer Panel enjoyed a great day out in London in March – when she joined our trip to the Homes for Britain Rally.

The rally at the Central Methodist Hall in Westminster brought together 2,300 people from 300 housing organisations to call for "an end to the housing crisis within a generation".

It was a great day out for Carron. She told us: "I really enjoyed the day. It was amazing coming to London. I've never been to Westminster before and I couldn't believe how tall the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben were!

"We went to a huge building filled with people from different places over the country, and listened to people speaking about how they will build more homes for Britain.

"My favourite part was watching all the videos about real people who are struggling because they don't have a home. It was really powerful."

Also on the trip with Carron were:

- Board member Jane Minter
- David Williams, our Chief Executive
- Housing Support Workers Karen McCoy and Vicki Spencer
- Housing Performance and Information Officer Sarah Robson, and
- Maddy Cox, who is our Customer Engagement Co-ordinator.

Karen McCoy said: "It was really good to hear from all the political parties. I was amazed at how many people were there and I could clearly see on Carron's face how much she enjoyed it!"

## Tim and Greg join Ability

We now have two new members of staff – and they both say their number one priority is customer satisfaction.

**Greg Terefenko** is our new Housing Services Manager and **Tim Hall** is our new Operations Director.

Greg comes from Burnley originally, but he spent the last 10 years in Manchester, working for The Guinness Partnership. As a Housing Manager, he was responsible for 5,000 properties and a team of 10 staff.



**Greg Terefenko**

We picked Greg because he has lots of customer service experience. He now manages all our housing officers and he is responsible for your estates.

Greg tells us he was pleased to move down south, because his wife is from Reading and they are hoping to start a family. He is excited about his new job at Ability.

“I’m passionate about increasing customer satisfaction! I’m going to be working with our housing officers and customers to improve satisfaction with our repairs, lettings and estates,” he says.

Our new Operations Director, Tim Hall, has worked in housing for the past 25 years. At Hanover Housing Association, he was Assistant Director (Retirement Housing). He has also worked for Hastoe Housing Association and the Home Group.



**Tim Hall**

Tim is married to Lisa – who is also in housing.

At Ability, Tim is responsible for all our frontline services: housing, care & support, repairs and managing our housing stock.

Tim tells us: “I like to be as close to customers as I can be – so I was particularly attracted to Ability’s approach to working with customers and the way it focuses on ability not disability. This was a big draw for me. I can see that Ability is a good organisation and I will be able to build on its success.”

**We are happy to welcome Greg and Tim to our team.**

## Using the benefits system to provide you with more housing officers

Regular readers will know that Ability likes to listen to you. That is why we set up a Customer Panel and why we carry out regular customer surveys.

In our surveys, some of you told us you would like to see your Housing Officer more often. We think this is a good idea, so we’re looking for a way to pay for more housing workers.

We have also been looking into what might happen when Housing Benefit ends for most people and help with rent is moved to a new system called Universal Credit.

If you live in supported housing and have a Housing Support Worker or ‘keyworker’, then your tenancy might be ‘exempt’. This means you will still be able to claim Housing Benefit for help with your rent.

If your tenancy is exempt, you might be able to get extra Housing Benefit to help pay for a better housing management service from Ability. We call this ‘additional or intensive housing management’. Some of you already get this service, because we’ve been trying it out in some areas.

We would like to provide an additional or intensive housing management service in all our supported housing – that would be about half of our homes. It would allow us to employ more staff, so you can see a Housing Officer more often.

In return, we would need to add £18 to your weekly rent, but we would only apply this charge if you got full Housing Benefit, so you wouldn’t be worse off. We plan to set up a separate fund to meet the costs for people who don’t get full Housing Benefit.

Before we extend this service, we will consult with you to make sure you’re happy with our plans.



*Maddy Cox, Customer Engagement Co-ordinator, with Customer Panel members.*

## Gemma's inspiring Race for Life challenge

Gemma Mitchell from our Bournemouth service hit the local headlines recently, when she took part in the Race for Life in aid of Cancer Research on Sunday 14 June.

Gemma has completed the course for the past four years, but decided to make this year extra special. After training hard for a year, she was able to get out of her wheelchair to cover 400m of the route in her walker.

Gemma says: "I just like giving something back. I think Race For Life is an amazing cause. The atmosphere there is amazing and it is just great to be a part of something that big."

Gemma is keen to thank all the people who supported her – her Mum Alison and carers Tracy Payne and Hannah Powis all did the race with her, while lots of people sponsored her and she was able to raise £200 for charity.



*Gemma crosses the finishing line and is congratulated by her supporters.*

active volunteer – at the Victoria Education Centre, where Martin is a member of the PE staff, and at the Sports College at Branksome. She also plays for and helps out at the Wessex Warriors Powerchair Football Club.

Even beginning the training took a huge amount of determination, as Gemma explains: "About 18 months ago I decided that I would like get a new walker, but I couldn't get funding for it. So me and my PA [carers] team decided to do a pub quiz with a raffle to raise money for it and I did a 50-length swim to raise the rest."

Now Gemma has set herself a new challenge. "I have just signed up for the Bournemouth Speed of Light 5K in October, with my training group," she says. The event is a five-kilometre marathon, which takes place in the evening. We all wish her the best of luck.

You can support Gemma's fundraising, by going to:  
[Justgiving.com/gemmamitchell3](https://www.justgiving.com/gemmamitchell3)

She also thanks Martin Cook, who runs wheelchair training sessions at the track at the Ashdown Leisure Centre in Poole. Martin set up her training.

As well as working as a graphic designer, Gemma who is 25, is an

## Recruitment skills training

Six customers from the Q-Team and the Customer Panel now have better recruitment skills, after taking part in a special training session in June.

Over the past year, customers have been helping us to choose some of our frontline housing and care & support staff.

They are doing a great job in making sure that customer priorities get detailed attention.



*Human Resources Manager Alex Hughes (right) with customers at the recruitment training session.*

We have now changed our recruitment process and introduced assessment days, where candidates for our jobs spend longer showing us what they have to offer. For this reason, we decided that a new round of customer training would be a good idea.

### The training looked at:

- equality and diversity – making sure that we treat every candidate fairly, whatever their background or abilities
- how our recruitment process works
- how to identify AbilityPOSITIVE+ attributes in candidates
- how to score each candidate.

The customers also got a chance to practise interviewing and scoring.

Human Resources Manager Alex Hughes said: "It was great to see how enthusiastic and committed our customers were during the training and I'm really looking forward to working alongside them during all our recruitment campaigns."

## Cavell House and *yourAbility* help Geraldine move on

After nearly two years living at our Cavell House service, Geraldine Taylor has moved on to a home of her own – and the team couldn't be more pleased for her.

Geraldine moved into Cavell House after a storm of problems came her way – she had housing difficulties, her family circumstances had changed, she was struggling to make ends meet and, not surprisingly, it all took a toll on her health and wellbeing.

Moving in to Cavell House took a bit of getting used to, but once she was settled, Geraldine went from strength to strength. So much so, that by the end of last year, she had found herself a home in Farnham. She moved in at the beginning of February.

Geraldine has opted to buy four *yourAbility* hours a week from the Cavell House service, which gives her the support she needs to continue becoming more independent.

“When I first arrived at Cavell House, I felt unloved. Nothing was going right for me. My brother did not



Geraldine wrote to the team:  
*“I would like to tell you how much I have enjoyed being at Cavell House.”*

want me to live where I was and I did not know if I would have anywhere else to live. So, when I arrived, I was so pleased to be there. I was bit battered and torn.

“Luckily, everyone came and helped me, including one of my new neighbours/tenants.

“The support team kept on giving me help and reminding me to do things. They have always been there for me...

“Ability Housing Association are great and gave me a home when I really needed one. I enjoyed learning to cook and do things, and help myself through the bad times...

“I would definitely recommend Ability Housing Association to other people. I will miss living at Cavell House, but I will be happy at my new house. I thank you all for preparing me for this move and I wish you all the best.”

## Wanted: ideas for improvements

Customers at Layton Court and Strauss Court in Mitcham, and Queen's Road in Hastings, will soon be enjoying new garden furniture thanks to grants from our improvement fund.

The projects were selected by the Customer Panel at their July meeting, from a list of suggestions put forward by customers.

We set up the £25,000 fund in 2013, so that we could offer extra funding to make improvements to your homes and surroundings.

Greg Terefenko, our new Housing Services Manager, tells us there is still funding left and the Customer Panel recommends getting in touch as soon as possible if you have any project ideas.

To be considered, your idea must:

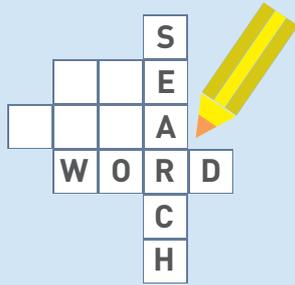
- benefit customers
- have some lasting value (so not a party or day trip)

- cost between £100 and £2,500 in total, and
- not need expensive ongoing maintenance.

You can tell us your suggestions by talking to a member of staff, or by writing to:

Greg Terefenko,  
 The Coach House,  
 Gresham Road, Staines,  
 TW18 2AE.

## HOME SAFETY HAZARDS



Can you find 16 items in your home or garden that you should be careful around if you want to stay safe?

Answers on back page.

S	C	I	S	S	O	R	S	K	I	U	Q	H	F	P
A	L	S	P	G	A	S	R	I	N	G	S	B	V	X
W	T	K	C	P	Z	E	U	T	C	Y	J	R	C	B
E	D	I	O	S	M	A	T	C	H	E	S	A	A	J
E	F	T	B	L	E	A	C	H	W	B	X	K	N	G
D	Z	R	F	B	A	T	T	E	R	I	E	S	D	Q
K	M	H	D	Y	J	Y	V	N	E	G	N	W	L	C
I	B	O	I	L	I	N	G	K	E	T	T	L	E	F
L	A	T	U	G	Z	M	I	N	D	H	E	S	S	R
L	R	D	G	L	A	S	S	I	G	L	N	O	I	S
E	B	R	T	H	X	O	H	V	M	Q	O	C	I	T
R	E	I	R	O	N	S	J	E	D	O	L	K	M	A
S	C	N	E	V	K	W	C	S	N	R	Q	E	A	I
B	U	K	M	E	D	I	C	I	N	E	S	T	K	R
A	E	S	T	E	P	L	A	D	D	E	R	S	Q	S

## SPOT THE DIFFERENCE – Eat well plate

The picture on the right has 10 differences. Can you find them? Answers on back page.

**Fruit and veg:** eat at least five a day

**Starchy food for energy:** bread, rice, pasta, potatoes

**Non dairy protein:** meat, fish, eggs, pulses

**Dairy foods for protein and calcium:** milk, cheese, yoghurt (low-fat is best)

**Sweet treats:** avoid too many sugary drinks and snacks

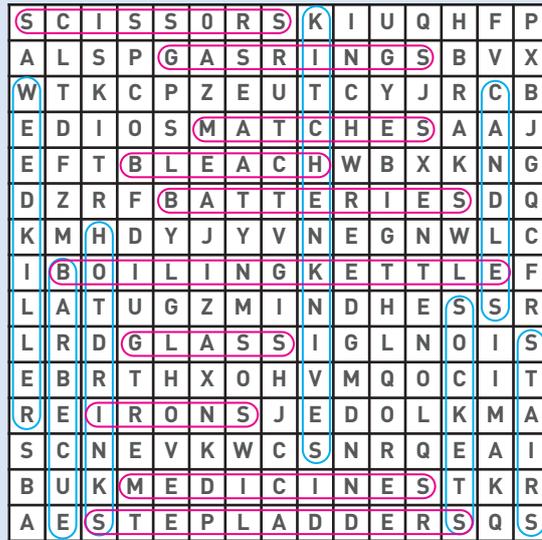
**Non dairy protein:** meat, fish, eggs, pulses

**Dairy foods for protein and calcium:** milk, cheese, yoghurt (low-fat is best)

**Starchy food for energy:** bread, rice, pasta, potatoes

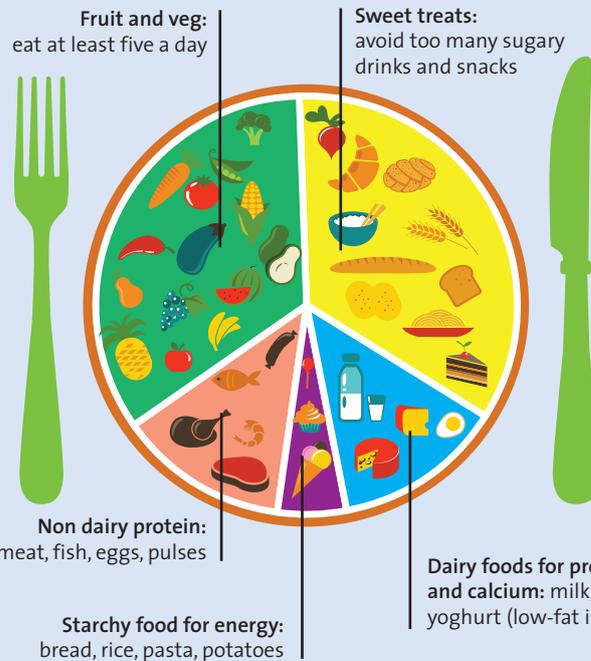
## Quiz answers

### WORD SEARCH



**Answers:** gas rings, kitchen knives, candles, hot drinks, boiling kettle, irons, bleach, stepladders, sockets, batteries, matches, scissors, weedkiller, barbecue, glass, stairs.

### SPOT THE DIFFERENCE – Eat well plate



#### Answers:

1. Starchy foods and sweet treats captions have swapped places
2. Cake has moved to starchy foods
3. Strawberry is missing from fruit and vegetables
4. Egg is with dairy foods
5. One of the peas is missing
6. Ice cream scoop is now pink.
7. The steak is missing its T-bone
8. The radish is in starchy foods
9. Avocado is missing its stone
10. The cheese is missing its holes.

This is your newsletter and we'd like to hear from you. You can contact us by:



E-mail  
window@ability-housing.co.uk



Telephone  
01784 490910



Letter  
Ability  
The Coach House  
Gresham Road  
Staines  
Middlesex  
TW18 2AE

**Don't forget to check our website  
for the latest news and events;  
[www.ability-housing.co.uk](http://www.ability-housing.co.uk)**