

# ABILITY NEWS

Winter 2022

Promoting Independent Living

New Customer Contact Centre:

Tel: **0808 164 7474**

Email: [contact@ability-housing.co.uk](mailto:contact@ability-housing.co.uk)



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## Ability Positive values: at the heart of everything we do!

We work to our Ability Positive values and provide some excellent support across our services. We are working at improving how we record the great outcomes some of the people we support have achieved – and to celebrate their success whenever we can.



Case studies bring to life the impact we can have on individuals' lives and we want to be able to celebrate and promote these successes showcasing the achievements our customers

and residents make and the positive difference Ability can and does make to the people we serve.



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## Welcome by Jeff Skipp, CEO



There has been a lot of coverage recently about housing associations in the news after the tragic death of a two-year-old boy, Awaab Ishah due to extreme damp and mould in the family home. In this edition we have included advice and practical steps residents can take to help prevent damp and mould issues. Our properties are maintained to a high standard, but these issues can still occur - and we are determined to help you resolve any issues in your home related to damp and mould at the earliest opportunity.

If you have any issues in your home that are worrying you, please ring our contact centre 0808 164 7474 and we will arrange a visit - and work with you to tackle the problem.

At Ability we are committed to working with residents to continually improve our services, understanding from you the changes we can make which will benefit you the most. In this edition there is an update on our five customer commitments and the progress we have made on these so far. We also talk about our new customer panel and the work it will be doing over the coming months to support Ability in

delivering excellent services to our residents.

A crucial way for Ability to understand the views and experiences of our customers is our customer satisfaction survey. This provides us with important information about the services we deliver, what you value and what we do well, as well as the areas where we are not so good and need to improve.

The survey is an important way for you to tell us about the service you receive and informs how we develop our services going forward. We will be sending customer satisfaction questionnaires to all our residents early in 2023

and I really hope you can find time to complete the questionnaire and let us know what you think.

For residents who need help completing the questionnaire, our Housing and Support Officers will be happy to help.

In this edition we have also included some money saving tips as we know the increases in gas, electric and food costs are making life more expensive for everyone.

I hope you enjoy this edition of Ability News. I wish you all season's greetings and a very Merry Christmas.

Yours sincerely

**Jeff Skipp, CEO**



# Delivery of customer strategy and contact centre

We told you in our last newsletter that our Customer Strategy made the five commitments to improve customer experience. Here is an update on each one:

## **1. We will communicate well and resolve problems**

The Contact Centre has now been operational since 9 May 2022. We have received and handled 3,518 calls since the launch. The centre is designed to be a single point of contact, where you can resolve any query you may have. We now log all calls that require a follow up to ensure that you receive further contact from us within two working days - or sooner if there is an emergency

## **2. We will ensure the good state of your home**

Our Housing and Support Officers carry out regular inspections of our communities to ensure that they are safe and pleasant places to live. We also have regular meetings with our contractors to monitor the status of any repairs and maintenance work which is carried out in your homes.

## **3. We will provide a supportive, proactive and responsive Housing Management service**

As part of the Intensive Housing Management (IHM) service, each of our customers can complete an IHM Support Plan with their Housing and Support Officer. We will ensure that everyone has a current IHM, which will be reviewed regularly as appropriate. We expect 100 per cent of these plans to be in place by the end of March 2023.

## **4. We will have meaningful engagement with our customers**

Our Customer Panel meets every other month. They are currently considering how we measure satisfaction with our repairs service and a member of the panel may contact you soon to ask your opinion about recent repairs to your home.

## **5. We will provide a supportive and personalised service to our customers**

The Intensive Housing Management (IHM) Support Plan is our blueprint for ensuring that we deliver a person-centred approach to the support we provide to you. Your IHM will be regularly reviewed as agreed with your Housing and Support Officer to ensure that you are receiving or are directed to any support that you need.

Over the past year, our Housing & Support Officers have been visiting our customers to roll out the Intensive Housing Management Support Plans and Tenancy Audits. Before March 2023, we will be visiting customers again to review the plans to ensure that the services and support that we offer to you meet your needs.





# Customer Panel update

**The Customer Panel has started to meet every two months. During these meetings we will be focussing on customer scrutiny of the services we deliver and how you think we can improve them.**

The first part of this will be members of our Customer Panel carrying out the customer satisfaction telephone calls after repairs and maintenance has been carried out in your home. The aim is to give us a greater insight into how you feel that our contractors are performing and identify areas for improvement.

In the new calendar year, the Customer Panel will be asked to look at some of the recent complaints that we have received. We want to get their opinions about how we responded to each complaint - and how we have learned from them.





5

## CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	★	★	★	★	★
<input type="checkbox"/>	★	★	★	★	
<input type="checkbox"/>	★	★	★		
<input type="checkbox"/>	★	★			
<input type="checkbox"/>	★				



# Ability Needs You!

## Customer Satisfaction Survey

**The feedback we receive from you as customers is incredibly important because it shapes how we deliver our services.**

This is how we developed our Customer Strategy and formed our in-house Contact Centre. It is why we ask you how satisfied you are with the repairs completed in your homes when they have been completed.

We also ask all our customers more detailed questions on their satisfaction with the services they receive from Ability in a Customer Satisfaction Survey every year.

These surveys will be sent to you in early 2023. We encourage all our customers to respond as fully as they can so we can make sure all our customers' voices are heard.

We will also be asking your Housing & Support Officers to contact you to ask whether you need any support in the completion of these surveys.



# COVID 19: keeping you and our staff safe and healthy

Ability's Care & Support continue to follow government guidance on the prevention and control of Covid 19.

We consider the potential risk presented from this virus to the health of those we support and the colleagues we work with. We are particularly careful to use personal protective equipment (PPE) when we are providing care or cleaning the room of someone with suspected or confirmed Covid 19. We are continuing to always use face masks when providing direct support.

Lateral flow testing for Covid continues in services to further reduce the risk of an outbreak. Customers and staff have been encouraged to get an autumn booster vaccination to give everyone extra protection.

We will continue to give all our customers advice about how to keep themselves safe and healthy during this uncertain time. We are continuing to monitor and apply the latest guidance – including updating our Infection Control Policy and Procedure on the use of PPE.





As a support worker working within the Hillingdon mental health floating support service for Ability Housing Association. I support people with mental health needs to live independently in the community, promoting recovery so people find hope and regain control of their lives, reaching their fullest potential in life. Many of our customers have secondary needs such as dual diagnosis of mental health and learning difficulties, substance misuse or physical health issues.



Ability Support Worker Georgie Scripps, pictured here with Cherry Holiday.

# A day in the life of an: Ability Support Worker

by Georgie Scripps

One of the joys of my role is that every day is different and throws up new challenges which we work with our customers to resolve. It is so fantastic to see our customers grow, in terms of acquiring new life skills, building up resilience so that they are empowered to eventually deal with setbacks themselves and to become more involved in the community where they have previously been so isolated.

My first visit is to JC who had just been given a new tenancy after spending 2 years in temporary accommodation. We completed the sign up and housing benefit/council tax reduction forms. Whilst we were there the contractor came to uncap the gas and I asked them to explain to JC how to operate the boiler/heating. Many of our customers have never managed their own home and lack the confidence and ability to attend to tasks that many of us take for granted e.g., budgeting, meal planning, filling in forms, meter readings and setting up accounts with utility providers, setting up direct debits etc. It is so rewarding to support and encourage customers to develop these skills to the point where they manage independently and gain enough confidence to find solutions to problems themselves. We completed an application form to The Fasnidge Trust for a grant for white goods-fridge/freezer, cooker and washing machine.

I then visit KS who needs support around debt management. We complete a budgeting plan for the next three months with all income and expenditure outlined on a month-by-month planner we downloaded. We then itemised all the debt and filed creditor letters in a document wallet. KS has debt of over £5,000 and I supported her to have a telephone consultation with Stepchange who offer debt advice. I ensured that KS understood

the options available to her and she opted to apply for an IVA which I supported her with.

Next is ME who needs support to apply for PIP and provide requested evidence. I supported her to complete the application form so that her benefits are maximised. While I am there ME announces that she has rats. She wishes to get a company to attend to them but does not know where to start. We call three companies found online and ask for quotes. With encouragement ME calls back to the firm she selected and plans for them to do the work.

Finally, I have a session with JK. JK had just been discharged from hospital after 2 years and had lost all her confidence and many of her life skills. She was socially isolated. I had referred her to the Mind walking group in order for her to be able to participate JK needed a freedom pass so that she could use the bus. JK also was experiencing social anxiety and felt unable to travel by bus. We agreed that over the next 2-3 weeks I would support her with travel training and go with her on a bus with the aim that I would be able to meet her at her destination and she could travel on the bus by herself. I also supported her to attend the walking group for the first two sessions as she did not know anyone and had no confidence to go there by herself. JK now attends every week by herself and has made two friends who she also meets up with for coffee and cinema trips.

Both of my customers KS and JK attend walking group. They have become good friends and a source of support for each other.





Ability Housing & Support Officer  
Gemma Granville.



# A day in the life of an: Housing & Support Officer

by Gemma Granville

I am a Housing & Support Officer in East & West Sussex and also for the East Hampshire area. I have not long been in the role as an HSO, however, everyday can be different and there are many rewards and challenges to the role.

My role consists of providing intensive housing management support which involves visiting tenants at their properties to discuss financial and social issues including assisting tenants with making referrals to ensure they have access to services to improve their quality of life.

I meet with tenants on the first day of their tenancy to complete their tenancy agreement and to provide any advice and guidance that they may need. I will then arrange to follow up with the tenant at a later date; to ensure they are settling in well into their new home.

I complete estate inspections of properties where there are communal spaces. Estate inspections are very helpful to ensure the health and safety of the building for tenants and visitors.

Annually, I complete tenancy audits with every customer, which I find is a very productive time to monitor our tenant's wellbeing and agree what support they would like from Ability Housing.

I enjoy meeting people and providing support to tenants to develop their independence and supporting them in their journey to achieve their personal goals.





# Zero tolerance to damp and mould in your home

If you are worried about damp and mould – or the cost of heating your home - please get in touch with your Housing & Support Officer. They will support you in tackling these issues.

In the meantime, here are some useful tips to help you.

## What is condensation?

Condensation is made by droplets of water from the air forming on cold surfaces – particularly windows and walls.

It is normal to find condensation on bedroom windows after a cold night – or on cold surfaces such as pipes or toilet cisterns. It is much more common during colder weather.

## When is condensation a problem?

In the worst cases, condensation can cause black or green mould on walls and other surfaces. It can damage furniture, fabrics and clothes.

Mould can be caused by normal levels of condensation. It is often found in cooler rooms such as bedrooms, bathrooms and hallways. Common places are window frames, outside walls, in cupboards and wardrobes or behind furniture where airflow is restricted.

## How can I reduce condensation and stop mould in future?

To stop mould from growing back again, you need to reduce condensation in your home.

There are four ways to do this:

1. Produce less moisture in your home
  - Hang washing outside whenever you can
  - Use lids on pans and turn the heat down once boiling (this saves energy, too)
  - Make sure your tumble dryer is vented to the outside
  - If you dry clothes inside, dry in a room with the window ajar and the door closed
  - Run cold water into your bath first - then top it up with warm
2. Stop moisture spreading around your home
  - Keep the internal bathroom and kitchen doors shut and open windows in these rooms during and after bathing and cooking
  - Wipe down surfaces where moisture settles, such as windows and mirrors
3. Keep your home ventilated
  - Each morning, open the windows in affected rooms for a while. Wipe down wet windowsills
  - Use extractor fans or cooker hoods in bathroom and kitchens if you have them
  - Leave bathroom and kitchen windows open slightly for 20 minutes once you have finished cooking, showering or bathing. Leave the vents open on windows to provide fresh air
  - BUT remember to shut your windows before you go out
4. Keep your home warm
  - Condensation can be worse in a cold home – so keeping your home warm can help to reduce condensation
  - Turn the radiators and heaters down in rooms you use less to save energy, but don't turn them off completely

## How can I get rid of mould?

1. Clean away mould growth early - as soon as you see it
2. Wear rubber gloves and wipe the mould off the area using a cloth and anti-mould remover. You can find these in supermarkets and DIY stores.
3. Mould can be washed out of fabrics but may leave a stain. Dry clean mildew from clothes.
4. Shampoo affected carpets. Don't vacuum or sweep them.

5. If you repaint walls, use anti-mould paint or fungicidal wallpaper paste. This helps stop the mould from happening again.



## DID YOU KNOW?

THE AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD PRODUCES ABOUT 24 PINTS OF MOISTURE EVERY DAY.

# The cost of living... we are here for you!

Life has become more expensive for everyone. If you are struggling or worried about how you are going to manage due to the rising cost of living, please get in touch with us. You are not alone.

Your Housing & Support Officers can discuss any worries you have. They can help you make sure you're getting the support you are entitled to.

Your Housing & Support Officers can also help you with making a budget, letting you know what help is available, and making referrals for you.

**Ability's Contact Centre number is 0808 164 7474**

In the meantime, here are some simple energy-saving tips, followed by some useful contacts.

## Quick tips to save energy in your home

1. **Switch off standby:** switch off electrical appliances at the plug, instead of leaving them on standby. You can use a standby saver or smart plug to help you do this.
2. **Draft-proofing:** your home can lose heat through draughts around doors, windows, floors and chimneys. Here is a helpful guide to draught-proofing - Energy Saving Trust:  
<https://energysavingtrust.org.uk/advice/draught-proofing/>
3. **Turn off lights:** turning off lights when you're not in a room will save you money. Using LED bulbs can help save even more.
4. **Save on laundry:** washing at 30-degrees, using an 'eco-cycle' if you have one, filling your machine and only washing clothes when they really need it will all save you money.
5. **Avoid tumble drying:** if you can dry clothes outside or on a heated clothes rack it will help reduce your electricity bills.







6. **Shorter showers:** having 4-minute showers could save a typical household £65 a year on energy bills. Swapping baths for showers will also help you save.
7. **Don't over fill your kettle:** just boil what you need so you don't waste electricity.
8. **Reduce your water use:** fixing aerators to your taps will reduce the amount of water coming out by adding air. These are cheap gadgets that are easy to install.
9. **Fill your dishwasher:** don't run a half-empty dishwasher as you will need to use it more often, using more water and electricity.
10. **Increase insulation:** if you have a hot water cylinder, make sure it is insulated. An insulation jacket is easy to put on and will reduce energy loss immediately.

These tips are adapted from [www.energysavingtrust.org](http://www.energysavingtrust.org)

# Energy saving tips

## Reducing energy usage at home

For tips please visit:

[www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/domestic](http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/domestic) and

[www.simpleenergyadvice.org.uk/energy-efficiency/reduce-bills](http://www.simpleenergyadvice.org.uk/energy-efficiency/reduce-bills)

Insulation measures and boiler repairs and replacement for low-income families:

[www.simpleenergyadvice.org.uk/pages/energy-company-obligation](http://www.simpleenergyadvice.org.uk/pages/energy-company-obligation)

Energy tips: [www.moneysavingexpert.com/energy/](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com/energy/)

### Are you struggling to pay bills or to pay for food?



You can contact the *Citizens Advice Bureau* on 0808 223 1133

You can also find some useful info on what to do if you are struggling to pay your bills, on the CAB website

[www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/energy/energy-supply](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/energy/energy-supply)

### Using food banks



*The Trussell Trust* can help you access food banks if needed.

In order to get help from your local food bank you will need to be referred with a voucher.

Please discuss this with them if this is a service you feel you need.

### What can you claim?



Are you getting all the income you are entitled to?

You can make sure, by filling out a short form at: [www.entitledto.co.uk](http://www.entitledto.co.uk)

### Further Advice and Resources



The *National Energy Action* is a national fuel poverty and energy efficiency charity that offers a free support service known as WASH (Warm and Safe Homes) providing energy advice.

Tel: 0800 304 7159 or visit [www.nea.org.uk](http://www.nea.org.uk)

### Warm Home Discount Scheme



The Warm Home Discount Scheme opened for applications again in September/October 2022.

The scheme can give you a rebate off your electricity bill.

People on low incomes, including families, pensioners, as well as people with long-term illness or disabilities, may qualify for a rebate of £150 from their energy supplier, which is paid in the winter/spring.

Pensioners on low incomes are paid the Warm Home Discount automatically, but all of the groups stated have to contact their electricity supplier each year to claim this discount.

For more information on the Warm Home Discount, and how to claim it, visit [www.gov.uk/the-warmhome-discount-scheme](http://www.gov.uk/the-warmhome-discount-scheme)

For a list of energy suppliers running the scheme, and links to their websites and online application forms, visit:

[www.gov.uk/the-warm-homediscount-scheme/energysuppliers](http://www.gov.uk/the-warm-homediscount-scheme/energysuppliers)

### British Gas



The British Gas Energy Trust offers free, impartial advice on energy and money at <https://britishgasenergytrust.org.uk/fuel-and-money-advice/>

Online debt and money information is also available at [www.turn2us.org.uk](http://www.turn2us.org.uk) and [www.StepChange.org](http://www.StepChange.org)

**Please get in touch with Ability today on 0808 164 7474. We are here to help you.**





**Ability Housing Association has been certified as a Disability Confident employer.**

Disability Confident is a government scheme which encourages employers to recruit and retain people with disabilities and health conditions. It is a voluntary scheme, which has been developed jointly by employers and representatives of disabled people.



## COMMITMENTS

### VALUES

#### **We engage actively for feedback**

*We listen actively to our customers, colleagues and partners to help improve what we do and how we do it.*

#### **We value differences**

*We respect and value the individuality of each person.*

#### **We focus on ability not disability**

*We focus on what each person CAN-DO.*

#### **We demonstrate integrity**

*Our culture is one of openness, honesty and personal accountability.*

### BEHAVIOURS

#### **Seek first to understand**

*I will listen actively to ensure I have the best possible understanding.*

#### **Think: CAN-DO**

*I will focus on what is possible and think about what I CAN-DO.*

#### **Give a positive response**

*I will work with you to agree a positive outcome, without excuse or blame.*

#### **Personal ownership**

*I will take full responsibility for making sure the agreed outcomes are achieved in good time.*

### Board Members

(as at 30th September 2022)

- Sally Reay (Chair)
- Dominic Wallace
- Jai Dosanjh
- Dritan Uka
- Mandy Dunstan
- Tim Jennings
- Vimal Gaglani
- Lynsey Bradshaw

### Executive Directors

- Jeff Skipp, CEO
- Peter Gardiner, Director of Resources & Deputy CEO
- Lucy Sivasundram, Director of Operations (Housing)

### Auditors, solicitors & bankers

- Auditors: Beever and Struthers
- Solicitors: Devonshires
- Bankers: Barclays Bank PLC

### Registrations

- Company number: 01261380
- Charity number: 271547
- Registered with The Regulator for Social Housing for England & Wales, Number LH2174

### Report production team

- Lucy Sivasundram, Ability team
- Copy Editor: Dominic Weaver, Twelve
- Design: [www.vdmagency.co.uk](http://www.vdmagency.co.uk)

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- 🌐 : [ability-housing-association](http://ability-housing-association)