



Promoting Independent Living

ANNUAL REPORT

2016-2017



Ability



Annual Report 2016-17

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Welcome

from CEO Jeff Skipp

It has been a busy and exciting year at Ability. We reviewed some of our work, to ensure we provide the best possible service to customers and we made some changes as a result.

We are now delivering our repairs service in a new and better way – by using contractors who are local to our different areas. This should also reduce our costs as the contractors are likely to spend less time travelling between jobs.

We checked how well we meet our health & safety responsibilities. This has always been our top priority, but we wanted to double-check following the Grenfell Tower fire.

Combining with another charity, we began planning a new supported housing scheme on the south coast, for people with autism.

We introduced computer-based e-learning training for our care & support staff which has proved to be so convenient that staff now take more courses.

Our new care & support quality system helps us monitor our performance and makes sure we meet the requirements of our regulators, the Care Quality Commission. It also helps to show where we need to improve.

Over the next 12 months, we plan to expand our care & support services, so that we can support more people to be independent. We will make sure our new repairs service delivers the improvements we expect and we will take forward our plans for the new autism service.



Our highlights

A new repairs service



Wendy at the Just Housing call centre

We launched our new-look repairs service in September, with support from Just Housing Group. They specialise in helping landlords like Ability to improve repairs for their customers.

Just Housing Group run a repairs call centre for us. When you need a repair, you can phone them on freephone 0808 164 7474.

They have also helped us to find and manage good local contractors. Local contractors spend less time travelling between jobs, so your repairs get done more quickly, making the service better for our customers.

We introduced our new service because customers keep telling us that repairs are the area of our work that most needs improving.

Official opening at Phoebe Cusden House

In March, we held the official opening of our new supported living service owned by Reading Borough Council.

Phoebe Cusden House is home

to 10 customers with learning and physical disabilities, mental health and complex needs. Our team of 8 support staff provide them with round-the-clock support.

On opening day, customers took the guest of honour, Cllr Mohammed Ayub, on a guided tour of their flats and up to the rooftop terrace. They were joined by other councillors and family members.



Celebrating the official opening of Phoebe Cusden House in Reading.

The celebration ended with tea and cake at Cedar Court care home, which is just next door.

Q-Team visits

In February, the Q-Team visited Hayes Park Lodge in Hillingdon. Hayes Park Lodge is a service for people with mental health needs. We support the 21 customers who live there.

Q-Team member James met customers in the lounge, to ask them questions about their lives and the support we provide. He says: "The overall visit was a success. We were greeted by a member of staff when we arrived

and shown into the communal lounge... a few of the customers were waiting for us and some were really engaged and wanted to talk."



The Q-Team talk to customers at Hayes Park Lodge

In October, it was the turn of Phoebe Cusden House in Reading. Liam Toner from the Q-Team talked to two customers in the communal area and a third in his flat.

Care & support – what you told us



Peter (left) and Stephen (right) with Support Worker Pablo.

Last year, we asked PFA Research to carry out a care & support survey for us. We wanted to know what you think of our services.

A total of 221 customers sent back their forms and nearly 9 out of 10 said they were happy with their Ability support service.

Your home



The condition of your home is important to you, so it's a priority for us too.

Repairs to your home

Morgan Sindall Property Services carried out 2,669 ordinary repairs to your homes for us in the year to mid-September 2017.

New repairs service

In response to customer feedback, we wanted to find a better way to provide you with reliable repairs, based locally to you.

We discussed this with Morgan Sindall, but together decided to end their contract early.

We are now working with repairs experts Just Housing Group. They run a repairs call centre for us. They also helped us to find locally based maintenance contractors.

With companies like Spectrum Property Care in the west of our area and Olli Property Management in the east, we are now saving money and getting repairs done more quickly. The call centre helps this process by grouping jobs together by area for certain days of the week.

Being local also means that our new contractors can get to emergency and urgent jobs more quickly.

Specialists K&T Heating now provide all our gas servicing and maintenance.

Improving performance

With support from Just Housing Group, we are in a much better position to monitor performance. Because we now use smaller, specialist contractors, there is less sub-contracting (where the contractor gets a job done by someone else). We have more direct control. This is just what customers have been asking us for.

Planned maintenance

Our change of contractor meant we were only able to carry out a limited number of larger, planned jobs last year.

However, we did install:

- windows and doors in six homes
- one central heating system
- one kitchen, and
- one car port

We continued a cycle of important property safety checks.

Facts & Figures



of customers were happy with their repair



of jobs were fixed at the first visit



of emergency repairs were finished within 24 hours (target 100%)



of urgent repairs were finished within 7 days (target 95%)



of routine repairs were finished within 21 days (target 95%)



of appointments were kept (target 95%)



of homes gained a gas safety certificate (target 100%)



Kevin Sterling (Housing Services Officer) , Peter James (Just Housing Group) and Jackie Davis (Director of Assets & Property), carrying out a risk assessment.

Stock condition surveys

We decided that we needed to update our information about the condition of our homes. This helps us to plan major repairs and maintenance in advance.

Just Housing Group have now surveyed 654 of our properties for us – around 88% of our stock.

We will store this information using a computer program called Geometra. The program will help us to plan and budget for long-term work.

Safety, safety!

In the summer, we carried out fire risk assessments to all of our blocks and have put right any defects we found.

We are updating electrical testing certificates at 400 properties in 2017. We make sure all our properties are tested at least every five years.

In December, we updated our asbestos surveys and re-inspections at 170 properties.

Plans for 2017-18

We will be working closely with Just Housing Group to make the most of our new repairs system.

Our planned maintenance work will prioritise any work our safety checks have identified. We expect to fit new gas boilers, re-wire some homes, improve fire safety and refurbish lifts.

Your tenancy

Our housing team lets and manages Ability homes and makes sure you can handle your tenancy.



What Ability housing means for Paul

Paul lives at an Ability service in Southampton.

“I moved into my Ability flat in March 2017. I’d been in my previous flat for about 11 years, but in 2015 I became very unwell and my whole circumstances changed.

“I have Functional Neurological Disorder and now use a wheelchair. I was struggling to get around my flat and it became unmanageable. The council put me in touch with Ability and I had a visit from Joan, the Housing Services Officer.

“The experience with Joan and Ability was great from the start. She was really clear and fully explained the process. She also gave me time to think – which is something I appreciated. My disorder means I can get confused

and have memory issues so Joan’s patience was exactly what I needed. Even so, the process was very quick and I moved in sooner than expected.

“My Ability flat is great and there are no restrictions for me any more! It has a wet room, lower worktops and a sink which goes up and down, meaning I can do my own washing up. It has wide doors and a lot of space for me to move in my wheelchair, which I so needed.

“There were a few snagging issues when I first moved in, but they were resolved within a few weeks. Everything was done in a timely fashion.

“I want to take this opportunity to thank Joan. My condition is made worse when I’m stressed and Joan always goes the extra mile to help which really relieved my stress and means I’m physically coping better. You can tell she enjoys what she does, it’s not just a job for her.

“Now I’ve had some time as an Ability tenant, I want to do some volunteering. So I am now a part of the Ability Q-Team and Customer Panel. It’s good to be able to get involved and help other customers to give their feedback and make their homes better.”



Letting our homes

By the end of the year, we were providing 646 homes in 32 local authority areas.

Between October 2016 and September 2017, our average re-let time between customers was 17 days – the same as the previous year.

We are now working with Just Housing Group to speed up our lettings process. Faster lettings mean that customers can move in more quickly and we lose less rental income.

As soon as we hear someone is moving out, we will inspect the property and organise any repairs. We will also let the local authority know, so they can put forward a new tenant.

Housing team changes

Our new Housing Manager, Paul Herbert, manages a new-look team of three housing officers and five assistant housing officers. Paul originally started out with us as a housing officer, before joining the property and development team. Many of you will know him already.

In future, our housing services officers – including Kevin Sterling, who joined us recently – will be making more regular visits to check on properties and to check on landlord issues such as rent payments. Our supported housing assistants will spend more time checking on the wellbeing of customers.

Julie Gray now supports the team, as Housing Officer Assistant, providing a call helpline from our Staines office.



Plans for 2017-18

We plan to make regular estate visits.

We will make sure that:

- our properties continue to meet health & safety rules'
- the grounds are well maintained, and
- communal areas are being cleaned properly.

We will also work with customers who are behind with their rent.

Our assistant housing officers will try to visit everyone at least once a year to find out how well you are managing in your home.

We will work with Just Housing Group to re-let homes more quickly.

Involving you

We aim to involve you in our work and help you to enjoy living more independently.

Local surveys start with Hillingdon



We began carrying out local surveys, to find out how customers experience our services locally.

At Sessile Court, 9 customers took part. We asked them about the support they get from Ability. We asked what we were doing well and what we could be doing better.

One customer told us:

“Ability look after me. Everything is OK. They are doing well”, while another said: “Ability could do things more quickly.”

Another 12 residents took part in a survey at Hayes Park Lodge, 13 at Yew Tree Lodge and 7 at Hamlet Lodge – a total of 41 customers in all.

The Q-Team – collecting your feedback

Our award-winning customer-led Q-Team did more great work collecting feedback from customers and recommending changes.

The team visited Hayes Park Lodge in February and Phoebe Cusden House in October.

Checking back on Hayes Park Lodge, six months later, the team found several customers were getting more encouragement to take up social activities.

One customer now had a safe place to pray. The lounge was due to be redecorated, with a new noticeboard for local information.



Next year, the Q-Team will visit Wishbone Way and Rosedene in Woking, Pound House in Dorking, the floating support service in Hillingdon, Fiddlers Green in Surbiton and Yew Tree Lodge in Hillingdon.

Facts & Figures

We received 13 housing complaints

7

were about anti-social behaviour

1

was about estate management

5

were about rent

We received 25 care & support complaints

17

were about the standard of support

6

were about communication

2

were about customers wanting more support

Customer complaints

From October 2016 to the end of September 2017, we received 57 complaints. We resolved more than half of these complaints within 10 days. Some were very complicated, especially repairs complaints, and took a bit longer.

We want to keep making the complaints process better for our customers. We have been improving our complaints system by training staff to:

- use our IT record-keeping system better, and
- be more consistent about keeping customers up to date on the progress of their complaint.

Customer Panel work



The Customer Panel, which is chaired by Stuart Rees, had 6 members last year. We recently approved 1 new member.

The Panel met in May and November, and looked at our performance with senior staff.

They also:

- heard how changes in the housing sector are affecting Ability
- looked at the housing packs we provide to new customers, and
- heard how things were going with the Hillingdon Peer Support Group.



Hillingdon Peer Support Group get together for a trip to Kew Gardens.

Stuart, James and Liam brainstormed with Carol, who produces the Window newsletter for us. They agreed on a new look and more practical articles for customers. When they checked over the summer edition, James said:

“I was very impressed with the layout regarding future benefits and housing awards.”

Peer support in Hillingdon



Hillingdon Peer Support Group is going from strength to strength, with 23 customers now signed up and taking part.

Peer support groups bring people together to organise their own activities. They are a great way for customers to socialise and support each other.

Staff member Sammy Piwovar has been organising 3 events

every month for the Hillingdon group – including trips to Kew Gardens, Black Park and Ruislip Lido. Customers picked fruit at a local farm and visited the Harefield Dogs Trust. They went bowling and to the cinema. Trips out to lunch and visits to tea rooms were also popular.

Customers have told Sammy they would love to do some gardening. With donated gardening equipment and lots of advice from experts, customers will soon be able to grow their own fruit and vegetables on a Hillingdon allotment.

One group member said:

“I like that you are supported and get to socialise with other people and to get out of your house and into the community.”

Customers are now coming up with lots of suggestions of their own – so there will be plenty of activity this year too.

Staff changes

In the summer, we said goodbye to Maddy Cox our Customer Engagement Co-ordinator. Sharon Taylor took on her role from September. She says she is looking forward to meeting more customers!

Your support



We support customers to live more independently, as you work towards your personal goals.

Care & support survey

Last year's care & support survey gave us helpful feedback about what you think of our services.

One customer told us:

"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."

Inspected services

In January 2017, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) reported back that 3 of our services were good, but 2 needed to improve. Since then, we have been working hard to make sure we get a good or outstanding rating for all our regulated services next time around.

Local authorities also check the services we provide for them. Last year, we got a rating of 'good' or 'outstanding', following visits to Yew Tree Lodge, Wishbone Way, Sessile Court and Phoebe Cusden House.

Making improvements

Rita Asamoah joined as our new Director of Care & Support in April. Since then, we have changed the structure of our care & support team.

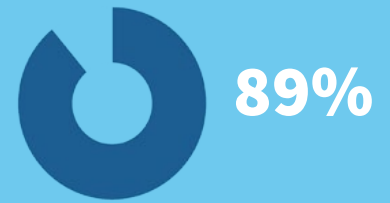
In the summer, we recruited Christina Harben to the new role of Quality Lead. We also took on Diane Husbands as Training and Development Manager to focus on our staff. All our managers now meet regularly to share the way they work and to learn from each other.

We brought in new internal quality checks, including recording weekly data on a special IT system. We keep a register to check we are meeting the standards set by the CQC and the local authorities we work with.

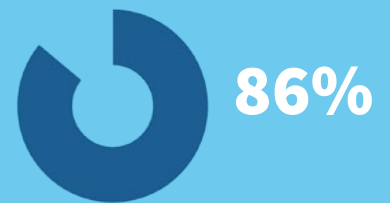
We introduced a new e-learning (computer-based) social care training package. We now have 98 staff who either have a care certificate or are studying for one.

To allow us to use fewer agency staff in future, we raised some pay rates to keep good staff. We also encouraged staff to recommend people through a 'refer a friend' scheme.

Facts & Figures



said they were happy with their Ability support service



said we helped them feel safe



said our staff treat them with respect



said we support them to be more independent



would recommend us to other people needing support

What care & support means for Chris



“I have been living at Loddon Court for quite a while now; about 14 years. I used to live in Caversham but wasn’t happy. Now I live here, I’m really happy and am going to stay.

“My support worker is Paul and he’s brilliant. He supports me with so much. I wanted to go on holiday to Spain, so he helped me to talk to ‘Smile’, who find people to go with you. We looked at how much it would cost and he helped me to do a budget, so I had money to pay. He helped me book it too and even took me to the airport to meet the carers from Smile. I have other holidays booked too!

“When I’m at home, we go to the cinema, which I like. We saw Star Wars on our last trip and it was so good! Paul is fun to go with as he is always helping me with things and I enjoy his company.

“Money is something I do need help with, so Paul and the other staff help me look at what money I have, what I can spend and how much I can save. I want to have savings so it helps me to have a budget. They also come shopping with me and give me support with buying clothes and things. I like to go into Reading town for my clothes shopping.

“The flat I live in is just great. I

have pictures up and chose all my own furniture. I cook in my flat with support from staff. They mostly help me to plan meals, shop for food and cook. We cook all sorts of things together – I can’t remember any of them at the moment though! The staff here also help me keep my flat tidy. It really is the best thing how much the staff all help me here. They’re happy and they help me to do things on my own.”



Facts & figures

- Our gross income for care & support was £5 million.
- We grew our care & support services in Hampshire and Surrey.
- We opened a brand-new supported living service in Reading.
- 99% of our customers were able to continue to live independently.

Plans for 2017-18

We will:

- continue to support customers to meet their independent living goals
- get a CQC ‘good’ or better rating for all our regulated services
- make sure our staff are well trained and supported
- recruit and retain staff to reduce our agency staffing to below 6% of our budget
- aim to grow and develop
- stay financially stable, by renegotiating our fees to give us a 2.5% operating surplus

Update

from our Chair Jane Harrison



We make sure that our services are strong and our organisation is sustainable.

Governance matters

During the year we reviewed our governance structures, to make the Board stronger. As a result, we recruited an additional board member with senior care & support experience. We held two Board strategy meetings, rather than one. We also increased the number of annual Finance, Audit and Risk Committee meetings to 3.

Wendy Crichlow and Jane Minter retired from the Board last year. We would like to thank them for their contribution.

Our year's work

With a new Chief Executive in post, we spent the year consolidating our position. We reviewed many of our internal processes to make sure we are delivering the best possible service to our customers.

The tragic fire at Grenfell Tower prompted us to arrange for new fire risk assessments, and we reviewed our other health & safety responsibilities as well.

We brought in new quality checking systems for care & support and centralised our system for handling housing queries, so they can be resolved more quickly.

During 2018-19, we will be focusing on quality. We also want to strengthen the relationship between our housing and care & support services, so that we can deliver seamless services to our customers and offer innovative packages to our local authority partners and commissioners.

We will also focus on keeping our care & support services viable. While we understand that local authorities are facing financial pressures, we will be reminding them that the fee they pay must cover the cost of the services we provide.

Facts & Figures

£943

average spent on responsive repairs to each home (previous year £732)

£676

average spent on planned maintenance to each home (previous year £815)

£1.1m

amount spent on improvements to existing homes, including kitchens and bathrooms (previous year £0.8m)

£10.6m

turnover at year end (previous year £10.0m)

£10m

housing-related costs (previous year £8.8m)

£0.6m

operating surplus (previous year £1.3m)

£5m

gross income for care & support (previous year £4.7m)

Value for money savings

We made some significant savings during the year.

- Sadly, we had to close our *YourAbility* services in Reading and Bournemouth, because they were no longer financially viable. We will save £40,000 a year on staff costs.
- We agreed fee increases with Reading Borough Council and *YourAbility* Havant, so that these services could continue.
- Introducing online e-learning for staff will save around £5,000 a year on training and transport costs.
- We reduced the expenses around staff escorting customers by £7,000 a year.
- We stopped providing lunch for staff holding meetings to save £5,000 a year.
- We renegotiated our loan with Barclays to reduce the interest rate by up to 0.6%.
- We saved around £44,000 in interest payments by using our available cash to reduce our loan balances.
- We are investing in our core management team to improve service quality and our financial performance over the next two financial years.
- We are spending more to keep good staff, which should also reduce our re-recruitment costs.

Plans for 2017-18

- We will continue to make value for money savings where we can.
- We have a budget of £1.3m for repairs, maintenance and planned works.

Board members

as at 30 September 2017

Jane Harrison (Chair)

Karen Hillhouse

Ian Lines

Vince Mewett

Nicola Philp

Adrian Polisano

Sally Reay

Gina Small (Co-opted)

Executive directors

Jeff Skipp, Chief Executive &
Company Secretary

Rita Asamoah,
Director of Care & Support

Auditors, solicitors & bankers

Auditors: Grant Thornton UK LLP

Solicitors: Devonshires

Bankers: Barclays Bank PLC

Registrations

Company number: 1261380

Charity number: 271547

Registered with the Homes
and Communities Agency,
Number LH 2174

Company registered office

Ability Housing Association
The Coach House, Gresham Road
Staines, Middlesex TW18 2AE

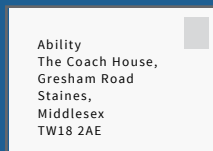
How to get in touch with us



01784 490 910



info@Ability-housing.co.uk



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

facebook.

AbilityHA

twitter 

@AbilityHA

Instagram

ability_pictures

Report production team

Maddy Cox - Editor

Carol Saunders - Copywriting

Keith Farmer - Design

www.ability-housing.co.uk