



# Window

Opening a window into our lives with Ability

Easy Read



## Meet our new customers in Reading

### Inside

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Wendy has a new home in Reading



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Aroona enjoys Hillingdon peer support group activities



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We say goodbye and thanks to Carron



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Paul takes his first parachute jump





# Housing news

**Diane Thompson** has been very busy as our Head of Housing.



The housing team look after homes over a wide area. Staff have told Diane they want to do more for customers. And they find it hard to sort out repairs.



Diane wrote a new plan for housing management.



We will give the housing team special training.



We will ask for your views more often, to help us improve our housing services.

Some customers now come on estate inspections. We will also call meetings so we can explain how we plan to tackle problems.



The team will run rent surgeries and a housing roadshow.

We will make videos about our housing work.



We will soon have 9 Supported Housing Assistants and a new housing manager to run our housing service.

# Care & support news



A lot has happened in 6 months!

**Good news!** We opened a new supported living service for people with disabilities at Phoebe Cusden House in Reading.

The first customers moved in during December. They get care and support all day and all night.



The Care Quality Commission visited 2 of our services this January. It said they require improvement.

The CQC has 4 ratings.

- Outstanding
- Good
- Requires improvement
- Inadequate

Requires improvement means the service doesn't run as well as it should. We need to do some things better.



We are writing action plans to improve these services. We intend to get a good or outstanding rating next time.



All of our other registered services have been rated as good by the Care Quality Commission.

In October last year, our services in Hillingdon were rated as outstanding by the council.

## More care & support news



Rita

Christina

We have 2 new care & support staff.

**Rita Asamoah** joined us as Director of Care & Support.

**Christina Harben** is our first-ever Quality Lead.

Rita and Christina will help us make sure that you always get high quality services from Ability.

## Sign for Genesis House



**Ramon** is showing off the new sign he designed to welcome guests to Genesis House in Staines.



Genesis House customers asked if they could have £45 from the Improvement Fund to pay for Ramon's sign

**The Improvement Fund is money Ability has for making our homes better.**

The Customer Panel chooses who gets money. When Genesis House asked about their sign, the Customer Panel were pleased to say, "Yes!".



If you would like an improvement for your service, ask your housing or support worker to put in a request.

## New homes in Reading



10 customers have moved in to our new supported living flats at Phoebe Cusden House in Reading.

Phoebe Cusden House customers have learning and physical disabilities, mental health and complex needs.

Customers get support all day and all night.

The new building is fully open to wheelchair users and it has a terrace garden on the roof.

On Friday 31 March, we held an official opening.

Councillor Mohammed Ayub was guest of honour.

We all had tea and cake at Cedar Court care home, which is just next door.

**Wendy** is pleased with her new home.

She says: “My favourite thing about my flat is everything! I love having my cat Oliver with me. He’s 13. Ability support me and they’re great. They’re so funny – I call them silly sometimes, and they laugh and I laugh.”

# Peer support groups: a big hit in Hillingdon!



Customers say the new peer support group in Hillingdon is a great success.

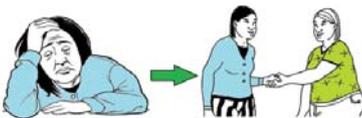


The Hillingdon group now has 10 members and gets support from 5 Ability staff.



Peer support groups bring people together to organise their own activities.

In a peer support group you get to go out. You make friends. And you can share your skills and experience.



**Lisa** has had quite severe depression.

Peer support is making a big difference in her life.



She now goes out every week on outings. She joins dog walkers in the park.

Lisa recently enjoyed a Chinese buffet lunch. She is looking forward to a bowling trip.



"Everyone is really quite understanding and I feel quite comfortable.

"I'm surprised at how comfortable I've felt."



**Aroona** says: “I’ve been involved in going on the trip to Kew Gardens, which was lovely, and also going to a Chinese buffet.

“The best aspect of peer support is meeting people and just making people aware they’re not alone.”

Aroona hopes more people will join in. She would definitely tell friends to join.

## Happy in Leith Close



**Peter** lives in Leith Close in Slough. He says it couldn’t be better.

He says: “When I came here, I settled very easily. They make me laugh.

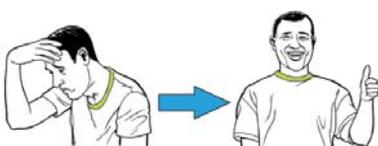
“The best thing about Leith Close is that I got my freedom!”



**Stephen** is really happy with his new home in Leith Close. But he had to get used to it first.

“I settled here in June. I used to live with my family and in other places in supported housing.

“On the first day I started staying here, I felt scared, frightened, anxious. Now I feel happy. Thank you for a lovely home. I would like to live here for ever.”





# Moving from DLA to PIP

Many of our customers get Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to help with their mobility or care costs.



If you are under 64, you will get a letter asking you to come to an assessment for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) instead.

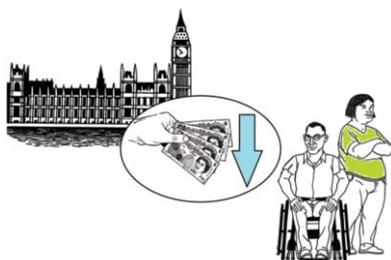


You may need help to fill in your application form.

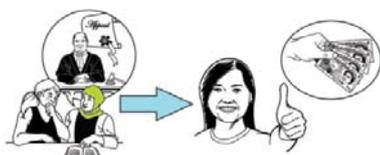


You can take someone with you to your appointment, so you feel supported.

Your support worker is an ideal person for this.



Sadly, many people get a rejection letter after their PIP assessment. This is because the Government is trying to pay benefits to fewer people.



Your support worker can help you appeal the decision. Many people win their appeal at a Benefits Tribunal.

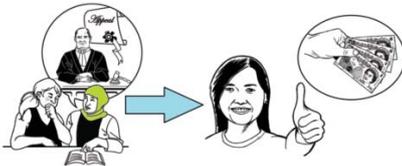
About 6 people out of 10 get their benefit back at this final stage.



If you need help with PIP, talk to your support worker.

We can help.

## Carron wins her PIP appeal



**Carron** was on DLA and thought she would always get it. Then she got a letter saying it was changing to PIP. Her mum helped her to fill in a new form.

PIP agreed to give her money, but it went down from £400 a month to £87 a month.

Carron was upset and didn't know how she was going to pay her bills.

Carron's Ability support worker, Nikki Elven, helped her to appeal. She got all her money back.



StepChange  
Debt Charity



## Sean sorts out his debts

**Sean Browne** found it hard to manage his money. He ran up £4,000 in debts.

Sean owned money on 4 mobile phones. He also used too much electricity and had a very high bill. "I tried to get out of this mess, but it was quite hard."

Sean's support worker, Nikki Elven, contacted the Step Change charity. They made a debt management plan and contacted everyone he owed money to.

Now Sean makes one big payment to Step Change and they are paying off all his bills. Sean is relieved.

If you need help with debts, talk to your support worker.



Care component of DLA	Daily living component of PIP
Highest	Enhanced
Middle	Standard
Lowest	



# Benefit change for under-35s

From the 1st April 2018, Housing Benefit and the housing element of Universal Credit will change for most people under the age of 35.

## What this means for you

If the change affects you, the money you get may not be enough to cover your rent.

And if you live alone, you will only get enough to cover the cost of a room in a shared house.

Some people under 35 won't be affected. For example:

- people who get the highest or middle rate of DLA (Disability Living Allowance), and
- people who get the daily living component of PIP (Personal Independence Payment).

## What Ability will do

Before next year, we will check which customers will be affected.

We will make sure you get the support you need to cope with the change.

If you are worried, you can always talk to your support worker.

# Universal credit



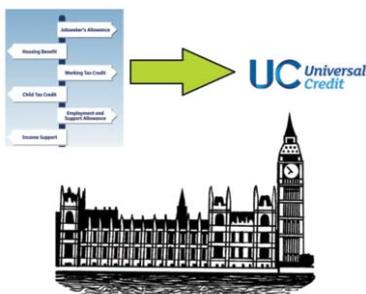
Universal Credit is going to replace the six benefits shown in our picture.

The benefits being replaced include Housing Benefit and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).



Single people who make new claims now have to apply for Universal Credit.

In some areas, couples and families making a new claim also have to apply for Universal Credit.



People who have been on benefits for a while will still get the same benefits for now.

The Government keeps delaying when they will switch everyone onto Universal Credit.



The expected switch date is now between July 2019 and March 2022. We will tell you if this changes.



## A new home for Julie

**Julie** moved to Wishbone Way in June last year, with her cat. She used to live with her twin sister in a bungalow.

“As soon as I saw Wishbone, I really liked it – it’s big and clean and the people I met were nice.

“I really like living here, because there is always support when I need it or if I just want a chat. I have support everyday if I want it.

“I have a cat called George – he’s a rescue cat and is about 3 years old. I was allowed to bring him with me and he loves it here too.”

## Carron moves on



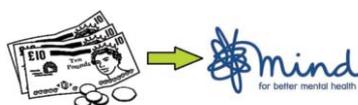
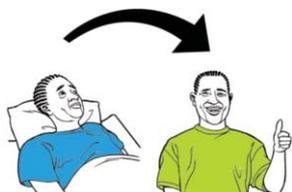
**Carron Cleversley** has moved away from Ability to a flat of her own. She says “I’m in a one-bed flat on the second floor. It’s a lovely area and I’ve got a lovely neighbour.”

Carron lived in one of our flats in Havant for 10 years. She thinks Ability is good because it helps your independence and you know you’re safe.

“Not only that, I got involved with everything – with the Customer Panel meetings and the Q-Team. So I was interviewing staff for jobs.”

We want to say a big thank-you to Carron for all the work she put in. We wish her well for the future.

## Paul does a parachute jump



Paul Swift made a tandem parachute jump in March, even though he's afraid of heights! A tandem parachute jump is when you are strapped to a professional skydiver.

Paul had been very unwell but started to get better in 2015. He moved into his own place in Uxbridge in 2016. He has been an Ability Care & Support customer since February.

Paul decided that now he was feeling better he wanted to do more things. He started by flying to Scotland. He had never flown before.

“Then, this year, on March the 2nd, I jumped out of an aeroplane at 10,000 feet!”

Paul paid for his jump himself and raised money for Hillingdon Mind.

## Robbie goes on the radio



**Robbie Mason** from our St Albans service took part in a BBC Radio broadcast in December. He was helping to promote his band's Christmas single.

Robbie is a keen member of Electric Umbrella. Electric Umbrella is a music charity that supports people with learning disabilities to play music with professional musicians.

Robbie said he really enjoys going to Electric Umbrella. “We get to hang out. We get to use instruments. We get to just sort of have fun. And learning different things about different people. It's so exhilarating. It's really good.”

# Your views on care and support with Ability



We paid PFA Research Ltd to carry out a survey for us to keep your answers private. PFA specialise in surveys.

PFA asked our care & support customers 5 questions about the support we provide. They asked for comments too.

221 customers sent in completed surveys.



## The questions we asked

1. Are you happy with the support service you get from Ability?

**203** (89%) said yes



2. Does Ability help you feel safe?

**195** (86%) said yes



3. Do Ability staff treat you with respect?

**205** (92%) said yes



4. Does Ability support you to be more independent?

**189** (85%) said yes



5. Would you recommend Ability to other people who need support?

**205** (92%) said yes



## What customers said

“Ability has helped me to live independently for the first time and has supported me throughout. I do not think I could have achieved this without Ability’s assistance.”



“My Ability employee has enabled me to loose over two stone by taking me out on walks.”



“Everybody I have dealt with at Ability has not only been helpful, but very friendly, so much so we’ve very often had a good giggle together.”



“I will be leaving Ability this year. I have enjoyed my time here. Thank you.”



## Keeping you safe from fire

Everyone at Ability was very upset about the big fire at Grenfell Tower.

Grenfell Tower was a council block in west London.

After the Grenfell Tower fire, the Government asked every council and housing association to send information about their homes.

We told the Government that none of Ability's homes are in tower blocks with dangerous cladding.

Your safety is very important to us. We stick to fire safety rules and we carry out regular fire safety checks.

- All your homes have fire detection equipment.
- All our services have fire safety doors and exit signs.
- We regularly check shared areas to make sure you can leave quickly if there's a fire.

### Keep your belongings inside your home

If you live in a **block of flats**, you must not leave anything you own in shared areas.

If you live in a **shared house**, you must not block the fire exits or leave things you own in corridors or stairways.

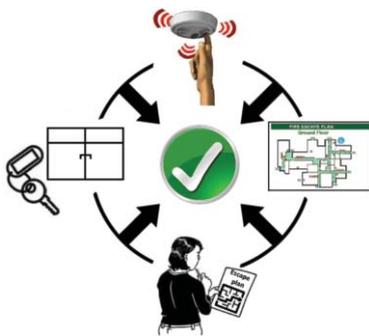
If you have a **balcony**, the Government has given us a new fire safety rule. You must not keep barbecues, or other items that catch fire, on your balcony.

# Fire Brigade fire tips



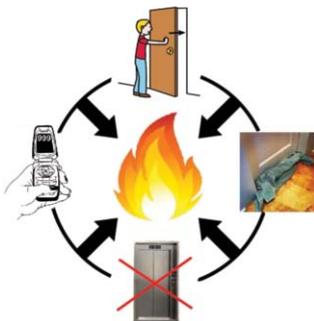
## Avoid starting a fire

- Don't smoke indoors and never smoke in bed.
- Keep matches and lighters away from children.
- Don't leave lit candles in an empty room.
- Don't overload electrical sockets.
- Don't cook when you're too tired, or if you've been drinking alcohol.
- Check everything is safe before you go to bed.
- Close doors, switch off any electrical items that don't need to be on at night.
- Avoid charging phones overnight.



## Be prepared for a fire

- Check your smoke and heat alarms regularly. Your support worker can help.
- Make sure you know the escape plan at your service.
- Make your own escape plan if you live in general needs housing – and practise it.
- Keep your door and window keys nearby.

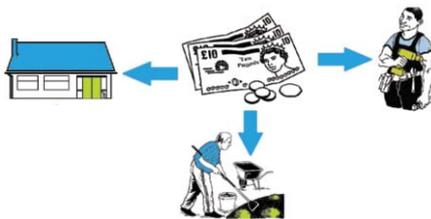
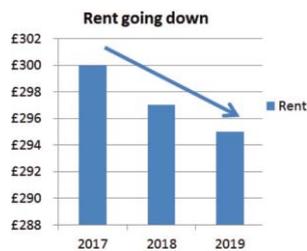


## In a fire

- If your home is affected by smoke or fire, don't try to put it out. Get out and close the door. Call 999.
- If you can't get out, go to the safest room and use towels to block any gaps.
- If your block is on fire, call 999 for advice.
- Follow any advice our staff give you.
- Never use the lift in a fire.



# Are rent cuts good news or bad news?



Last year, the Government told housing associations they must cut their rents for 3 or 4 years.

The Government has made this change because it wants to spend less on Housing Benefit.

## What this means for Ability customers

If you live at most of our services, your rent will reduce by 1% in the year beginning on 1 April 2017. It will also reduce in 2018 and 2019.

## What this means for Ability

The rent cuts will reduce our income by a large amount. We use your rent money to pay for the homes and services we provide, and to pay our staff.

With less money, we will have to be even more efficient. But we may also have to cut some services.

Less money also makes it more difficult for us to produce new homes.

## What we will do

- We will find ways to save money.
- We will make sure we look after your home and provide the most important services.
- We will make sure everyone pays all their rent.

## What you can do

Help us to sort out your Housing Benefit or Universal Credit claim as quickly as possible.

Always pay your rent and charges on time!



## How to get in touch with us



**01784 490 910**



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### By post



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