

ABILITY ANNUAL REPORT

2023-24

Promoting Independent Living



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Welcome by Jeff Skipp, CEO and Mandy Dunstan, Chair

During the year Ability has sought to further improve the services we deliver for and with our residents and customers.

It has been a period of transition within Ability with the implementation of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act and the new assessment approach implemented by the Care Quality Commission for care and support services.

During the year we undertook Customer satisfaction surveys with customers in our care and support services achieving an overall satisfaction level of 95%. We also achieved high audit scores from local authorities who undertook quality monitoring of our services achieving scores of between 94 – 97%.

We undertook our first Tenant Satisfaction Measures Survey (TSMs) with housing residents as required by the Regulator of Social Housing. We achieved an overall satisfaction rate of 69.4% with Repairs achieving a satisfaction rating of 72.7%, Home Safety 77.8% and treating residents with fairness and respect 77.8%. This provides a foundation, working with and alongside residents to improve satisfaction rates and focusing on improvements over the coming months and years.

Our Care and Support surveys and TSMs are key to supporting Ability to develop our services in ways that will maximise resident and customer benefit. It is also key to the delivery of our five key commitments made in our Corporate Plan – Better Together, these are:

- Provide good quality homes and neighbourhoods
- Deliver high quality housing management and support services.
- To recruit, retain and develop an engaged workforce.
- To grow our services and increase our reach.
- To maintain financial sustainability and deliver value for money

During the year we have made significant improvements in our repairs service and its timeliness, through closer partnership with our contractors, improved scheduling of works and tighter contract management.

Our Housing & Support team have co-produced housing support plans with all residents receiving an intensive housing management service. These plans are focussed on tenancy sustainment and supporting people to maintain independent living.

We have commenced implementation of our people strategy focusing on staff development, training and wellbeing. Only by having a well trained and engaged staff team can we achieve excellence in our service delivery.

It remains a challenging financial operating environment. Local authority funding for social care has failed to increase in line with National Living Wage increases for a number of years, and sadly without any sign of an integrated health and social care strategy or additional funding being made available any time soon. This sorry state of affairs has impacted on Ability's finances; however, with good financial management and controls we have maintained high quality and effective care services, which are valued by our customers.

Finally, we would like to thank our dedicated board whose expertise has maintained Ability Housing's focus on our core values during these challenging times and to our teams, without whom we could not maintain and deliver the quality services we do to our residents.

Yours sincerely

Jeff Skipp, CEO



Mandy Dunstan, Chair



Overview of the Financial Year



Ability Housing owns and manages 649 properties (plus some office accommodation) across 31 local authority areas in London and the South East, from Hastings to Bournemouth and Essex to Oxfordshire. We provide accessible housing for people who have disabilities and want to live independently in their communities.



There are five key commitments made in our Corporate Plan ('Better Together') which are:

- Provide Good Quality Homes and Neighbourhoods
- Deliver high quality Housing Management & Support Services
- Recruit, Retain and Develop an engaged workforce
- Grow our services and increase our reach
- Maintain financial sustainability and deliver Value for Money (VFM)

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 introduced a legal requirement for social housing providers to undertake Tenant Satisfaction Measure (TSM's) surveys. Ability HA undertook a TSM survey with the results being returned August 2024. Ability also asked an additional question regarding our Intensive Housing Management service. The best way to judge if we are meeting our corporate objectives is to assess our performance against the experiences of our residents. The survey results are set out in table 1.

Question	Sector Average (Satisfied)	Satisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied
1) Taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the service provided by Ability Housing Association?	69.4%	66.91%	11.27%	21.8%
*2) How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the overall repairs service from Ability Housing Association over the last 12 months?	71.2%	72.67%	9.25%	18.01%
3) How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the time take to complete your most recent repair after you reported it?	66.9%	62.84%	9.63%	27.51%
4) How satisfied or dissatisfied are you that Ability HA provides a home that is well maintained?	69.4%	69.44%	10.54%	19.99%
5) Thinking about the condition of the property you live in, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you that Ability HA provides a home that is safe?	76.5%	77.81%	12%	10.18%
6) How satisfied or dissatisfied are you that Ability HA listens to your views and acts upon them?	58.4%	53.08%	18.9%	27.99%
7) How satisfied or dissatisfied are you that Ability HA keeps you informed of the things that matter to you?	69.7%	56.19%	22.26%	21.52%
8) How satisfied or dissatisfied are you that Ability HA treats me fairly and with respect?	76%	73.44%	10.9%	15.63%
9) How satisfied or dissatisfied are you that Ability HA approach to complaints handling?	33.9%	37.49%	19.64%	42.84%
10) How satisfied or dissatisfied are you that Ability HA keeps communal areas clean and well maintained.	65.2%	68.49%	15.46%	16.01%
11) How satisfied or dissatisfied are you that Ability HA makes a positive contribution to your neighbourhood?	62.4%	51.46%	35.66%	12.86%
12) How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with Ability HA approach to handling Anti-Social Behaviour?	57%	49.24%	36.94%	13.79%
**13) Intensive Housing Management support - how satisfied or dissatisfied do you feel with the quality of the support you received?	N/A	73.46%	11.56%	15.16%

*only applies to people who have had a repair in the last 12 months = 79.62% of respondents

**Ability own question not part of TSM suite

Our TSM results are in line with sector averages. It is reassuring that our service offer, and the view of our residents are broadly consistent with the experiences of other social housing tenants. This provides a good platform from which we can develop our service offer, improve our customer experience and using customer feedback, focus our teams and operational services on the areas which will maximise resident satisfaction.

During the year we commissioned the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS), to support Ability HA to develop a co-produced resident engagement strategy. Residents, frontline staff and board members attended Challenge, Discovery and Design sessions independently facilitated by TPAS – The outcome of this work led to seven key recommendations:

- Establish a new resident engagement group
- Design and implement customer services platform to promote effective two-way communication
- Raise staff awareness of residents needs
- Invite residents to staff meetings
- Review resident communication channels
- Develop a range of resident engagement opportunities
- Develop and deliver a new resident engagement strategy



During the year we have appointed a resident engagement lead, Hannah-Kate Lampard, who is a member of the Housing & Property senior management team, to project manage the development of resident engagement throughout Ability Housing Association, working with residents and managers to deliver the TPAS recommendations and develop a co-produced engagement strategy with clear success criteria and milestones.



Property and Assets

Repairs will be completed in target time: Working in partnership with our core contractors we have improved the performance of our repairs service across the year, achieving our target.

EPC: We did not meet our target of bringing 13 properties up to EPC or better during the year. This was primarily due to improving our repair service and achieving 80% of repairs in target time. We have rescheduled the EPC programme and all properties will achieve EPC C or better before 2030.

Planned Maintenance: We achieved our planned maintenance programme, which included the installation of 22 kitchens, 13 bathrooms and 33 boiler replacements.

Disposal Criteria for Void Properties: This has been implemented during the year and will inform future decisions on disposals based upon viability, geography and proximity to our core operating areas and the suitability for use as supported housing. The proceeds of any disposals will be reinvested in either new stock or our existing stock.

Housing support and Management

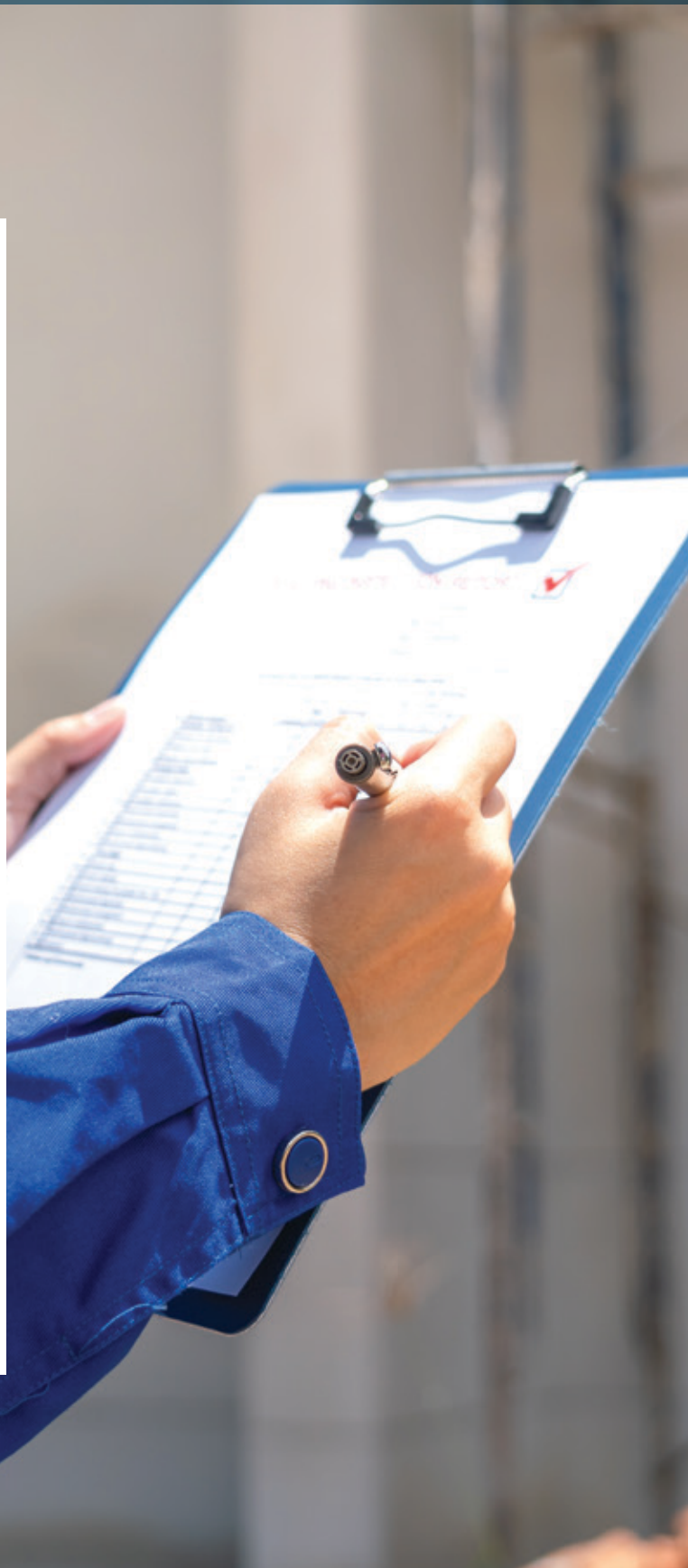
Intensive Housing Management Support:

We have co-produced with each resident a housing support plan which details the level of assistance that individual tenants require, in order to sustain their tenancy. The plan is reviewed regularly throughout the year, to ensure our tenants needs are met and that we're enabling them to live independent lives with choice and control.

Annual Tenancy Audit and Property MOT:

We have undertaken annual tenancy audits and Property MOTs with residents throughout the year. This is to ensure we understand any changes of circumstances affecting residents alongside a detailed inspection of the property with the resident, identifying any issues or concerns and if required ensuring any repairs are reported and rectified.

Estate Inspections: We have enhanced our regular Estate Inspections to ensure the health and safety of residents. We invite residents to attend these frequent inspections, giving them the opportunity to raise any issues or concerns about their neighbourhood. The visits also increase contact with the resident's Housing and Support Officer, strengthening the relationship and increasing engagement with Ability Housing Association.





Compliments & Complaints

Compliments

The total number of compliments received for the year was 14.

We identify this as an area we need to improve on in terms of increasing the awareness across the organisation of the importance of collecting compliments.

Complaints

We received 49 formal complaints in the year.

The majority of complaints, 44, were resolved at stage one. The key themes of these complaints were:

Theme	Number
Care and Support	4
Repairs and Maintenance	24
Housing	17
Staff Attitude	4
Total	49

Of the 49 Complaints, 18 were upheld, 17 partially upheld and 14 not upheld. We had two complaints escalated to the Ombudsman, one of which was determined to have no maladministration and the other awaiting determination.



Recruit, Retain and Develop an Engaged Workforce

The success of our business relies on Ability's most important resource: the staff teams who deliver services to our customers. This year we have created and published a People Strategy to sit beneath Ability's Corporate Plan.

The People Strategy has been developed to provide clarity on what's needed to safeguard the quality of our services by recruiting, retaining and developing an engaged workforce. The principles underlying the strategy are as follows:

- Ability's Workforce Wellbeing Statement and Commitments
- Understanding our People – a focus on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion which are central to Ability's values, and
- Maintaining and building upon our Investors In People accreditation, in addition to ISO and Disability Confident badges



Key milestones of the people Strategy achieved through the year are as follows:

Recruitment literature is continually reviewed to maximise our profile as an organisation, and our attractiveness to potential future candidates.

- Our induction processes have been reviewed by line managers and newer staff members, identifying learnings which will continue to ensure that the probation period is effective and beneficial, promoting positive outcomes for the individual and the business.
- We have continued to build on our staff engagement programmes with all staff having the opportunity to

interact in forums lead by senior managers, where individual feedback and suggestions are welcomed and heard.

- Following Investors In People recommendations, senior leaders have increased presence and visibility to operational teams across the business.

To ensure staff teams are adequately equipped to deliver high quality services within the context of an increasingly challenging financial environment, we have reviewed and increased training budgets across the business. This will enable us to continue to deliver training in line with the Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy, and to meet the qualification requirements of the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill.

Care & Support

Ability delivers care and support services in four local authority areas in the south-east of England, supporting our customers to live as independently as possible in the community. We provide supported living and community support in people’s homes for those with a learning disability, physical disabilities, and mental health needs.

Delivering high-quality Support Services

Our annual care and support customer satisfaction survey, administered in December 2023, showed 95% of customers (on average) were satisfied with the service they received. The results were as follows:

Question	2024	2025
Ability staff help me feel safe in my own home	95.95%	95.92%
There is some flexibility in the way I receive my support as sometimes I don't want to stick to a fixed plan	91.89%	97.96%
I feel that staff listen to me and I feel comfortable discussing and planning my support with them	95.94%	97.96%
If I am not happy I know who to talk to	94.59%	95.92%
Staff know what is important to me and how I like to live my life	95.55%	97.28%

Of the 233 surveys sent Ability received 148 responses, equating to a 63.5% return rate (2023: 64.5%)

Based upon the views of customers at each of our services, we have developed service specific development plans which seek to improve the service customers receive and increase the quality of support provided. The intention for 2025 is to review progress against service development plans and refine the planning process, before agreeing updated development plans for each service.

All services performed consistently well during the year as measured by our performance indicators and quarterly quality audits. Our high performance has been validated by local authority quality monitoring and our CQC registered services have retained overall ratings of Good, within which some domains achieved Outstanding. Our Hillingdon Supported Living services achieved audit scores of 94%, 96% and 97% following inspections undertaken by the London Borough of Hillingdon.

During the year we have further focused our services on delivering personalised and customer led support, seeking to maximise the choice and control each customer has over their lives. We have continued to develop our person-centred planning tools, ensuring customers are at the centre of the service they receive. Training in strength-based approaches is part of the rolling training programme for care and support teams. This helps to ensure that staff work with customers in an asset-based way, enabling and encouraging customers to take positive risks to maximise independence.



Grow our Services and Increasing our Reach

We have continued to develop our services through organic growth and have achieved this in some services by allocating accommodation to individuals with higher and more complex support needs.

We have also been accepted onto several local authority framework agreements and dynamic purchasing systems (DPS) and will continue applications for target geographical areas. In September, we successfully recruited to the Head of Business Development role,

which is a key achievement and milestone in our growth strategy.

Throughout the year, we submitted numerous bids as part of competitive tender processes with local authorities. Unfortunately, we were unable to submit stage 2 bids in two tenders after being successful at stage 1. In one case, this was due to the need to prioritise other bids, and in the other, the increases in National Insurance Contributions and National Living Wage made the contract financially unviable.

Maintaining Financial Sustainability

The most significant challenge to maintaining financial sustainability in care and support continues to be securing adequate local authority fee increases, particularly given significant increases in National Insurance Contributions and the National Living Wage (NLW). Ability supports the increase to the NLW and aspires to pay our care and support staff above this rate, however, this is contingent upon Local Authority annual inflationary fee increases being commensurate with both living wage and broader inflationary increases impacting care and support providers. Whilst we acknowledge the financial pressures facing local authorities in England, Ability and many other care and support providers will continue to bear increased financial risk given the already tight margins that exist.

Winning new business has the potential to create economies of scale, however, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find contracts that represent full cost recovery as LA budgets are squeezed ever further. The draft business development strategy will continue to be refined now the Head of Business Development has been appointed. This will seek to define opportunities for diversifying both our funding streams and our service offer, providing these align with Ability's core ethos and values and target geographical growth areas.



Housing support and Management



Ability Housing Association's corporate plan - Better Together - sets out our key objectives to September 2026.

Ability's service approach is underpinned by the principles of personalisation and co-production, and support planning tools follow a strengths-based approach which ensures support and care plans are individually tailored, promoting choice, control and autonomy.

Over the next two years our corporate plan focuses on the following key objectives:

- Provide quality homes and neighbourhoods
- Deliver high-quality Housing Management & Support Services
- To recruit, retain and develop an engaged workforce
- To grow our services and increase our reach
- To maintain financial sustainability and deliver value for money



Better Together

By 2026 Ability Housing Association will be able to demonstrate that:

- We provide high-quality homes for our residents with a timely and qualitative repairs service. We have invested significantly in our properties, and no home has an energy rating below EPC D, with all homes to be at a rating of EPC C or above by 2030.
- We have co-produced service plans with every resident, based on their needs and wishes. We have engaged with residents in their neighbourhoods to improve the local area and agreed with them a local plan to be implemented.
- We have relaunched our Customer Committee, involving residents in the development of Ability's organisational strategies and plans, evaluating our performance and service delivery.
- Our Housing & Support Officers are both proactive and responsive, supporting residents to maintain independent living and achieve their aspirations.
- Our Care & Support services have delivered high-quality co-produced support focused on the needs and aspirations of the individual, ensuring everyone has choice and control over the support they receive and the life they lead.
- Our workforce is well-managed, engaged, and trained to deliver high-quality services and outcomes with our residents.
- We have grown our Care & Support business by 20 per cent, increasing our reach and the number of people who benefit from Ability's services, while increasing our economies of scale to support the financial success of this part of our business.
- We have reinvested money from homes we have disposed of to create more opportunities for people to receive supported housing and care and support from Ability in our core areas of operation.
- We are financially strong, with management decisions based on robust data and information. We will be efficient and effective, ensuring our resources are targeted, delivering high-quality services to the people we serve.



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

- Mandy Dunstan (Chair)
- Jai Dosanjh
- Vimal Gaglani
- Tim Jennings
- Lynsey van Aswegen
- Dritan Uka
- Rinat Abdrasilov
- Kimberley Ellis
- Nick Barker
- Dominic Wallace

Executive Directors

- Jeff Skipp, CEO
- Marcus Andrews, Director of Finance
- Stephanie Wood, Director of Operations
- Lauren Green, Director of Care & Support

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

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