



*We transform the lives of people with a disability or mental health condition by providing the best quality housing and support services to enable them to live the lives they choose, achieve their personal goals, feel valued and know their voices are heard.*

## NEWSLETTER 2 - 2021

It is hard to believe it is a year since we entered the first national lockdown. Last year was the toughest and most challenging many of us can remember – both in and outside work. Looking back to that first lockdown twelve months ago I doubt any of us could have predicted how the year would unfold.

Throughout, our priority has been to keep our customers and staff safe and informed; and to protect the long-term viability of the organisation. Twelve months on I am proud to say we have largely succeeded.

Despite the challenges we kept our services running throughout and we adapted to new ways of working at very short notice. This is largely due to



the extraordinary commitment and dedication of our colleagues. We sourced PPE to keep people safe. We moved to home working overnight. We put in place proactive calls to tenants and shared owners, while staff on the frontline made sure everyone got the support they needed day in day out.

As we look forward - I am optimistic about the impact of the vaccination programme and hope we will not face similar lockdown restrictions. I am encouraged by the take up of the vaccine from both customers and colleagues as we all know vaccination is the best route to protecting ourselves and each other.

Looking ahead, we will soon publish our Strategic Plan update 2021/22. That plan will reflect the learning of the last year and our future focus for the second year of our current three-year strategy. As an organisation we will continue to change and adapt to make sure we are delivering the high-quality homes and services our customers deserve.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue.



Julie Layton, Chief Executive

## LATEST NEWS



### Learning Disability & Autism Housing

#### Network Charter

The Learning Disability and Autism Housing Network launched its Charter on 25 March 2021 at the National Housing Federation's National Housing Summit 2021. The network is a coalition of twelve housing associations, including Advance as a founding member, calling for action to address the barriers for new, sustainable quality housing for people with a learning disability and/or autism.

There is clear evidence that strategically planned sustainable, quality supported housing for people with a learning disability and/or autism provides long-term positive benefits for them and delivers value for money for social care and health commissioners. The Network is calling for four areas of action:

- Government to create a more comprehensive and

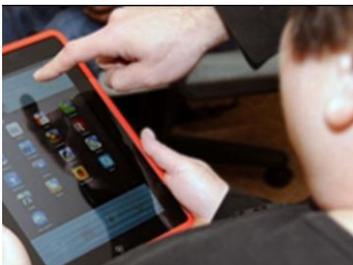
integrated national and local planning and policy framework for supported housing for people with a learning disability and autism.

- Government to create the conditions for growth of supply by allocating a higher proportion of the new affordable homes programme to new housing for people with learning disability and autism.
- A rent standard that supports the commissioning and funding of new supported housing for people with high support needs.
- A long-term sustainable, consistent housing benefit regime for supported housing. [Read more](#)



### **New Board Member**

We are pleased to welcome [Rob Tovey](#) to the Board of Advance. Rob is a social care professional with 38 years' experience across the statutory, public, voluntary and private sectors. Most recently, he was Head of Quality at Home Instead Senior Care - the largest home care provider in the world and the highest-ranked provider in the UK. Immediately prior to that he was Head of Inspection, Adult Social Care for the Care Quality Commission.



### **Digital lifeline**

Following the announcement of funding by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport for a project administered by the Good Things Foundation in partnership with AbilityNet, Advance submitted applications for 48 customers to access free tablet devices. The devices and funding are to help people with learning disabilities to tackle social and digital isolation issues.

We hope to receive positive feedback and distribute equipment later in March with some pre-loaded apps, links to the Advance website and MyAdvance and information to support customers in safely exploring digital services. Customers will have the devices for life, supported by a data package for two years.



### **Promoting diversity**

Throughout February, Advance showed support for LGBTQ month by sharing staff and customer stories on the intranet and on social media channels. This was part of a wider calendar of events to celebrate diversity and equality issues and campaigns within the organisation and with Advance's stakeholders.

In March several staff shared their personal reflections on International Women's Day and what it meant to them.

## SUPPORT



### Support survey results

We are really pleased that despite all the challenges everyone has faced this year, our survey return for support services has increased from 26-41%. 97.5% of respondents said they were happy with the quality of the support they receive. A really encouraging result was that 100% of respondents said they felt Advance staff did a good job as well as show them care and respect. More than 98% of respondents said that Advance helped them live the life they choose as well as respond to changes in their lives.

## HOUSING



### Keeping in touch with tenants

The tenancy and leasehold management team have been working hard over the past couple of years to build up our engagement with tenants and shared owners – seeing people more regularly, offering assistance to live safely and successfully in their home, getting involved positively with their housemates or neighbours and with Advance, particularly when they don't have much other support available. In the past year a lot of this has had to shift towards remote contact by phone and other means, although visits have carried on where they are essential.

New measures introduced by our Regional Housing Officers and Housing Outreach Workers, with support from the Customer Engagement Manager include:

- Annual Visits
- 8-week new tenancy follow up visits
- Scheme Meetings
- Scheme Activities
- Improved information provided in communal areas and notice boards
- Tenant Inspectors Pilot
- COVID-19 Welfare Telephone Calls
- Vulnerability Welfare Calls & Visits.



### Investing in our properties

Our planned and cyclical maintenance programme has been disrupted this year due to the pandemic. Nevertheless, we have completed improvements at over 50 properties and we are working hard with our contractors to complete as much as we can in the remainder of the financial year. By the end of March we are hoping to have completed 104 different 'components' (kitchens, bathrooms, boilers, etc.), investing £463,000. And next year we are planning to do a lot more!

## CUSTOMER FOCUS



### Census 2021

We hope as many customers as possible were able to take part in the census earlier this month so that everyone is counted and taken into account when planning services. To help we shared Easy Read information and other resources. We also promoted ways to request accessible versions of the survey so everyone could take part.



### David's success story

David has lived in an Advance supported living property for 4 people since 2010. Born with Knobloch Layer Syndrome, a rare genetic condition that can affect a person's eyesight, balance and co-ordination. He left school with 4-5 GCSEs and took college courses in woodwork and ICT skills before beginning voluntary work in several different roles.

After asking for more information on independent living from his social worker, David was supported to move in to an Advance property.

When he first came to Advance David was receiving 22 hours support a week. This was eventually reduced to four. Fast forward to today and David has achieved so many of his goals having trained to be a support worker. He then decided to come off benefits and work full-time. He also passed his driving test and is on the waiting list to get his own one-bedroom flat. [Read more](#)



## Customer collective

The Advance Customer Collective met on Friday 5<sup>th</sup> March. As well as a wellbeing check-in, a place to tell us what they think and a chance to socialise, customers were able to put their questions about repairs and maintenance to Wendy Cox, Head of Property Services. Seventeen customers and additional family members and Support staff joined the videocall session chaired by Adam. Seven volunteers from the group will take part in a wider piece of work to gather feedback and improve the customer experience of repairs.

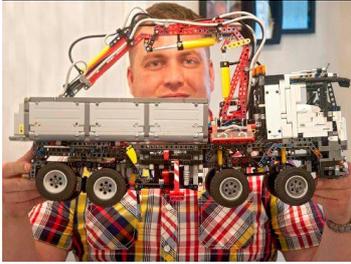
These meetings gather positive feedback – specifically, a mother of a customer contacted us after the meeting to say: *“Thank you for inviting us and for your helpful contributions to the Collective zoom on Friday. I thought Adam handled the chairing very well and I appreciated the opportunity to try out the Collective meeting with my son James. It was especially useful to him to find that others shared some of his anxieties and concerns and that he was not alone in his disability. He said he would like to join in on the April session.”*



## Future learning - Physical health & data collection

We recognise the health inequalities that people with learning disabilities and mental health conditions are likely to face. To address this our Quality Improvement Manager is working with our Customer Engagement Manager as well as Area Managers to tackle the barriers that exist for people with mental health conditions and learning disabilities to minimise health inequalities and access health care services.

With valuable input from customers, we will be inviting everyone who accesses our services to complete a health survey. This will be an annual survey that will help us to identify the main areas to focus on in order to make the biggest difference for the people we support. This information will enable us to have a full body of data from which to work and will therefore allow us to spot patterns or trends in relation to health and to determine areas we can work on. [Read more](#)



### Darryl's story

“Darryl enjoys his food, so being able to call in on him and check he’s eating a healthy diet, helps me to stay connected to him.” says Darryl’s Mum, Tori who lives a short distance away from her son in Cornwall.

Growing up with autism Darryl struggled to express himself. His sister, Christine describes him as loving and caring but also acknowledges Darryl could get stressed when unable to understand situations. Mum, Tori confesses she often worried about what the future held for her son.

As Darryl grew up, Tori began to consider ways in which Darryl might begin to live as independently as possible. By working with social workers and the local council she was able to secure a tenancy for Darryl at a newly built Advance property within walking distance from her home. [Read more](#)

## STAFF FOCUS



### Covid 19 update

We continue to focus on ensuring that Advance communicates effectively with stakeholders about its response to the coronavirus. As well as updating factual information, Advance has promoted staff and customer stories encouraging all to take the vaccine when offered. As of 15 March, 56% of all staff had had their first vaccination.



### Staff health and well-being

Over the past year working in social care has involved increased anxieties and stresses for our staff, as well as our customers. At Advance we have been sure to acknowledge the importance of staff wellbeing – both for staff members working on the frontline and those working from home to keep the organisation running safely and effectively.

Changes in day to day life have had their effect in the workplace, with housing and support workers not being able to interact with their colleagues and customers as they had done previously and with office based teams being isolated working from home.

Investing in our staff wellbeing and development is a priority and

over the past year has played a vital role in how Advance has adapted.

Key steps recommended for employers:

- Be proactive and make time to talk about how staff are feeling
- Encourage open and honest conversations
- Put support in place for staff and managers and make it widely available
- Support relationships between colleagues and teams'

[Taken from [localgov](#) website]

These recommendations are all points reflected in our work at Advance to support our staff over the past year, especially during peak times of stress and uncertainty. As a result of the pandemic, a Health & Wellbeing group was formed with senior representatives from across the organisation in order to discuss and determine an action plan for the future months.

Examples of the actions we committed to include:

- Advertising the staff representative group (The Voice) and scheduling an event for staff to raise and discuss concerns or queries with the group
- Working to assign mental health first aiders internally
- Making the Health Assured app available for download on work phones to people can access support on the go
- Determine ways to measure the progress of this work

All Advance staff were asked to complete a survey in order to gauge how the subsequent work improved communication and engagement during Covid-19.

The results were as follows:

- 90% overall staff satisfaction
- 80% of staff feel supported to deliver the best quality service
- Voluntary staff turnover reduced
- Sickness rates remained low despite the pandemic

## USEFUL LINKS

### Useful links ▶

We are proud to be involved with or members of the following organisations and support the good work they do to improve the lives of customers with long-term disabilities and mental health conditions.

- [Voluntary Organisations Disability Group \(VODG\)](#)
- [Association of Mental Health Providers \(AMHP\)](#)
- [Charity Works](#)
- [Learning Disability England \(LDE\)](#)
- [National Housing Federation \(NHF\)](#)

## DIARY DATES



We will be taking part in the following events:

- [The Autism Show](#) - online event June 2021
- [Transition Network](#) online event - May 2021
- [Mental Health Awareness Week](#) – 10-16<sup>th</sup> May
- Learning Disability Today conference 1 December 2021

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