



**Connexus**

## Repairs

How we are maintaining our service

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## Community

Celebrating local achievements & projects



## Domestic Abuse Advice

Providing help and support for you & others in need

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Issue 5  
Autumn/Winter 2020



Hello

It continues to be a worrying time with Covid-19 still having a significant impact.

Our biggest priority continues to be the safety of our residents and staff and we have amended our ways of working (but still adhering to Government guidelines) to deliver as full a service as possible during this time.

Inevitably there have been difficulties delivering a full service and some of you may have experienced delays. All of us at Connexus are working as hard as we can to get services back to normal as soon as possible.

Despite the likely restrictions during this time, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you a very Happy Christmas and let's hope that 2021 is a more positive year for all of us!

Richard Woolley, CEO

## Performance

April 2020 - September 2020

Satisfaction with the quality of our homes **81.84%**

Satisfaction with our repairs **90.85%**

Satisfaction with lettings **98.00%**

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# Consultation

You will have received a letter from us all about our proposals to consolidate the group as we believe that simplifying the current group structure will save money, create a more streamlined organisation and avoid duplication of work. The savings we make can be reinvested in new housing and improving our existing homes and services.

Your feedback matters - here's how you can have your say:

Email us via [hello@connexus-group.co.uk](mailto:hello@connexus-group.co.uk)

Call us on 03332 31 32 33

Fill in the feedback form on our website [connexus-group.co.uk/contact](http://connexus-group.co.uk/contact)

Send your responses in the self-addressed envelope provided with the letter



# Repairs and COVID-19

We'd like to say a huge thank you for helping us to follow Government COVID-19 safety guidelines. We are offering a more normal repairs service after both lockdowns thanks to the help of local sub-contractors, however, non-urgent repairs may take a little longer due to the restrictions. We'll always keep you updated via our website and social media when new government guidelines are announced.

**Remember: Please let us know if you have an appointment scheduled and a member of your household has symptoms of COVID-19.**

## Can I book a repair? What can I expect?

Our team (alongside approved local contractors) are working extra hours to tackle a backlog of appointments that built up due to lockdown restrictions. Customers with non-urgent repairs may experience longer waiting times. Thank you to all our customers for their understanding and patience.

## For us

When we arrive at your home, we will always...

- Make sure we clean any surfaces we come into contact with
- Wear any necessary protective equipment, including face masks

## For you

It's all about the distance...

- Give us a minimum of 2 metres space at all times
- Before we arrive, wipe down any surfaces we're likely to come into contact with
- Once you've let us in, you and anyone else in the house will need to move to a separate room. We'll give you a shout when we're done!

# Keeping you safe

Connexus are committed to providing you with a home that meets all safety standards.

Safety checks have been continuing as usual during the lockdown period. Here's how many checks we've completed from April - September 2020:



Electrical tests:

**531**



Gas services:

**3136**



Gas safety compliance:

**99.62%**

## Fire safety and you

In each newsletter, we take a look at different issues around safety and your home. This time we focus on making you aware of the fire hazards in your home and the steps you can take to help prevent home fires.

### In the kitchen

- Keep tea towels away from your hob
- Turn pans down or take them off the heat if you need to leave the kitchen



### Around the house

- Never smoke in bed
- Be careful with candles and tea lights. Never place them near curtains.
- Keep lighters and matches out of the reach of children.



### Smoke alarms

- You are responsible for making sure the fire alarms in your home are working.
- Test smoke alarms every month.
- If your smoke alarm has a battery, replace this every year.



### Electrical appliances

- Sounds obvious, but keep appliances well away from water!
- Using a non-UK appliance? Use an adaptor. Never put a 2-prong plug into a 3-prong socket.
- Do not overload extension leads with too many plugs.

### Before bed

- Is the cooker off? Kitchen door shut?
- Switch off any portable heaters.
- If you use an electric blanket, turn it off when you get into bed. Never use an electric blanket and a hot water bottle together.

# Community Development Fund

Our Community Development Fund (CDF) has been set up to fund communities working together, on local projects, which have a positive effect in their area. Connexus is a not-for-profit business, and the CDF is us actively reinvesting in, supporting, and engaging with the communities we serve across Shropshire and Herefordshire.

Connexus welcome applications for funds and assistance for new and existing projects that meet one or more of the following:

- Benefits our tenants and develops links with the wider community
- Encourages interaction between different generations within the whole community
- Leads to activities people want, but no one currently provides
- Generates training or employment opportunities

Last year we donated over £40,000 worth of grants to local community projects.

## Do you know a local project that needs some support?

Our Community Development Fund gives grants up to £5,000

**Apply here:** [connexus-group.co.uk/cdf](https://connexus-group.co.uk/cdf)





## Food bank donations

The projects supported by the Community Development Fund (CDF) in more normal times tend to be community groups doing anything from rejuvenating outdoor spaces to running skills development programmes. Early in the lockdown, we used CDF grants to help support the food banks that have become even more vital to many during the Coronavirus pandemic.

We donated a total of £2,700 to 18 local food banks across Shropshire and Herefordshire. This follows a previous grant of £2,700 to Ludlow Food Bank to improve their storage facilities.



We've seen a big increase in demand here at the foodbank and our figures show that we've been busier than any previous year. The support from Connexus and the whole community has meant that up to September this year we've been able to support an incredible 538 different individuals of all age groups.

**Gemma Williams**  
Ludlow Food Bank

## Shawbury Football Club

With fewer leisure activities available to all of us under Coronavirus restrictions, and with many of us feeling a rejuvenated focus on health, we're proud to support local sports teams for kids and adults.

Shawbury FC started their junior football training sessions (while following COVID-19 guidelines) and successfully applied for a CDF grant of £2544.90 for new kit to see them through the upcoming season. Besides the obvious benefits to youngsters' health, these junior football sessions will be a stress reliever for parents.



Our Junior teams were so excited to receive their new kit! These footballs sessions are helping kids and parents alike during these unprecedented times.

**Sean Evans**  
Coach, Shawbury FC

## Lakelands Academy in Ellesmere

They were granted £5,000 for a state-of-the-art upgrading of their theatre lighting and sound systems. Though their primary focus is providing top-level education for secondary school pupils, the theatre facilities are enjoyed by people of all ages from the Ellesmere community - something the CDF were only too happy to support.

## Ludlow Cricket Club

They were successful in applying for a £3,000 grant from the Connexus CDF that will go towards all-new triple-lane practice nets. So, watch out Joe Root and the rest - the next big cricket superstar could be coming straight out of Ludlow!



# National Housing Federations Together with Tenants



Together with Tenants (TwT) is a sector-wide initiative focused on strengthening the relationship between tenants, residents and housing association landlords.

Connexus was one of the 130 early adopters of the National Housing Federations (NHF) initiative who worked with them to review their approach. You may remember we told you about this back in 2019 when some of our customer involvement panel members attended an event. The NHF are now ready to roll out their four-point plan to all housing associations.

Connexus are already signed up, and believe that we are already on the right road to meet the aims they set out in the TwT charter (action point two).

We have already worked hard to make sure we meet the commitments

## 1. Relationships

We have a customer offer that states our commitment to treating all customers with respect, honesty and openness

## 2. Communication

We regularly communicate with you individually about your tenancy and we publish information about our performance and what we are doing in our newsletters and on our website. We also have an Annual Report that shows our progress and what we are doing to improve

## 3. Voice and Influence

We ask you for your views in a number of ways, for example:

- Through telephone surveys
- By encouraging you to make complaints or give us compliments
- By consulting with you - most recently on repairs and procurement
- By listening to what you say on our social media pages
- By providing opportunities for you to be part of a group, such as scrutiny or focus groups

## 4. Accountability

We are actively seeking to recruit more people to take part in the scrutiny of what we do. Our existing group have made many recommendations that the board have approved.

## 5. Quality

Our customer offer sets out what we do to ensure your home is maintained to a good standard. A new compliance team was set up to ensure that we meet all our obligations in respect of keeping you safe in your home and we have a programme of planned works to ensure that the major components of homes are replaced at the end of their life expectancy. And of course, we carry out responsive repairs when you report them.

## 6. When things go wrong

We have simplified our complaints process and are appointing a Complaints Manager in the New Year, who will manage the complaint process and ensure that Connexus continues to respond positively to put things right when they go wrong.

But this is only the start. We need to make sure that we continue to meet the aims of the charter and constantly review our services to make sure they meet customer demand.

We cannot do this alone!

Please:

- Continue to tell us what you think - in whichever way works for you and whenever you want to
- Get involved when we ask for feedback - we'll be looking at the different aims throughout the year
- Join the scrutiny group and directly influence decisions



# 24 new affordable homes for Bishops Castle, Shropshire

Late October saw us hand over the keys to 24 new affordable homes to residents in Bishops Castle, South Shropshire. The Oak Meadow development makes good on Connexus' promise to deliver high-quality, affordable housing to rural communities.

We believe in working with local communities to make sure that we respond to their housing needs. The Town Council had identified the need for affordable housing as a means to retain young people and families in Bishops Castle, a struggle for many rural communities. Shropshire Council's housing enablers then identified the site. This partnership between Connexus and the local community attracted the attention of Robert Jenrick MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, who visited the site back in August 2019.



"It has been a pleasure working with Connexus, who have been willing throughout the process to respond to local concerns regarding the development. We were also pleased the contribution of £100,000 of community-led funding towards the scheme has led to such a positive result. It's great to see that people are now making them their own, at a time when home is more important than ever." -

**Robert Macey**

Shropshire Council's member for Housing and Strategic Planning.

Oak Meadow contains a mix of properties for affordable rent (available via the Home Point online system) and shared ownership, a Government-backed scheme where buyers can purchase a share of their home. Connexus worked closely with construction contractor J Harper & Sons Ltd to build homes that are energy efficient and future-fit. Every home is fitted with an innovative Mitsubishi air source heat pump, absorbing heat from the air outside to heat radiators and hot water while keeping energy bills low.



Working with Shropshire Council, the Town Council and the wider local community has made sure that we've responded to the specific housing needs of Bishops Castle. I'm sure new residents will be very happy in their homes for years to come.

**Richard Woolley**

CEO, Connexus



**Read more about all our developments here...**

[connexus-group.co.uk/developments](https://connexus-group.co.uk/developments)

# Scrutiny: a searching study, inquiry, or inspection

For you, the customer: the chance to find out more about what we do, ask questions of the people who provide the services and make recommendations to improve services and get better value for money. To ensure the board directly hears from customers.

For Connexus: to have a critical friend watching what and how we do things and telling us where we can improve. To make sure we focus on what matters to you.

When scrutiny is effective, it can change board decisions, as each review reminds them what matters to tenants and has recommendations about improvements to services from those who receive those services.

## How?

We will support tenants and residents to work together to independently review services. We will supply you with the information you request and support you to carry out your own research, to question why we do things the way we do and to reach conclusions from the information you gather, so that you can make recommendations for improvement to effect change, improve a service and/or make it more efficient.

## Who?

- Do you like to ask why?
- Do you like talking to people?
- Do you like puzzles/problem solving?
- Do you want to improve your general skills/confidence etc
- Do you want to try something new?

Worried about a time commitment?

We want to make scrutiny accessible to all, so even if you can only have a couple of hours to spare, we will look at ways that you can contribute to the overall review.

How you carry out the review will depend on who wants to be involved and what works for the majority.

## Consultation portal

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. Connexus developed a way for us to consult with you online.

We launched our online consultation platform in August this year, with a consultation on repairs. A topic we knew was important to the majority of our tenants.

Don't worry if you are not online though, you can still join in by phone, or post. Let us know if you would be interested in upcoming consultation and we will make a note so that we can contact you when we have a new consultation.

The following sums up the responses to the repairs consultation, which we'll use to develop the new repairs policy and procedure.

## Repair categories

The different repair categories are important to you, but only if Connexus sticks to them and does things when it says it will.

## Length of time to wait

This was very much an individual's choice. There was a general feeling that the planned works response time should be less than 12 weeks and many customers felt the responsive should be even quicker.

## Appointment times

Some customers would like appointments that are more precise within the current times, while others would like to see weekend and/or evening appointments, avoiding the need to take time off from work.

## Adapting to individual needs

A number of you felt that whilst Connexus does try to be flexible, we could still do more to adapt to and understand individual needs.

We'd love to hear from you if you regularly think 'if they only did this, the service would be so much better.'

Call for chat on 03332 31 32 33 or  
email: [hello@connexus-group.co.uk](mailto:hello@connexus-group.co.uk)

## A quality repair

Amongst other things, a quality repair should fully resolve the issue, be done quickly, to a good standard and last.

## Priorities

The three most frequent comments were

- The need for the repair to be effective and of a good standard;
- The need to be prompt - being on time to appointments and responding to repairs in good time;
- The courtesy of the people coming into your home

## When you report repairs

There were several comments about the delays in picking up calls and these have been passed onto the Customer Service Manager, whose team answer the calls. We were encouraged to hear that when you do get through to our Customer Service Team you feel they do good a job. Other customers thought that there is still room for improvement on how well our team understand what you report.

Another theme that came out was that you are not always given an appointment, which you would like to see improved.

## Frustrations

Comments showed that Connexus needs to improve its communication with its own teams and with customers, so that repairs requests do not have to be repeated. There are also frustrations around the time it takes for repair to happen and the quality of that repair.

## Do well

Many of you complimented different teams and felt that they were generally polite and helpful and provided a good service. As with all services, there are areas in which we can improve and these comments will be passed to the relevant teams in addition to their use in the repairs review.



# Community spirit

Our garden competition unearthed more than the greenfingers.

We found out about Mr Smith, who goes over and above the norm to make the communal areas where he lives a space that all the tenants who live there, and the general public who walk by, can enjoy.

Mr Smith sought permission to make the changes to the front garden so while Connexus' grounds maintenance team looks after the basic grounds maintenance, Mr Smith makes the communal areas an attractive place to sit or even just pass by

When asked why, he replied

'the enjoyment factor... I live there and I want it to look nice, to be proud of the area'

Mr Smith has certainly achieved that, with many neighbours and passer by's commenting on the colourful displays. Mr Smith has also jet-washed the shared communal space and adorned it with baskets and pots, which meant he and his neighbours had a welcoming and pleasant space to enjoy the outdoors during lockdown.

So what's in store for the future? Mr Smith plans to continue to provide a colourful display outside his home, but would love to see other neighbours join in to create their own 'Cordwell Park in bloom'.



## Thank you, Julie!

First starting her career in housing for South Shropshire District Council, Julie made the switch to South Shropshire Housing Association in 1994 and stayed with us all the way through our journey to becoming Connexus. A longtime Ludlow resident, Julie's role as Independent Living Scheme Co-ordinator saw her take the lead at sheltered housing schemes for older residents.

At Connexus, we're passionate about providing the very best services for our customers and Julie's exceptional customer service over the years has been second-to-none. Her annual holiday trips were famous among the residents at Whitefriars and Beech Gardens schemes in Ludlow, providing a fun (and sometimes surprisingly raucous!) high point for everybody's years.

A particular highlight for Julie in her housing career was the vital role she played in Connexus winning the Best Older People's Landlord Award at the Inside Housing Awards 2018. The award recognised the important social value of our Independent Living Schemes in helping residents enjoy their home environment for as long as possible, with Julie demonstrating to judges how these schemes combine high-quality affordable housing with a real sense of community. 2018 also saw Beech Gardens, then overseen by Julie, shortlisted for a prestigious Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) award.



Watch the  
interview  
with Julie

[connexus-group.co.uk/julie](https://connexus-group.co.uk/julie)



# Lunch Club heroes make Queen's Birthday Honours List

**Betty and Margaret have been awarded the British Empire Medal for running the Church Stretton Lunch Club - held at our Ley Gardens Independent Living Centre.**

Each year, the Queen's Birthday Honours List recognises the achievements and services of extraordinary people. The national press celebrates the celebrity additions to the list, but this year Marcus Rashford, Mary Berry and the rest have been joined by two esteemed Church Stretton residents who have made an undeniable contribution to their community for 30 years...and counting!

Back in 1990, Church Stretton residents Margaret Hamer and Betty Lewis founded the Lunch Club, a place for local people to meet, chat and enjoy a delicious hot meal. During more normal times, The Lunch Club is held in the community room at our Ley Gardens Independent Living Scheme in Church Stretton, Shropshire. Up to 40 residents and members of other local community groups come together to meet, chat and enjoy a delicious hot meal.



Well, I wasn't expecting that phone call! I couldn't have done it without all my helpers - who have been fantastic - and Ley Gardens for giving us the use of this lovely room.

**Margaret Hamer**, Lunch Club

Margaret and Betty are both now proud recipients of the British Empire Medal (BEM), awarded by the Her Majesty the Queen for 'hands-on' service the local community. The Lunch Club is just one of many groups and social clubs that have found a natural home in one of our Independent Living Centres' community rooms.

"It's a place for people to come, meet their friends and reduce social isolation. Residents can come and have a hot meal, have some fun and link in with the wider community." - Michelle Hodnett, Independent Living Coordinator.

Although currently suspended by Coronavirus restrictions, the Lunch Club was first set-up not just to feed local residents, but also to combat loneliness and social isolation by encouraging new friendships. Now rightfully recognised for their years of dedicated volunteering, Betty and Margaret just can't wait to bring everybody together again.

**Do you run a community group that is looking for a space? Our Independent Living Centres have Community Rooms for hosting clubs, groups and events. Contact us to find out more.**

Watch the interview  
with Margaret

[connexus-group.co.uk/heroes](https://connexus-group.co.uk/heroes)



# What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is any type of controlling, bullying, threatening or violent behaviour between people in a romantic relationship or between close family members. It can be physical, emotional, sexual, financial or digital abuse (using social media or mobile phones).



## Domestic abuse is:

- A repeated pattern of behaviour with a clear intention of trying to hurt or upset the person they are in a relationship with
- Always about one person trying to control the other person

Relationships shouldn't be scary.

Unless you are trying to help someone who has been very open about their experiences it might be difficult to acknowledge the problem directly.

## Support for someone else

### General advice would be:

- Listen to them, try to understand and let them know that it's not them who are at fault
- Don't tell them to leave the relationship, this is their decision
- Look after yourself while you are supporting someone through such a difficult and emotional time. Ensure that you do not put yourself into a dangerous situation

### I'm worried for someone else, like a neighbour

- This can be a difficult, you don't necessarily know exactly what's happening

## Support for you

Advice on community support and what to do in an emergency

It's not your fault and help is available...

If you're in immediate danger call 999

- **Dial 999**
- Can't talk? Cough or make a noise to let the operator know you are there, and that the call is genuine. They can alert the police on your behalf.
- If transferred to the police and you still can't talk, **press 55** and they will continue to listen.

### Talk to someone you trust

Tell someone what's happening. They can help you get the support you need. These people could be:

- A friend
- Family member
- Teacher or neighbour

- If you hear/see an incident and believe someone is in danger, contact the police
- The police have a responsibility to respond and to undertake a risk assessment where there is domestic abuse taking place

### One of my parents is abusing the other

Abuse can be, physical or mental.

- Neither you or your victimised parent is responsible for what is happening
- You can seek support and advice from your local domestic abuse service (details below)

### Tactics to support you

Avoid unsafe situations

If someone at home is hurting or scaring you:

- Make sure you're not alone with that person
- Avoid them when they're angry, upset, or have been drinking
- Stay in your room or somewhere in the house that feels safe
- If something is happening, don't intervene—your priority is keeping yourself safe

### Make a safety plan

A safety plan can help you know what to do if you feel unsafe at home in an emergency. It's important to talk to someone you trust or a support service when you're making a safety plan.

It could include:

- Who to call (a trusted adult, the police)
- Where to go if you need to leave home, and how to get there safely
- What to take (charger, medication)
- If you need to leave home to stay safe, it's important to talk to the police - call 999 once you've left



## Digital abuse is still abuse

If someone is using your phone or social media to harass, stalk or control you, this is abuse...

Report abuse to the police by calling 101.

Online abuse can be:

- Reported to Child Protection Advisor at CEOP. This isn't confidential, but they can help to stop the abuse.
- Social media sites have ways of reporting online abuse or bullying.
- If you feel ok to, block the person so they can't contact you.
- Change passwords and usernames on accounts to keep them secure, and change them regularly
- Keep passwords private - you have a right to online privacy, and shouldn't feel pressured to Make sure only people you know can see your posts on social media and only accept friend requests from people you know
- Check which apps on your phone use GPS or location sharing (Find My Phone, fitness apps, Snapchat etc). Turn GPS off when not in use so you can't be tracked

## Sexting

No one should pressure you to send or receive nude pictures, videos or sexual messages. It is against the law to send nude photos of yourself if you're under 18 and for anyone to save or share them, even if they are under 18 too.

If someone won't stop messaging you or asking you for nudes you can:

- Ask them to stop, and explain how it makes you feel; a respectful partner should understand
- Block the person
- Report them to CEOP

Download ZIPIT from Childline to help you deal with any pressure you experience about sexting.



## Get help

Shropshire Domestic Abuse Service - For men and women living in Shropshire (including Telford & Wrekin)

**shropsdas.org.uk**  
**0300 303 1191**

• West Mercia Womens Aid  
• For women living in Herefordshire  
• **westmerciawomensaid.org**  
• **0800 783 1359**

• Go to the Mens Advice Line  
• For men in Herefordshire or Shropshire  
• **mensadvice.org.uk**  
• **0808 8010327**



# See our Shared Ownership homes



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