



Ability



Our Annual Report to
our customers - 2015



Dear Ability customers

I am pleased to introduce our report for 2015.

Our results this year show a very mixed picture and this is reflected in your feedback.

We have built some splendid new homes in Hayes and Bexhill. We have made great progress with involving customers in improving our services. We brought in some talented new people to our Board and management team. Most importantly, we trained all our staff in our AbilityPOSITIVE+ Commitments, to make sure you always have a positive experience.

But not everything has gone according to plan. At the end of last year, our repairs contractor, Richardson, went bust! They gave us only 24 hours' notice. As a result, our repairs service suffered. Although we worked quickly to find a new contractor, it took a few months before Mears had all the staff and facilities they needed to deliver the first-class service you expect.

Many of you experienced delays and problems in getting your repairs done. Your feedback tells us how much this means to you. In our satisfaction survey, 87% said they were satisfied with their homes, but only 54% with the repairs service. We understand why so many of you were unhappy. I am very sorry about this.

We are now working hard to choose a permanent new contractor who can give you the service you want. We've put strong performance clauses in the contract too. Once we have appointed the new contractor, we expect to keep a good contractor for five years at least, providing tenants with the certainty and security you have told us you value.

This will be my last annual report to you as Chief Executive. I will be leaving next April. I hope to see most of you before I leave, but I want to let you know how much I have enjoyed working with you all. I'm sure I am leaving the organisation in good hands and that you will continue to experience a positive and friendly response in all your dealings with Ability.

Best wishes, David

IN THIS REPORT

Your home	4
Your tenancy	6
Your neighbourhood & community	7
Your involvement	8
Your support	10
Value for money	12
Our future commitments	14



How satisfied are you?

We completed our second customer survey in March this year, with 94 customers giving their views. Surveys are a good way for us to track your satisfaction with our services over time. You will find the results throughout this report, together with how well we performed against our service offers.



74%

of customers satisfied with our overall service

Highlights of the year

The Q-Team in action

Our special team of trained customers visited schemes to get valuable face-to-face feedback about our services.

Q-Team member Nigel says: "I enjoy getting out, meeting people and talking to them. I have been in their shoes and I understand, from their point of view, what their needs are and how to ask the questions.

"It's definitely the most enjoyable and effective way of gathering customer feedback."



The Q-Team's Carron Cleversley thanks a customer for his feedback.

New schemes open



SESSILE COURT

Sessile Court in Hayes opened its doors to residents in April. Our part of the development has 14, self-contained, supported housing flats. We provide the support.

We opened Elva Court in Bexhill-on-Sea, in September. Elva Court provides another 14 supported housing flats.

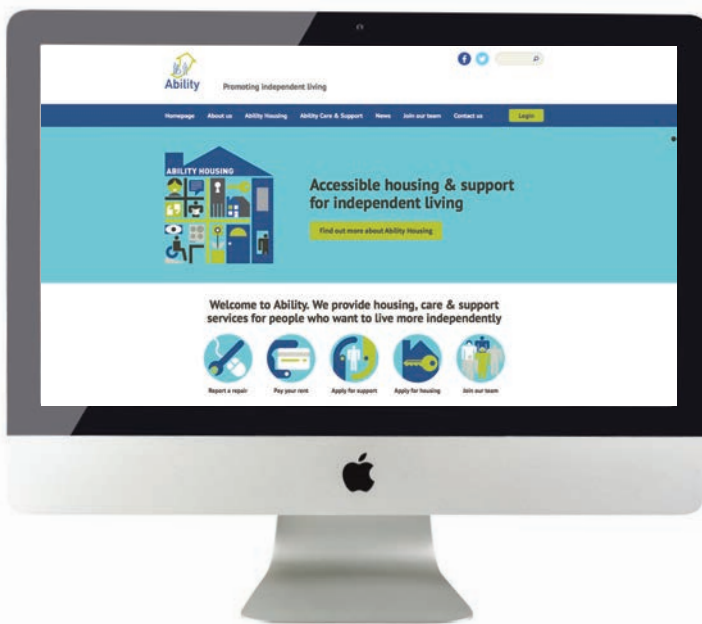
Recruit for attitude, train for skills

We updated our recruitment process, to make sure we always take on the right staff.

Applicants now have to show they share our positive attitudes and values (we call this **AbilityPOSITIVE+**), as well as having the right knowledge and skills.

This year, customers helped us choose several housing and care & support staff. To improve their skills, six customers took part in training in June.

We have a new 10-day training programme for new staff. The sessions explain **AbilityPOSITIVE+**, look at how to sort out complaints, and help staff to focus on putting customers first and keeping people safe.



Bright new website

We launched our new website. It now has a bright new look, and it's clearer and easier to use. We consulted the Customer Panel and they were very pleased with the result.

"The new website is so easy to use and well designed. The pictures are clear and easy to understand and the website loads quickly. Excellent."

Your home



Taking care of your home is one of our top priorities. But when our repairs contractors folded earlier in the year, unfortunately, it brought down our performance. Mears, who took over for us, began by prioritising our most urgent work. The service as a whole is now gradually improving.

Our home service offer

What we promised and how we did



All our homes will meet the Ability Standard (that's better than the government's Decent Homes standard)

Many more of our homes now meet the Ability Standard – all meet the Decent Homes standard.

- If you have a gas supply, we'll provide you with a gas safety certificate every year

All our homes have gas safety certificates.

- If you have an emergency repair, we will come within 24 hours and make sure your home is safe

After they took over our service, Mears were able to meet this target with 86% of emergency jobs. This number is now increasing.

- We complete 95% of urgent repairs within seven days and we set targets for improving this

Because Mears had to prioritise emergencies, on-target urgent repairs slipped to 81%. However, more recently, Mears are starting to meet our target.

EMERGENCY REPAIRS TARGET



97%
WITHIN 24 HOURS

URGENT REPAIR TARGET



95%
WITHIN 7 DAYS



What you said...

 **87%**
satisfied with
the quality
of their homes

 **54%**
satisfied with
our repairs and
maintenance service



Customer Panel members made an official visit to Mears in May.

What comes next...

We're currently looking for new contractors, with the help of the Customer Panel. The Panel have written some questions we can use.



In the new repair contract, we will prioritise:

- **customer satisfaction**
- **carrying out repairs on the first visit, and**
- **completing the repair at a convenient time for you.**

Supported living services for Bexhill-on-Sea

East Sussex gained a new supported living service, when we opened Elva Court in Bexhill-on-Sea, in September.

Our 14 customers benefit from 24-hour support, as they gain the confidence to live independently.



“ I think it's a brilliant place. I've been in many establishments for the last 15 years and it's by far the best. The buildings are very safe, it's nice, comfortable and relaxed, and the staff are very helpful and respectful. **”**

Wayne Tydeman

Your tenancy

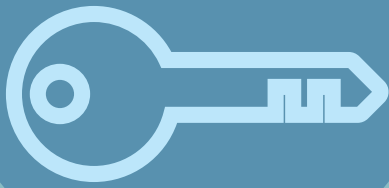


What you said...



88%

satisfied that our staff are friendly, positive and approachable



Our tenancy promises are about making sure you can make the most of your tenancy – and that we can make the best use of our homes.



Our tenancy offer

What we promised and how we did

- We will let our homes within 28 days wherever possible

Mears, our repairs contractor, worked with us to speed up repairs to our empty properties.

- We will set our rents in accordance with the regulatory standard set by the Homes and Communities Agency

We raised our rents by 2.2% in October – which met our regulator’s requirement. The rise was in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for September 2014, plus 1%, although some properties also had a top-up rise under the ‘target rent’ system.

- We will support our tenants to look after their tenancy

We explain tenancy responsibilities to our new customers when they sign their tenancy agreements. We have an Easy Read leaflet as well. While you are our tenant, we will always help you – and help your support staff – to make sure you don’t put your tenancy at risk.

- We will ensure that our homes are let fairly

Our teams are working together to make sure we let our homes to people who want to live more independently.

What happens next...

We’re going to improve the turnaround of empty properties, by changing the targets in our repairs contract. We will set our new contractors the target of completing repairs to empty properties within 10 days (currently 19 days).



😊 **86%**

satisfied with their neighbourhood

Your neighbourhood and community

We want to make sure you live in a pleasant and safe environment.



Our neighbourhood and community offer What we promised and how we did

- **We will keep the immediate area around your home and the internal shared areas clean and safe**

We regularly check that all our estates and communal areas are being kept safe and clean.

- **We will work with other partners in your neighbourhoods to make the area and what it offers a good place to live**

We meet with the council and other landlords at local partnership agency meetings to share any local problems affecting the health and wellbeing of our customers.

- **We will respond promptly to complaints of anti-social behaviour and use a range of methods to deal with the problem**

We have been working with the police and local partner agencies to identify areas where anti-social behaviour is a particular problem. In the London Borough of Merton, we have worked successfully with the police safer neighbourhoods team to reduce anti-social behaviour significantly.



What happens next...

We will be checking to see if we can reproduce our Merton success elsewhere.

“ My flat’s really nice, I love it. It’s nice and cosy and warm. I’ve got the flat on the ground floor, with the garden. I’ve put up a bird box on the fence. “I’m nice and settled and hope I can stay for a long time. It’s one of the best places I’ve lived in.”

Nick Ashley

Your involvement



We involve customers in our work to make sure we know what you want and how you experience our services. We call this customer engagement.



Our customer engagement and empowerment offer

What we promised and how we did

■ We will deal with complaints clearly, quickly and fairly

This year's complaints included:

- 29 about repairs
- 13 about support services
- 1 each about estate management, the property and development, and anti-social behaviour.

■ We will have a range of ways to get you involved and helping to shape our services

Our active Customer Panel, which has a mix of 12 housing and Care & support customers, met three times during the year – once with Board members.

We resolved 63% within 10 days and 95% at stage 1 of our process.

Most complaints were about delays and not keeping you informed about repairs. We worked hard with Mears to improve things. We also sent our managers for training around complaints and service improvements.

■ This year, the Customer Panel:

- reviewed complaints and improvements
- chose which projects should get money from the improvement fund
- discussed priorities for the new business plan
- scrutinised repairs data, and
- looked at satisfaction survey results and Q-Team action plans.

Our six Q-Team members made visits to Waterloo, Woking and Hayes, getting feedback from 22 customers and passing on recommendations.

We carried out a major satisfaction survey.

■ We treat all our customers with respect

During the year we launched AbilityPOSITIVE+ and staff attended workshops to learn how we want them to behave in support of our values.



What you said...

67%

were satisfied we listen to your views and act on them

78%

were satisfied we keep you informed



Carron and Stuart visit Mears



Carron and Stuart visited our repair contractor's office.



They met Darren Barnard, who manages our repairs. Darren said Mears are working to improve our repairs service.



They met the call centre team who take our repairs calls.



They met Tara, who is a gas engineer, and Andy, who does different sorts of repairs. Stuart and Carron were impressed when they looked in their vans.



The Q-Team visits Waterloo



Carron, Cleversley and James Turley from the Q-Team visited 3 services in May. Maddy Cox and Karen McCoy went with them.



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

Stuart Rees, who Chairs the Customer Panel, has been actively involved in Ability since the Panel was launched more than three years ago. "I think it does make a difference. It allows quite a range of customers to make their views known to Ability," he says.



Last year, the Panel played an important role when Ability had to replace our previous repairs contractors at short notice. Stuart and Carron Cleversley visited Mears, who had taken over the contract, to make sure they understood more about Ability customers.

The Panel has also been helping Ability find permanent new contractors. "We were sent a list of questions that Ability proposed to ask when they held interviews for contractors who had submitted tenders. These had to be whittled down and we were asked to reject some, amend some or come up with new ones," Stuart explains.

Next year the Panel will be changing. "We're looking at the best way to structure Customer Panel meetings, because we are two groups of customers – housing customers and a much larger group of care & support customers," says Stuart.

"We don't want to become separate, but we don't necessarily all need to discuss everything in detail."

In future, customers will also have a more formal 'scrutiny' role – checking our performance, reviewing our services and making recommendations to improve our services.

"I've been talking to a couple of people at Ability about getting a broad range of customers involved. It will probably be a sub-group that will involve some of the Panel," says Stuart.

We are committed to making our services accessible to all

The Customer Panel made sure all our main documents are available in Easy Read format. We also developed our new, clear, user-friendly website.

Your support



The support we provide is designed to enable you to live as independently as possible.



What you said...

😊 **78%**

were satisfied with the support we provide



Our support offer

What we promised and how we did

- **We will work with you to design an Easy Read support plan for those of you who want one**

Customers have been helping to train staff to provide person-centred support plans in a variety of formats, including Easy Read.

- **We will support you if you want to arrange social activities**

We will detail ways to maximise your access to social and leisure activities in your support plans.

- **We will agree individual goals with you and work with you to achieve them**

We use your support plans, person-centred plans and the recovery star to help you meet your independent-living aspirations. We have supported some customers into employment and education, away from institutional placements.

- **Aim to always achieve good or excellent results when our services are inspected**

Our registered services have been awarded 'Good' or 'Fully compliant' by the Care Quality Commission. In March, the CQC's report on Fiddlers Green in Kingston, gave us a 'good' in every category.

- **The report found:** "The manager ran the service in an open and transparent way. We saw good leadership and the service had clear values, which included promoting choice, involvement, dignity, respect, equality and independence for people."
- It also commented: "People were able to make decisions about their everyday life and were asked for their consent.... staff always sought people's consent before carrying out any care or support."

New care & support contracts

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

We now provide round-the-clock care & 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.

Value for money/ Governance and finance



We work to give you the best possible value of money for the rent and charges you pay. We also have to report regularly to our regulator, to show that our organisation is well managed and financially strong.

Value for money service offer What we promised and how we did

- We will assess and improve our value-for-money strategy in consultation with the Board and the Customer Panel

Our new, improved strategy is set out in full on our website.

- We will reduce costs, finding more money to improve and build homes

We set a budget for the year to September 2015 that included cost reductions. We met all our targets and built 29 homes in the last year.

- We will ask customers how we can get better value for money on estate services

We have continued to maintain our estate services to a high standard.



Our Board's year

Our Board had a busy year and productive year.

At the Annual General Meeting, Jane Harrison became the new Chair and Ian Lines, Sally Reay and Nicola Philps were voted in as new members.

In June 2015, the Board approved our new business plan, which sets out our plans for the next five years.

Board members took part in a strategy day in July – to think about our overall direction as a provider of homes for people who want to live more independently.

FACTS & FIGURES

£1,338

Our average spend on repairs to each home

£497

How much of our spend related to work planned in advance. We were not able to carry out the full planned programme after our contractor went into administration

£1.7M

Our net investment of grant into new homes



What you said...

😊 86%

were satisfied your rent gives you value for money

😊 77%

were satisfied your service charge gives you value for money

😊 74%

agreed that Ability has a good reputation locally

😊 81%

agreed they trust Ability

We became more efficient and reduced our costs this year by:

- getting our repairs contractor to handle repairs calls
- reducing and re-training our office administration team
- closing a loss-making registered residential care home and turning it into self-contained supported housing
- changing the use of supported-living properties in Oxfordshire to meet the local authority's priorities better
- assessing how much money we saved other organisations by providing supported living accommodation – for example, it meant fewer hospital admissions and a reduction in the high financial and social costs of institutional care
- reviewing the impact of the Ability Homes Standard and our planned work programmes
- through our Customer Panel and other engagement activities, making sure customers have a say in everything we do, so that our investment priorities and plans continue to match customer expectations
- reducing our overhead costs to less than 10% of turnover
- sharing our performance data with other similar organisations, so that we can learn from each other, and
- reviewing our asset management strategy to make sure we get better value when we invest in property.

During 2016 we will:

- assess and improve our value for money strategy (we did this in September 2015)
- re-tender our repairs contract to make sure we get best value
- find out how we compare to other similar organisations – and put the results on our website, and
- reduce our costs, so that we have more money to improve and build homes.

We will also involve customers in coming up with ideas to make us more efficient.

Our future commitments



We have drawn up a new set of promises for the future. Our aim is to make a real difference to your services, by taking simple and practical steps to improve them.

What we will do

- We will work with you to create local plans to improve the areas where you live and the support you receive. We will agree a set of standards and priorities with you, and report back to you on progress. These local plans will include information about our planned maintenance spending for the next five years.
- So you can have more contact with our housing team, we will appoint Supported Housing Assistants. They will be based closer to where you live and work with your local Housing Services Officers to deliver a more visible and responsive service.
- We will develop circles of support – so that care and support customers can support each other to provide more opportunities to get involved in social and leisure activities.
- We will continue to ensure our services are recognised as good or outstanding by external regulators.
- We will update our *complaints policy* and procedure to simplify the way we handle complaints. We will encourage staff to resolve complaints locally and make sure you get the best outcome when you complain.
- We will work with our new contractor to ensure that we keep improving our repairs service.
- We will set up new, flexible and creative ways for you to be actively involved with all aspects of Ability's service.



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



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