

# Annual Report 2020



Connexus

# Hello and welcome to the Connexus Annual Report 2020



Richard Woolley, CEO

It was back in 2017 that Connexus was formed through the merger of separate landlords, but this year saw us take significant steps towards becoming what we call “One Connexus.” From the start of April we have been operating solely as Connexus. Bringing our landlords together has helped us to deliver our core services better, in both the long term and during the ongoing coronavirus crisis. This process also saw us launch the new Connexus website, a vital tool in communicating with our customers.

Much of 2020 has been about how we’ve responded to the Coronavirus pandemic, and we shared some amazing stories on social media of how colleagues and customers from right across the business supported each other during these uncertain times. We took steps early on in the crisis to make phone calls to each of our tenants to understand any additional needs or challenges they may have through the lockdown period.

Connexus was downgraded in 2019 for governance but following positive dialogue with the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) throughout 2020, we are optimistic that Connexus will be given a G1 status when the RSH review takes place in November 2020.

Our Corporate Plan for 2020-22 was agreed this year following consultation with customers. Connexus, now more than ever, is focused on what has always mattered to us - our customers and the communities they live in. Tenant surveys and consultations allow us to hear what our customers are saying. We like to celebrate our successes, but the data in this report shows us that we’re not always getting it right. Each section of this year’s Annual Report sets out some of our future plans and improvements, responding to what our customers have told us.



# How have we performed this year?



Number of  
Connexus homes

**10,727**



New homes  
built

**199**



Gas Safety  
Compliance

**99.62%**



Aids &  
adaptations

**147**



Repairs  
satisfaction

**89%**



Shared  
Ownership

**30 homes sold**



How many new homes  
we said we'd provide

**131**



How many homes  
we've invested in

**3,000+**



We're going to be focusing on the issues that matter most to our customers, including regeneration of existing homes, reduction of fuel poverty and improving services.

We operate across two beautiful rural counties that have their own challenges. Connexus is committed to these rural communities and we want to play a wider role in the development of housing and other services, making them more sustainable and better places to live and work.

**Richard Woolley, CEO**

# How are we maintaining and investing in your home?



Connexus aims to provide high-quality affordable housing to our customers. This means investing in maintaining and improving our existing properties to make sure they fulfil tenants' expectations and aspirations. We want to achieve this by delivering an effective, efficient repairs service and investing in home improvements, with a focus on energy and thermal efficiency.

Last year you told us that you wanted a Connexus repairs service that delivered on a consistent customer offer. Only 89% of customers said they were satisfied with our repairs service and there are areas in which we need to improve. We're introducing an integrated booking system across all geographical areas in which we operate, so that we can get your repairs done on time, every time.

The new Connexus Standard for investing in your home goes beyond the Government's Decent Homes Standard. We aim to undertake surveys on 20% of our homes every year and use the results of these surveys to inform any improvements. Up to date data is essential to ensure that components are replaced on time. Kitchens have already started to see a massive upgrade, with our new supplier providing kitchens that are hard-wearing, practical and attractive.

We want all our homes, old and new, to be as energy efficient as possible so that customers can live comfortably, free from risk of entering fuel poverty. Our Warmer Homes project (part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund) will look at ways of improving the energy efficiency of 132 of our existing properties, considering improved wall insulation, energy efficient heating systems and a Passivhaus approach. Data from this project will inform the next 30 years of Connexus investments and put us on the path to net-zero emissions.

## Repairs & Maintenance budget - £10.3m

See our website for a breakdown of how we spent the repairs budget.



Number of emergency repairs

**3,601**



Number of repairs completed in target

**98%**



Repairs satisfaction

**89%**



New Kitchens Fitted

**194**

New Bathrooms Fitted

**144**



Gas safety compliance (Target 100%)

**99.62%\***



Oil safety certificate

**99.0%**



Solid fuel safety certificate

**98.6%**



Electrical periodical test

**87.6%**

\*Compliant as 0.4% of our homes are in our escalation process, seeking court access to complete a gas safety check

# How are we supporting you in your home and neighbourhood?

Connexus is committed to one level of service delivery across all areas and to all customers: our Customer Offer. Our Customer Offer recognises that our customers want a landlord who delivers efficiently, and we can always improve. We've started a 6-month cross-departmental review into how we manage our lettings and voids (empty properties) procedure, with the aim of reducing the amount of time a property is left empty. Empty properties need to be brought up to the high standard our customers expect, as soon as possible.

We're also reviewing the way our Neighbourhood Management works and the relationship between customers and their Housing Officer. Our new Neighbourhood Management policy will help to make our communities great places to live, addressing Anti-Social Behaviour and other neighbourhood issues through regular inspections and Housing Officer walkabouts.

Connexus is committed to supporting customers with different needs. We'll be expanding our network of Independent Living Schemes, offering supported housing that helps customers enjoy their home environment for as long as possible. We'll be developing the vital services offered at our Marstons Hub building in Ludlow, Shropshire: the Ludlow Foyer offers accommodation, training and support to 16 - 25 year-olds and helps young people to take steps towards their first independent home, while the Grain Loft accommodation is available to 18 - 55 year olds with low-level support needs.



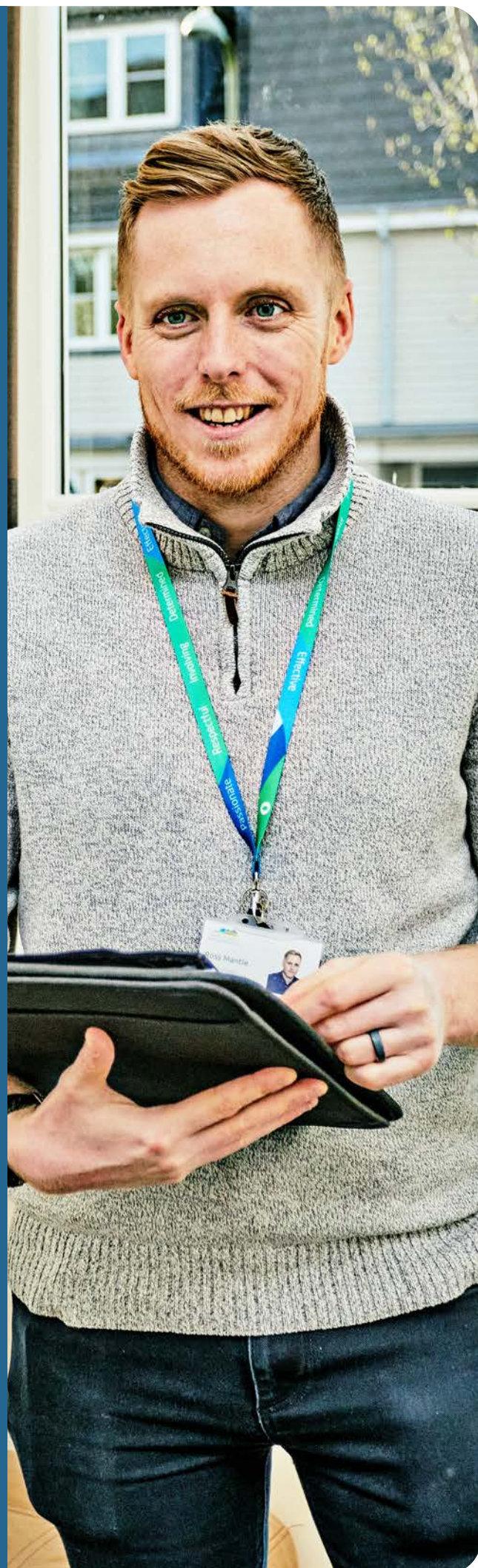
Current total tenants

**12,534**



Total of new tenants

**714**



# How did we help?

Our data shows that customers are most concerned about the time it takes us to complete repairs and the effectiveness of our communication, and we will learn from this. All of our performance data is now shown on our website, so you can see what we're focusing on improving.

Our aim is to ensure that each of our customers receives a high standard of service from us at all times. However, we know that sometimes things do go wrong or we make mistakes and our services aren't up to an acceptable standard. We encourage all feedback and to help with this we've developed a complaints policy and procedure to make sure that we deal with any complaints we receive effectively and fairly.



We managed to deal with 89% of negative feedback without the need to go through our complaints procedure and we'll continue to develop a customer service approach that enables more support and resolution at first point of contact. Our services will embrace technology to receive feedback quickly and take effective action, but those without access to technology will never be left out.



Feedback received

**476**



Complaints resolved

**67**



Compliments received

**221**



Calls received (monthly average 10,814)

**129,772**



Calls received in the previous year

**141,117** 8.74% reduction



Calls resolved at first point of contact

**87.6%**

# How we are committed to our communities?

Connexus strives to be more than simply a provider of housing and is committed to a wider role in developing and supporting the rural communities we serve. Working with Local Authorities and other strategic partners across Shropshire and Herefordshire we will continue to make our communities more sustainable and better places to live and work.

Customers are at the heart of Connexus. Our Customer Involvement Panel is made of our tenants and has a scrutiny role, looking in-depth at aspects of Connexus services, making recommendations for service improvement and ensuring our accountability to customers. It's important to us that our customers are involved in the consultation process across all areas of the business and help to shape new policies and procedures so that we can deliver a better service. With this in mind, our recently launched Connexus Consultation Portal enables customers to access all consultations online, from the comfort of their own home.

The Community Development Fund has been set up to offer grants of up to £5,000 to local community projects that have a positive impact on their area. Last year in Shropshire we provided over £40k to 24 community groups and this year the fund is expanding to include projects and groups in Herefordshire.



Community Development Fund total

**£40k**



Community activities total

**£12k**



CDF groups/projects supported

**24**



Our Community Development Fund is there to support everything from groups that manage community gardens and wildlife spaces, to parent and toddler groups, sports teams, and skills development groups to help with computer skills - and so much more! We're now working right across both counties we serve and would love to find out about your group and your ideas.

**Jacqui Gears, Communities Manager**



# How are we helping fight the housing crisis?

Connexus is firmly committed to delivering quality affordable homes to the rural counties of Shropshire and Herefordshire and we're delighted to have over-delivered our targeted amount of homes in 2019/2020. The Covid-19 crisis will see us fall short of our New Home Strategy's promise of 250 new homes being built each year; during the next financial year we are determined to hit that target and deliver the housing that rural communities really need to help make them more sustainable places to live and work. We know that one size doesn't fit all, so we're continuing to build a mixture of affordable rent, Shared Ownership and Independent Living homes to suit the needs of our customers and communities.

Looking to the future, we will pilot a low cost and carbon neutral approach to building quality affordable housing. Tenants will be able to enjoy comfortable, healthy homes without concerns around fuel poverty and the sustainability of their local community. We recognise the investment in these new homes benefits not only our customers, but also the wider local economy through job creation and supporting local businesses.



Number of new homes built (handed over)

**199**



Shared Ownership

**30 homes sold**



How many homes we said we'd provide (outstanding home were delayed due to Covid-19)

**131**



How much have we spent on new homes

- **Expenditure £34,434,275** funded by
  - **Grant income £5,003,728**
  - **Sales income £11,147,989**
- Remainder from loans and surpluses





# How are we spending your money?

Connexus is a not-for-profit housing association, investing any profits made back into building new affordable housing, maintaining our customers' existing homes and providing services across the communities we serve. The Coronavirus crisis has shown that anything could be around the corner; we regularly stress-test the business for financial risks and we're confident that Connexus is financially sound and resilient.

Our social value figure represents the social, economic and environmental impact our services have on the wider community, through the building of new homes, creating

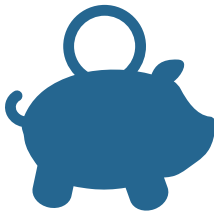
jobs and more. Connexus is committed to supporting sustainable rural communities in Herefordshire and Shropshire, and so we want to see this social value figure increase in the next year.

During the year we've recorded £884,355.81 of Value For Money savings, with Connexus colleagues always looking for ways to save costs on shared travel, negotiated fees with contractors and much more. This is so we can spend more money on our key priority: our customers and their homes.



Social Value

**£5,795,623**



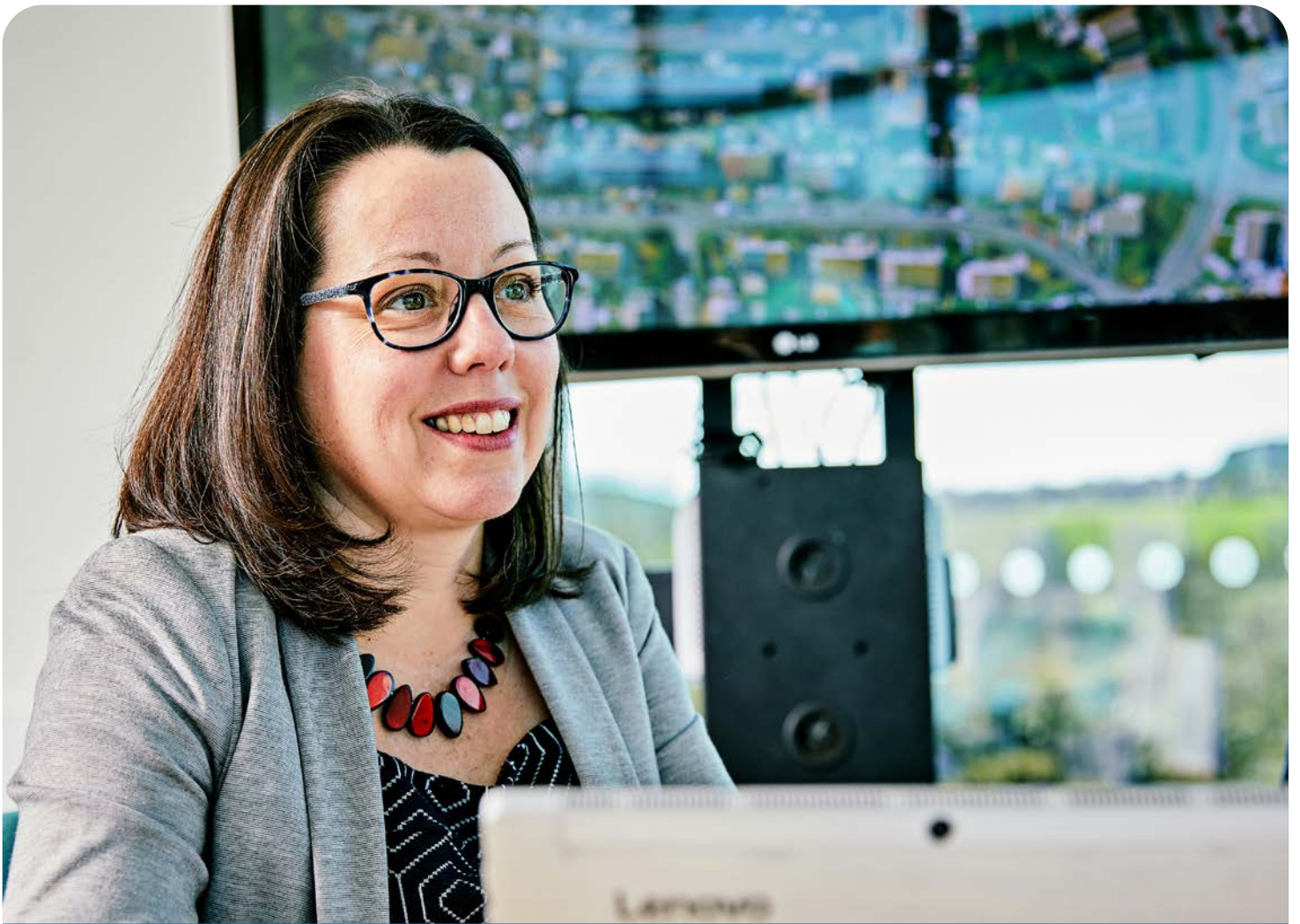
Value for money

**£884,355**



It was recognised by the ratings agency, Moody's that our financial strength improved in 19/20 with our credit rating being increased from Baa1 to A3

**Richard Woolley, CEO**



## Tell us what you think

Connexus wants to hear from you! It's important to us that our customers and communities are involved in the consultation process in all areas of the business, helping shape new policies and procedures so that we can give you a better service. See our latest consultations at [connexus-group.co.uk/about/contact/community](https://connexus-group.co.uk/about/contact/community)

We want to know your thoughts and ideas on what we are doing well and not so well so that we can improve and grow.

Look out for our surveys, they help form some of the data that we use in this report.

Thank you to all our customers who have taken part and completed surveys, they help form some of the data that we use in this report.

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