



Promoting  
Independent  
Living





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# Welcome from CEO Jeff Skipp

Welcome to our 2017-2018 annual report. As you will see Ability has achieved a lot over the last year. I have listed some of the key areas below:

We have continued to invest significantly in our tenants' homes, ensuring our Repairs and Maintenance services are delivered on time and to a good standard of workmanship; and, through an ongoing programme of Landlord Health & Safety works, ensure our tenants remain safe. To manage this, we have recruited a Property Services Manager, Richard Kent, and a Property Services Officer, Maggie Biddlecombe, to provide the capacity and expertise to manage this well.

We have begun to change how we manage our housing, working more closely with tenants so everyone has regular contact with their Housing Officers, so we can resolve any problems quicker. Going forward, each Housing Officer will manage no more than 150 properties to ensure they have the time to provide a really good service to our tenants. This will be fully implemented by April 2019 and we will be monitoring the improvements these changes bring.

Within our Care & Support services, we have also been focussing closely on the quality of services we provide to our customers. All of our services have achieved a 'Good' rating from our regulator, the Care Quality Commission (CQC). We have introduced management-training programmes for managers and ensured that all our colleagues in Care & Support have opportunities to undertake the necessary training to deliver high quality Care & Support services.

During the year, we have renegotiated the fees for our Care & Support services with the local authorities with whom we work. This has been an important piece of work and will ensure our services are financially secure.

Our plans for next year include continuing to improve our repair service, and settling in our new housing management service to have closer contact with tenants. Within Care & Support we want to increase the number of people we serve whilst always seeking to improve the quality of the services we deliver.

We are looking forward to working closely with you during the year ahead.

# Our highlights



## The new repairs service Care & Support - What you told us:

We have continued to develop our new repairs service, which started in September 2017. The Just Housing Group run this service for us.

We are working with companies who provide different repairs and maintenance services, such as general building maintenance, electrical repairs, out-of-hours calls, gas servicing and general repairs. If you have used the repairs service recently, you may have met contractors from MCG Building Contractors, Laker, Lux, CHS or a number of others.

Because Ability Housing's homes are spread over a large area across the South East and South West, we try to batch non-urgent repairs together by area. This reduces contractors' travelling time and means they can spend a day in one place working on a number of repairs, which saves time and money.

*Fiddlers Green  
Q Team visit buffet*

We are very keen to know what you think of our services and last year we carried out care and support customer and family surveys.

A total of 133 customers and 57 family/appointee members sent back their surveys.

One of our customers told us: "I like my support workers, they are understanding and help me with my needs, anxiety and confidence within the community."

## Q Team visits

Ability's Q Team carried out these visits in 2018:

- Wishbone Way in Woking on 25th January 2018
- Fiddlers Green in Surbiton on 14th March 2018
- Dorking services on 25th July 2018
- Hillingdon in Hayes on 27th July 2018

We recruited three new customers to the Q Team from: Phoebe Cusden House, Sir Robert Mews and within the Middlesex community.



**Just Housing Group: Freephone 0808 164 7474**

# Your Home



We want to ensure you feel happy and secure in your home, so we work hard to ensure we keep it in good condition.

## Property Services Team

In 2018, we strengthened our Property Services team to support the services we are now delivering in-house. Richard Kent started in May as the Property Services Manager and he has been joined by Maggie Biddlecombe

and Martin Whale. Maggie is carrying out property inspections and helping Richard manage our contractors. Martin is a Chartered Surveyor who is helping us with our asset management plans, property data and compliance.



*Richard, Maggie and Martin*

## Facts & Figures:



of homes gained a gas safety certificate



empty properties were refurbished



**7** Housing and estate management (including rent)

**11** Repairs

**26** Anti-Social Behaviour

# Plans for 2018-19

## Safety

**Fire:** in 2016-17, we carried out fire risk assessments at all of our blocks and put right any defects we found. This year we re-surveyed a number of blocks, often working alongside the local Fire Service.

We have carried out some additional works to improve fire safety further, such as alterations to doors, emergency lighting and refuse disposal areas.

Our staff also need your help to keep your block as safe as possible: they may ask you to remove personal items from corridors that are fire escape routes because they may be a smoke or fire hazard.

**Electrics:** we have carried out 430 electrical safety inspections and put right any problems. Most of these involved sockets or light switches that needed repairing. If you find a socket or light switch which is damaged or doesn't seem to be working correctly, it is important that you report it to Just Housing Group so they can organise a repair. This is to keep you safe.

**Gas:** we changed contractors last year. Our new contractor for gas servicing and repairs is Central Heating Services Ltd (CHS). All of our properties that use gas, have an up to date Landlord Gas Safety Certificate. It is very important that you allow the gas contractor to carry out this annual servicing work, which is a legal requirement.

- We will be continuing to replace old boilers.
- We plan to replace windows and doors at one of our estates in Liss, Hampshire.
- We will be carrying out major repairs to estate paths and roadways, and renewing several carports.

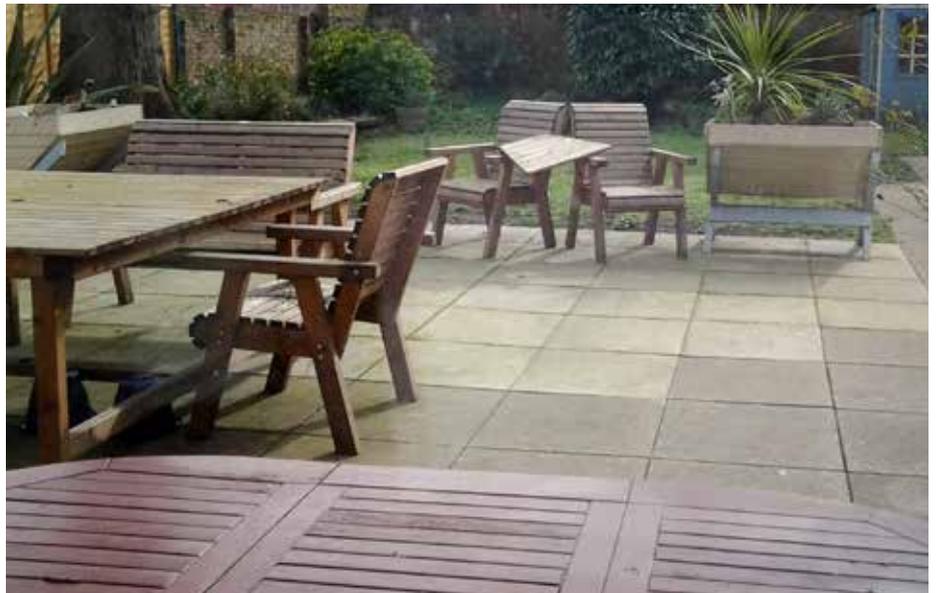


# Your Tenancy



## Changes to the Housing Management team

There have been a number of changes to the Housing Management team this year. One of our Housing Officers, Joan Williams, retired in July 2018 after working for Ability for 33 years. Joan was Ability's first employee and covered the South and South West areas. We all wish Joan a very well-deserved and happy retirement.



## What Ability Housing means for Christian

Christian moved to an Ability bungalow in July 2017. He says, "I was living in a first-floor flat but my health started to deteriorate two years ago as I've got motor neurone disease. I now have trouble walking as my legs are giving up and it's slowly getting worse.

"It was getting difficult for me to get up and down the stairs to use the facilities - I hope to get an electronic wheelchair soon.

"I was referred to Ability from my local council and when I was offered this bungalow, I took it straightaway. Everything in the bungalow is perfect for me as it's on one level. I've got wide doors and low counter tops in the kitchen so it's easy for me to use.

I feel lucky to have this. My Housing Officer was helpful, I spoke to her on the phone a few times when I moved in and she helped me get my intercom fixed and to settle in."

"I would definitely recommend being with Ability. It's excellent for me as there are other Ability tenants in the close, so it's a nice environment."



## Housing and Tenancy Management services 2017-18

Priorities for this year have included:

### **Estate Inspections**

Our Property Services and Housing Management staff carry out regular estate inspections to check on the safety and condition of housing schemes, both inside and outside.

The team will try to let you know the dates of these inspections so you can take part and speak to them about how your block or scheme is managed and maintained.

### **Service Charges**

As well as rent, many of our tenants pay charges for services such as cleaning and grounds

maintenance, lifts and hoists, kitchen appliances, alarm call monitoring and door entry systems. Over the year, our Housing Management team visited most of these properties and schemes to ensure that everyone has the correct information and is receiving and being charged for the correct services.

### **Tenancy Audits**

The team has also started a programme of Tenancy Audits, which will continue this year.

They will be visiting all of Ability's tenants to make sure we have up to date information about our tenants and their households. The information we receive is helping us to identify our tenants changing support needs and ensure that our homes are meeting the individual needs of our customers.

# Plans for 2018-19

- So we can continue to improve the services that we deliver to you, we are making some changes to the Housing Management team in the year ahead.
- We are planning to combine the roles of the Housing Officers and Supported Housing Assistants. These new roles will cover smaller areas than our current three Housing Officers and deal with all aspects of tenancy management and tenancy sustainment support.
- We are also planning to recruit a Lettings and Project Officer who will be based at our head office.

# Involving You

We aim to involve you in what we do - and help you live more independently.

## Surrey services overview:

Ability's Surrey services based at Wishbone Way, Rosedene and Genesis House continued to increase customer engagement by organising social activities for customers.

## Wishbone Way:



*Wishbone Way coffee morning*

Ability provided garden chairs for the communal garden.

One customer has moved to more independent accommodation, and another will follow.

## Rosedene:

The communal kitchen at Rosedene was refurbished in February 2018, which provided a dishwasher, replacement crockery and the introduction of weekly baking classes.

Fun customer and family activities during the year included parties for Easter and Comic Relief, and an activity room was opened.

Staff and customers continued to work together throughout the year and attended the musical Thriller



*Rosedene barbecue*

Live at the Peacock Theatre in Woking. They also held a customer, family and friends barbecue, and a Halloween party. In December 2018, customers visited London to see the Christmas lights.

As part of a pre-Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection, the service was visited by Care 4 Quality (C4Q) Ltd who graded the service and all areas of the Key Lines of Enquiry as 'Good'. They also ran a customer workshop on safeguarding.

Positive developments this year include one customer who has become more independent by working with care and support staff. Meanwhile, at a review meeting, the parents of another customer commented that this is the happiest they'd seen them in 15 years.

## Genesis House:

The service ran activities including a fruit and vegetable gardening project and Halloween and Christmas parties.

An oral hygienist from Surrey & Borders NHS Trust ran a workshop with customers to improve their awareness of dental hygiene.

One customer has moved on to live more independently in local authority accommodation.

## Q Team – collecting your feedback



*Genesis House barbecue*

Our award-winning customer-led Q Team continued to visit customers across our services and were impressed by the continued efforts of staff to provide levels of support across diverse needs.

The Q Team made sure that any of your feedback or recommended changes were conveyed to support staff and followed up. During the Fiddlers Green Q Team visit one customer said that he felt he was treated like "a human being," and that the support staff helped him but didn't, "take my individuality away."



Hillingdon Peer Support Group visited Kew Gardens

Next year, the Q Team plan to visit Havant, Rosedene, Yew Tree Lodge, Slough and Loddon Court.

## Customer Panel work

The Customer Panel held an away day in Portsmouth on 23rd April 2018. They discussed issues including:

- Ability customer engagement
- Obtaining customer feedback on Housing and Care & Support

The Customer Panel met again in November 2018 in Old Windsor and discussed housing services staff restructuring, housing and tenant engagement and the development of a Contractors' Code of Conduct.

## Peer support in Hillingdon



Ability staff member Sammy Piwowar runs the Hillingdon Peer Support group.

The peer support group have been on more than 15 trips in 2018, which have included visits to the London Science Museum, the Battle of Britain Bunker, Kew Gardens, bowling, the cinema, Eastcote House Gardens, and a Christmas lunch at the Water's Edge at Ruislip Lido.

Another 16 customers joined peer support in the last year and overall attendance to peer support meetings has increased.

Sammy recently started a newsletter, which goes out to all peer support customers every month.

The National Woodland Trust has donated two trees to the peer support group, which is considering the right place to plant them.

Next year the peer support group hopes to set up a swimming group at the local pool.

One of the members said: "While you are having fun with friends in the peer support group you find that you have forgotten what you were worrying about and it makes life less of a burden. Things aren't so bad".

# Care & Support Survey Results

**93%** said they were happy with their Ability service

**90%** said we helped them feel safe

**93%** said our staff treat them with respect

**84%** said we support them to be more independent

**88%** would recommend Ability to other people needing support

# Your Support

Supporting more independent living as you work towards personal goals.



Rita Asamoah  
Director of Care & Support

## Care & Support survey:

Quote from our Care & Support survey. *"I like my support workers, they are understanding and help me with my needs and anxiety and confidence within the community."*

## Care & Support

Ability Care & Support deliver services in seven Local Authority areas in England. Our focus is to provide high quality services that deliver positive outcomes to all customers, enabling them to achieve their goals and take control of their lives.

Currently Ability has five services registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC), all of which have been rated as 'Good' in all areas. We continue to develop and retain a high-performing workforce led by strong local leaders and embedding Ability Positive values in all that we do.

**1. Quality** We have focussed significantly on the quality and experience of our customers by streamlining our internal quality processes. We have commissioned an external organisation to quality audit our services every six months, showing areas of strength and identifying areas for development and analysing trends.

**2. People Development** We have enhanced our people development, ensuring our teams are equipped to deliver excellent support. We have invested in additional training through the use of SocialTV, management training providing first line managers with training in areas of people and business management. We look to build on these strong foundations as we grow and develop.

**3. Customer Focus** We have enhanced our services and developed the breadth of our offer. Through strong external and internal partnerships, we have been able to offer supported living opportunities to people who have been living in institutional settings or where current living arrangements have broken down. This has been achieved by innovation in the use of our housing stock and flexibility in the housing adaptations we

## Facts & Figures:

We received:

- 9** Care & Support complaints
  - 1** raised by family about Ability staff
  - 1** raised by a customer about another customer
  - 7** raised by customers about staff (one of these was an external contractor). From these two complaints were sent to Local Authority safe guarding teams

**64%** Customer complaints have significantly reduced by 64% since last year

**90%** All Care & Support staff are now 90% compliant with their mandatory training requirements.

This includes completing their Care Certificate training in their first 6 months.

make alongside co-produced support packages that reflect the aspirations and requirements of customers, maximising opportunities for successful outcomes.

## Staff Changes

In April 2017, we said goodbye to David Fox, former Head of Care & Support who left after 18 years of dedicated and distinguished service.

## What Care & Support means for Amajit & Robert



### **Amajit, Hillingdon: making the move to independence in the community**

Amajit has been receiving support from Ability for three years. He was previously living in a shared house in the London Borough of Hillingdon, where he received support a few hours a week.

Amajit joined peer support last year as he felt he needed to be more sociable.

“I was nervous at first but after a few meet ups I felt more comfortable. I enjoy the activities

here. I liked the visit to the Rural Tea Garden in Hillingdon. It’s helped me get out more and make new friends.”

Amajit moved out into his own property in the community in December 2017.

“I’m much happier now having my own space and freedom.”

### **What Care & Support means for Robert**



Ability customer Robert lives in supported housing at Sir Robert Mews. Following a road traffic accident at the age of 19, Robert suffers from short-term memory loss.

Robert’s accident has not prevented him from living a full life with the help of Care & Support staff, he says. “I like to study and I have gained distinctions in Microsoft Word, Publisher and cookery courses, as well as gaining a certificate in horticulture and I learnt British Sign Language at college.

Robert recently joined the Ability Q Team, he said: “I want to help prepare other customers when they come to Ability. I can understand how they might be feeling, and I’m willing to listen to people and challenge their thinking.”

# Plans for 2018-19

## We will:

- Develop and deliver innovative services in line with customers’ needs.
- Maintain sustainable growth to enhance our financial viability and sustainability through growth and full cost recovery in all our services.
- Recruit, develop and retain a high-performing workforce led by strong local leaders and embedding Ability Positive values in all that we do.
- Provide adequate systems and processes to deliver, monitor and evidence continuous improvement.
- All our staff will receive positive behaviour support training.
- C4Q, our external care auditors, will visit our services twice a year to ensure we are CQC compliant.

# Update



## from our Chair Jane Harrison

### Strong governance is essential to Ability's success

The Board have agreed a new five-year business plan, which sets out Ability's key objectives up until 2023. Specifically, these are:

- To implement a more intensive form of housing management service, ensuring tenants have regular contact with Housing Officers and issues are resolved quickly.
- To ensure our responsive and planned maintenance service delivers a quality service, homes are maintained to a high standard and we ensure we get good value for money from the building contractors we work with.
- To expand our customer engagement programme, giving customers and tenants a greater say in how Ability develops and is managed.
- To increase the number of people we serve in our Care & Support services, working with customers to co-produce the services they receive and ensure people have greater control and choice over the life they lead.
- To ensure we achieve the above within the budget available from rents and charges for our Care & Support services.

**The plan** is ambitious and puts our tenants and customers at the heart of everything we do. The Board will be monitoring how the business plan is implemented and will ensure that progress is made on time and in budget.

**To achieve** the above, having a strong Board with the right skills and experience is essential. During the year, we have recruited three new Board members. Dominic Wallace, Maureen Osborne and Jim MacIntyre, who collectively bring enhanced knowledge in the areas of Risk, Finance and Asset management.

I am looking forward to working with our Board over the coming years to deliver Ability's business plan.

## Finance Facts & Figures:

**£1,094**

average spend on responsive repairs to each home (previous year £943)

**£998**

average spend on planned maintenance to each home (previous year £676)

**£2,824**

spent on each home to manage the property (previous year £2,077)

**£10.8m**

turnover at year end (previous year £10.6m)

**£10.3m**

housing related costs (previous year £10.2m)

**£0.4m**

operating surplus (previous year £0.4m)

**£5.3m**

gross income for Care & Support (previous year £5m)

# Ability

## the story of the year



**Peter Gardiner**

Director of Resources  
& Deputy Chief  
Executive Officer

We have had a really busy year at Ability, with the following highlights:

- At the start of the year, we spent a lot of time talking to the local authorities that we work for, and agreed increases to our income so that Care & Support can continue to deliver their excellent service.
- Our housing team has spent a lot of time during the spring and summer, ensuring that we have good, local contractors to keep our properties in first-class condition. Our maintenance calls are handled by Just Housing Group, and they commission local contractors to carry out the works you report to them.
- In the summer, we invested in new computers for our head-office, bringing our systems up to date and making sure, that we can support the business going forward. This systems work was complete by the autumn.
- We also invested a lot in new computer equipment for all of our schemes in the autumn, so they can continue to support customers quickly and effectively.
- During the course of the year, we have also said 'Hello' to 60 new colleagues who have joined Ability in Care & Support, Housing and Support services at Coach House. We have also said 'Goodbye and good luck' to 48 colleagues off to new opportunities or to a well-earned retirement.
- The end of the year saw Ability in a secure financial position, with a clear budget in place for next year and a business plan in place for the next five years.

## Budget for 2018-19

- Budget turnover **£10.68m**
- Further investment in computers **£0.18m**
- Investing in your properties **£0.89m**

## Board Members

As at 30th September 2018

Jane Harrison (Chair)

Gina Small

Vince Mewett

Karen Hillhouse

Sally Reay

Ian Lines

Nicola Philp

Dominic Wallace

Maureen Osborne

Jim MacIntyre

## Executive Directors

Jeff Skipp, CEO

Peter Gardiner, Director of Resources & Deputy CEO

Rita Asamoah, Director of Care & Support

Jackie Davis, Director of Assets and Housing

## Auditors, solicitors & bankers

Auditors: Grant Thornton UK LLP

Solicitors: Devonshires

Bankers: Barclays Bank PLC

## Registrations

Company number: 1261380

Charity number: 271547

Registered with The Regulator for Social Housing for England & Wales,  
Number LH2174

## Company registered office

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