



Focusing on ability  
not disability



Chief Executive's  
statement



Looking forward,  
looking back

This annual report will be my last as Chief Executive at Ability. After 24 years with the organisation and the last 14 of those as CEO, I have decided the time is right for me to try some new challenges.

In some ways, 2014-2015 was more challenging than most, whilst in others it provided a typical rollercoaster of challenge and opportunity. The one constant feature throughout my time at Ability has been that by focusing resolutely on our purpose, alongside positive 'can-do' commitments, we have been able to overcome most of the barriers to progress that have landed in our way.

At the beginning of the year, our repairs contractor, Richardson, went into administration. 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 our customers expect. As a result, customer satisfaction levels understandably fell back.

In other unexpected developments, the Government announced that housing associations must reduce their rents by

1% each year. This came just 18 months after the Government had announced a 10-year rent settlement of CPI+1%. Like all housing associations, this meant we need to tear up our business plans and rewrite them. As a result, Ability will be able to build far fewer new homes in the future.

However, despite these difficulties, we still managed to complete two splendid new supported living developments – providing 15 homes at Elva Court in Bexhill and another 15 at Sessile Court in Hayes. At Sessile Court, we were selected as care provider too. As the year ended, we were near to completing a third supported living development of 12 homes in Woking. We had also started work on converting The Lodge, in Farnham, to provide a further four homes.

Care & support services have experienced a difficult time in recent years, with many low-level services being decommissioned and the hourly rates for the remaining services being squeezed year on year by cash-strapped local authorities.

Despite this, we have started to grow our care & support services once more. This year, as well as winning a contract

for Sessile Court in Hayes, we also won a major contract for supported living for people with learning disabilities in Waterlooville in Hampshire. In Surrey, we negotiated a framework partnership arrangement with the county council that will ensure long-term growth where we are able to supply new homes.

These positive outcomes provide a firm endorsement for our strategy of focusing on providing supported living solutions in high quality self-contained homes. The board has reaffirmed its commitment to an independent future of doing more of the same for the foreseeable future. That is, we will continue to use positive attitudes to overcome challenges and barriers for the benefit of people who want to live more independently.

While I will miss the greatest rewards of seeing so many Ability customers achieving their independent living goals, I know that, together, the Ability board and my colleagues will achieve many more successes in the years to come.



**David Williams**, Chief Executive

# New homes and strong services



## Official opening of Sessile Court

From left to right: **David Williams**, Chief Executive of Ability; **Geeta Nanda**, Chief Executive of Thames Valley Housing; **Carole Brockwell**, Support Services Manager at Ability; **Tim Preston**, Regional Land and New Business Manager at Thames Valley Housing and Councillor **Philip Corthorne** of Hillingdon Council

## Elva Court flats

The 14 one bedroom flats are set over four floors and the scheme includes a staff flat and office, as well as a cycle store and a communal courtyard



## Sessile Court

Our new development in Hayes, opened its doors to residents in April 2015.

The site, which we developed in partnership with Thames Valley Housing and Hillingdon Council, provides 24 affordable homes in two self-contained blocks.

Our part of the development has self-contained supported housing flats for 14 Hillingdon residents. We provide the round-the-clock care and support they need, after winning the contract from the Council.

Sessile Court was officially opened on 17 September 2015.

## Elva Court

We opened Elva Court in Bexhill-on-Sea, in September 2015. Elva Court provides a further 14 supported housing flats.

We developed Elva Court in partnership with East Sussex County Council and Rother District Council. Construction at this challenging site, which lies between existing properties, was carried out by Providence Building Services.

Elva Court residents benefit from 24-hour support, enabling them to live independently before they make the move to general needs housing.

## New contract in Ruislip

In May, we won a five-year contract with the London Borough of Hillingdon, so that we now provide 24/7 care and support to customers living at our purpose-built block of self-contained flats in Hayes.

We have set a very high standard at Ruislip, proving it is possible to give customers with high needs much more independence, by assisting them to live in supported housing.

## Waterlooville services

Ability Care & Support began providing services to a new group of adults with learning difficulties from 30 March 2015 – after successfully winning the contract last autumn.

Under the contract, we provide 800 hours of care and support every week to customers in Waterlooville.

## CQC inspections

Our personal care services for people living in their own homes were all rated by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) as fully compliant or good.

Fiddlers Green, our care home in Kingston, was awarded 'good' in every category when the CQC's inspection report came out in March 2015. The inspectors were impressed with the way the service is managed and with the way we treat our customers.

## Renewed contract in West Sussex

Our three-year contract with West Sussex County Council has been extended.

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.

## *yourAbility* success

Our *yourAbility* support service, which offers a flexible support service to customers who hold a personal budget or pay for their own support, is proving to be a popular and growing service. We are attracting customers from a wider area and currently providing the service to 87 people.

In Reading, we are now recognised as a 'gold standard' provider – and our service there has grown by 29%.

# Engaging with our customers

## The Customer Panel

Ability Housing and Care & Support customers continued to play an active role in our work as members of the Customer Panel.

The Panel's busy year included helping us to recruit support staff, as well as the new Operations Director and Head of Housing. The Panel worked with us to review complaints and chose which service ideas should get backing from our new improvement fund. Members also visited our contractors, got to know Board members at a special 'speed networking' event and took part in recruitment skills training.



Housing Services Manager **Greg Terefenko** (left) in conversation with **Stuart Rees**, Chair of the Customer Panel

## Quality assurance through the Q-Team

The Q-Team is our customer-led quality auditing team, whose members visit our services to capture feedback face to face.

During the year, the Q-Team made five visits to four services, spoke to 27 customers and took written feedback from another five.

To prepare for a visit to Yew Tree Lodge in Hillingdon, we trained the team in how to communicate effectively with tenants with learning difficulties. They were able to use a touch-screen tablet to make collecting feedback easier.

When visiting our three services in Waterlooville in Hampshire, the Q-Team took customers to the pub for lunch – helping to make the feedback fun as well as relaxed.

The Q-Team produces summary reports and action plans, which are reviewed by the Customer Panel, shared with customers and their relatives, and discussed with the Team Leader or Service Manager for each service. Over the following year, the local team implements the agreed action plan, sharing its progress with all concerned.



Recruitment training session for members of the Customer Panel



Q-Team take notes during discussion with Ability customer at Waterlooville pub lunch



**Carron** (seated) checks out gas engineer **Tara's** van during the Mears visit



## In their own words

### Mary-Ann Poulter – *yourAbility* customer

“I’ve been very mentally ill and in care homes where I was being hit, spat at and shouted at.

“I left the care homes and was given a place with Ability nearly nine years ago.

“I’ve had a lot of support workers, but Inga is the best I’ve ever had. She’s got the heart and passion for the job. She’s so gentle and considerate. I’ve got a lot better since I’ve known her.

“I have two to two-and-a-half hours support each week.

“Inga takes me out and supports me with letters and appointments. She helps me pay my bills and buy my things. I’m very anxious about going out, but she’s so caring. She looks in shop windows with me and makes me feel like a person.”



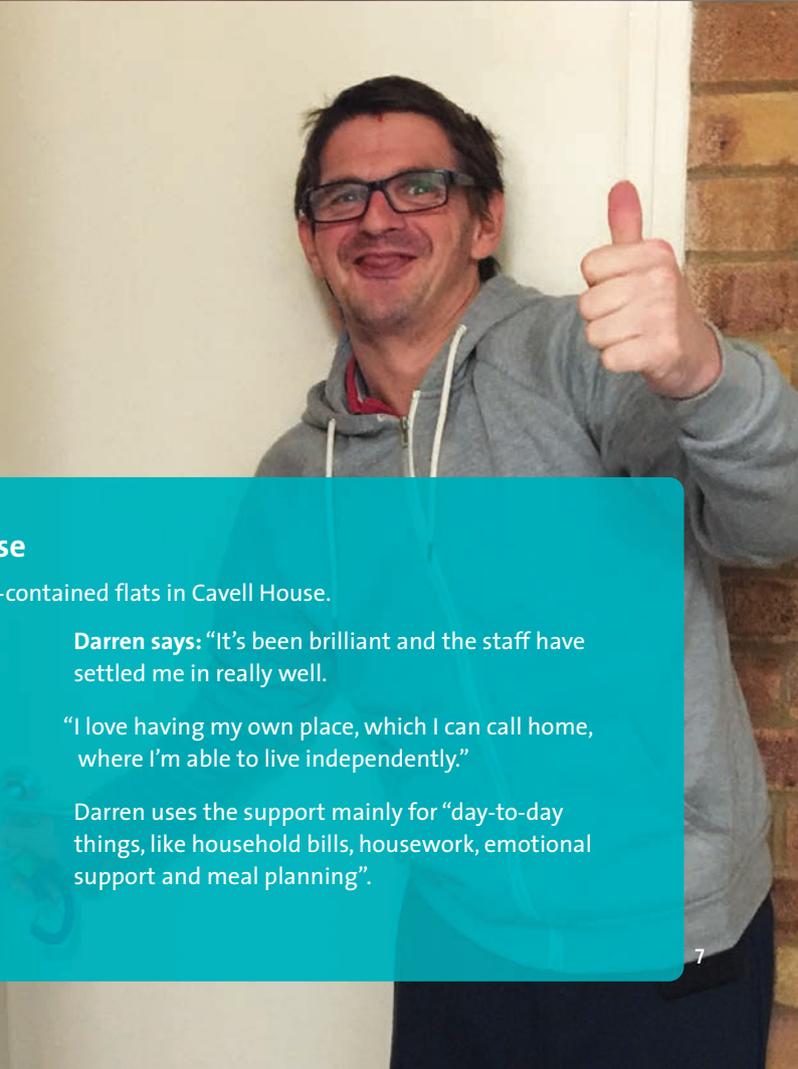
### Ben and Darren – new residents at Cavell House

In September 2015, Ben and Darren moved into their own self-contained flats in Cavell House.

**Ben says:** “It was absolutely fine. It took me a couple of weeks to settle in and familiarise myself with the new surroundings. Now, what I like best about my flat is the peace and quiet.

“It may take a couple of weeks to settle in, but after that you will feel safe and staff are always here to help you.

“I get support with telephone calls, paperwork and whatever I feel comfortable asking for.”



**Darren says:** “It’s been brilliant and the staff have settled me in really well.

“I love having my own place, which I can call home, where I’m able to live independently.”

Darren uses the support mainly for “day-to-day things, like household bills, housework, emotional support and meal planning”.

# Investing in homes

By the end of the year, all our homes met the Decent Homes standard set by the Government. This means they have reasonably modern kitchens, bathrooms and boilers, and good quality insulation.

In addition, we are working to our own Ability Standard – adding in upgrades to home security, health and safety, fuel efficiency and disability adaptations. Customers helped us to identify these priorities.

During the 2014-2015 financial year, we invested more than £538,000 in planned works and refurbishments to our existing homes. However, this was less than we expected, because the failure of our repairs contractors meant that we had to focus instead on maintaining our day-to-day repairs service.

We are now procuring a permanent new repairs contractor for a five-year contract. Once the service is embedded, we will be able to refocus on delivering the enhanced Ability Standard to all our homes.

## Summers Close

Between service providers, we completely redecorated Summers Close in Adderbury in Oxfordshire, which has six rooms for residents with learning difficulties.

We replaced the kitchen and fitted new carpets, as well as carrying out minor repairs and improving the bedrooms and bathrooms. The scheme was ready to let by May 2015.

## The Lodge

By the end of the financial year, we had begun work on the transformation of The Lodge in Farnham at a total cost of £608,000.

The Lodge was formerly a care home with five rooms and a one-bedroom flat for customers with learning difficulties. It is situated next door to another of our schemes – Cavell House.

In the interests of long-term sustainability, we are now converting the ground floor of the property into three flats for wheelchair users. Upstairs, we are extending the existing studio flat into the eaves to provide a one-bedroom flat.

The scheme is due to be completed by the end of March. Customers living in the new flats will be supported by staff at Cavell House.





### **Wishbone Way**

We began work on a new supported housing scheme at Wishbone Way in Woking during the year.

The scheme, which was handed over in December 2015, provides 12 one-bedroom supported housing flats and an office.

The homes are set out in two, two-storey blocks and will provide homes for customers with a mix of supported living needs.

# Governance and finance

## Chairman's statement

In my first report as Chair, I can reflect positively and with great pride on the strong position Ability finds itself in.

The board is in transition. We welcomed three new members, Ian Lines, Sally Reay and Nicola Philp, who bring impressive and varied skills and knowledge. In addition, I took over from John Daley in March and I am grateful for his commitment and leadership over the years. John's approach to governance always focused on our customers' needs, while providing the right balance of scrutiny and support for our executive team. It was always delivered with good humour and honesty. I intend to continue in a similar direction.

This year, we had to respond to unprecedented external challenges arising from welfare reforms, a new housing bill and local authority funding cuts. I am delighted that we emerged from a soul-searching review with the confidence to move forward independently, with a viable long-term plan that retains a clear sense of our purpose and priorities.

This is possible only because of the prudent investments we made in the past. Our 10-year programme of active asset management, which concluded this year, delivered a modern and fit-for-purpose

housing stock, a strong balance sheet, relatively low levels of debt and healthy cash reserves.

The architect of our successful strategies for growth and improvement has been our Chief Executive, David Williams, who will be leaving us shortly. David has led Ability for the past 14 years and been part of the team for 24 years.

On behalf of the board, I would like to thank both David and John for their highly successful leadership. They leave Ability in an enviable position, with a strong platform from which to continue our work of promoting independent living.

**Jane Harrison**, Chairman

## Finance Director's report

During 2014-15, our turnover from rents and service charges increased by £108,892. The increase came from gaining 32 housing units during the year, which partly offset a reduction in our social care contract income of £257,238.

Our housing-related operating costs decreased by £287,287 compared to the

previous year. This was largely because we did fewer planned repairs than expected, because we had to prioritise responsive repairs with a new contractor after our original contractor went bankrupt.

Our operating surplus for the year was £1,262,053 (14.2% of turnover), compared to a budget surplus of £801,487. The surplus after interest was £797,163 (8.9% of turnover). The surpluses met our business plan targets of achieving an operating surplus of at least 10% of turnover and a surplus after interest of at least 5% of turnover.

Our development activities resulted in a net cost of £119,935 (2014: £129,004), as expected. Management services and sundry items contributed a surplus of £48,499 (2014: £42,763).

Our cash balances have increased during the year from £696,788 to £706,529. Additional drawdowns of £0.5m were made to fund development.

Our full accounts are available on request.

**Donna Marshall**, Finance Director and Company Secretary

## Value for Money (VFM)

In line with our fully revised and updated Value for Money strategy, we continued to balance providing good quality services against the price restrictions inevitably resulting from competitive tendering, at a time when our commissioners' budgets are reducing.

During 2014-2015, we were able to reduce the average cost of a support hour by a further 5%. We also successfully kept our overhead costs to around 11% of turnover.

Making the best use of our assets, we opted to sell a redundant hostel in Wimbledon to a private developer. The £4.6m sale was completed in October 2015.

We began work to convert an unsustainable former care home in Farnham into four self-contained flats, which are due to complete by the end of March 2016.

We also remodelled a low-demand hostel in Oxfordshire to provide accommodation for a high-care group, securing void cover payments from the local authority for a five-year period.

Following the liquidation of our principal repairs contractor, we carried out an interim procurement exercise, which produced savings of approximately 18%.

We expect the full EU-compliant procurement exercise for a long-term repairs contract that we will carry out during the current finance year to deliver savings of 10% against our current costs.

Amongst other steps being taken during 2015-2016, we plan to undertake a cost-saving exercise to reduce costs by 5% overall.



### **Board Members**

at 30th September 2015

#### **Board**

Jane Harrison (*Chair*)

John Daley

Wendy Crichlow

Ian Lines

Nicola Philip

Adrian Polisano

Vince Mewett

Jane Minter

Karen Hillhouse

Sally Reay

#### **Executive Directors**

David Williams

*Chief Executive*

Donna Marshall

*Finance Director and Company Secretary*

#### **Registered Office:**

The Coach House, Gresham Road, Staines, Middlesex TW18 2AE

Company Number: 1261380

Charity Number: 271547

Registered with the Homes and Communities Agency,  
Number LH 2174

Auditors: Grant Thornton UK LLP

Solicitors: Devonshires

Bankers: Lloyds TSB Bank plc



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[www.ability-housing.co.uk](http://www.ability-housing.co.uk)