

## **Corporate plan 2023-2026**

**Good quality  
affordable homes  
for all**

Corporate plan 2023-2026



### **We are Connexus**

Connexus is a rural housing association which provides over 10,000 affordable rented homes and associated services.

Operating across the counties of Shropshire and Herefordshire, it strives to be a trusted landlord that values its customers and staff, makes a positive impact, and enhances the lives of those living in its communities. As well as being a great place to work, Connexus aims to build a customer focussed culture delivered by one team embracing a shared approach.

### **Foreword**

Creating a long-term plan for any organisation in 2023 is no easy task. With global events causing disruption and affecting everything from the price of energy to the availability of materials, it would have been easier to limit our ambition or maintain the status quo.

But as a community and customer focussed organisation, that wouldn't help those struggling with the cost of living, looking for an affordable place to live, trying to find work or learn new skills. It also wouldn't help the organisation develop in any meaningful way. It is therefore up to us to use our organisational strength, people, and expertise to develop something which tackles these issues and creates opportunities for growth.

To do this, we must have three things in place: firm foundations, an understanding of what we want to achieve and the means to make it happen. This plan has been developed with all three of those things being carefully considered.

In terms of foundations, stability starts with good governance and our ability to manage risks. In 2022, Connexus was re-graded by the Regulator of Social Housing and now holds the highest possible rating of G1. Having robust governance means that whatever decisions we make during the life of our plan will be underpinned by the right checks and balances.

To understand what we want to achieve, it is crucial that our priorities reflect those of our customers and other



*Connexus chief executive and board chair Michele Ibbs.*

stakeholders, otherwise we will find it difficult to meet and manage expectations. They must also reflect Connexus' own aspirations, and for us this is to provide decent, safe homes for those on lower incomes. After all, a good quality home is a basic human right for everyone.

When we spoke to customers during the development of this plan, they wanted to see services change for the better, especially when it came to maintaining and improving their homes and accessing services. Demand for repair work has increased significantly over the last two years, and we must respond to this challenge with significant improvements, something this plan sets in motion.

Many of our homes were built before 1982, which brings a number of challenges – especially when combined with the dispersed nature of our geography. Older construction methods mean some homes aren't as energy efficient as they could be, and this plan begins the process of ensuring all properties are rated SAP C by 2030.

And while there is a need to bring homes up to date and invest in this type of work, we also need to make tough choices about those homes which are no longer viable. This means that some homes will be lost, but we plan to continue developing sustainable new homes across our areas each and every year, working to meet demand and create affordable places to live in the heart of our communities.

Away from the bricks and mortar of our homes, we must improve access to our customer services to reflect changing habits and levels of expectation, especially around access through digital channels. This must be done without losing focus on the in-community delivery of wider housing and support services.

Understanding what we want to achieve has been an important part of developing this plan, but we will not meet our objectives if we do not have the means to deliver them. That's why we will be investing in change for our people, systems, and processes. This will involve transformation and modernisation across the organisation, but it will also mean embracing new ways of working.

To support this change, we will introduce a new approach of making sure we get the most out of each interaction we have with customers, colleagues, or stakeholders. We call this our 'make it count' approach. Alongside our values, this will help us deliver a more customer focussed culture.

We hope the plan explains where Connexus is heading over the next three years in a straightforward way. What it means for our customers, colleagues and stakeholders is explained most simply in our new vision, our North Star – *good quality affordable homes for all*.

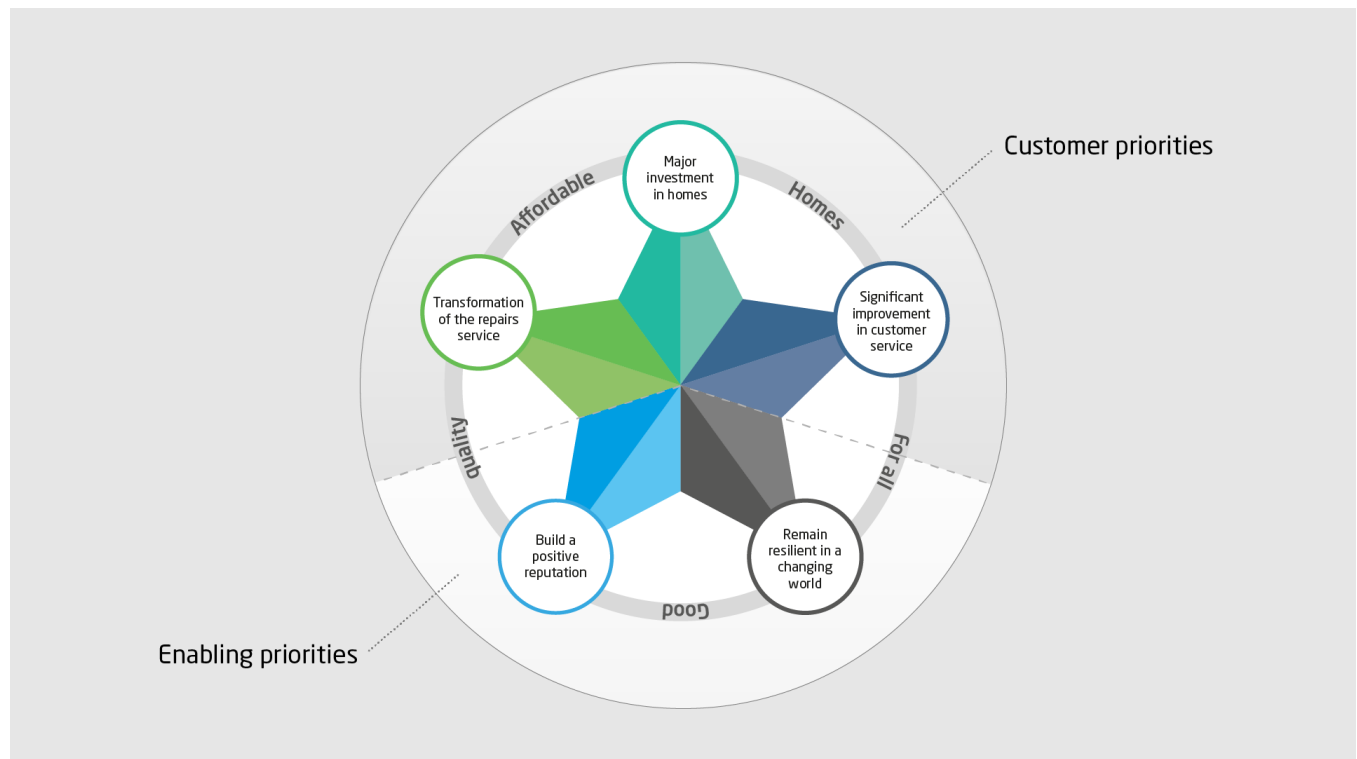
It serves as our statement of intent, of where we want to be.

**Richard Woolley, chief executive**

**Michele Ibbs, chair of Connexus' board**

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# The North Star - Good quality affordable homes for all



## Understanding our priorities and objectives

The plan contains five priorities shown in the diagram above- three customer priorities and two enabling priorities. Each priority has a series of objectives which will deliver outcomes over the three-year life of the plan. There are also things that will need to happen on a day-to-day basis to support their delivery. We call these business-as-usual (BAU) achievements.

Our customer priorities are based on things customers have told us are important to them. They will put customers at the heart of Connexus' service delivery. Enabling priorities support the delivery of our customer priorities, and make sure key business functions like finance, IT and the colleague experience remains strong and continues to develop over time.

All five priority areas include objectives which are cross cutting and are delivered by teams working together across the organisation.

To make sure objectives are delivered successfully, each is linked to a strategy. These are in turn delivered through team and individual plans.



Each objective also links directly to an element of the North Star. We call these pillars. Each pillar ‘Good Quality’, ‘Affordable’, ‘Homes’, ‘For All’ has its own definition shown below.

**Good Quality** - at least middle quartile service performance delivery within the parameters of affordability and based on frequent benchmarked data.

**Affordable** - in its wider context and not defined by a single formula, we want our homes to be “not too expensive for people of limited means.”

**Homes** - a focus on our existing homes and tenures, but with an open mind about other tenure types in the future.

**For all** - we will operate in the two counties of Shropshire and Herefordshire.

Each priority, its North Star pillar, associated strategy and outcome is shown in the following tables.



*Customer priorities include transforming the repairs service, investing in homes and improvement in customer service.*

## Transformation of the repairs service

Connexus works across a wide geography. The transformation will ensure a consistent efficient repairs service across the two counties that responds quickly and appropriately to customer needs, while improving value for money.

Objective	North Star link	Strategy link	Outcome by 2026
Modern and efficient repairs	Good Quality,	Delivered through the	Defined, agreed and resourced “opening

Objective	North Star link	Strategy link	Outcome by 2026
service that delivers based on customer demand.	Homes.	Homes Strategy.	<p>up” offer in place.</p> <p>Access to customer portal to report repairs.</p> <p>Increased customer satisfaction with the repairs and maintenance work we complete - 92%.</p> <p>Repair jobs completed within target - 90%.</p>

## Major investment in homes

The average age of Connexus homes is increasing matched by a low average energy efficiency rating. By investing significantly, Connexus will improve the quality of its homes and the energy rating to SAP C. This will make them better places to live and more sustainable over time.

Objective	North Star link	Strategy link	Outcome by 2026
SAP C interventions and treatments.	Good Quality, Homes.	Delivered through the Homes Strategy.	<p>2571 properties completed to SAP C.</p> <p>Resolution of condensation and mould cases within six weeks from point of reporting. Where damp</p>

Objective	North Star link	Strategy link	Outcome by 2026
			is found a resolution date with the customer will be agreed.
Pilot SAP B interventions and treatments.	Good quality, Affordable, Homes.	Delivered through the Homes Strategy.	Pilot project delivered and evaluated.
All our properties are well maintained and available to let.	Good Quality, Homes.	Delivered through the Homes Strategy.	<p>Increased customer satisfaction with the decent homes to 92% over the life of the plan.</p> <p>20% Stock Condition Surveys completed each year.</p> <p>Maximise the period of our occupancy of our homes measured through the percentage void loss - less than 1.96% of rent throughout the life of the plan.</p> <p>Set a decent homes budget of £23,678,000 for the next three years replacing components to tenants homes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kitchens - 960 homes</li> </ul>

Objective	North Star link	Strategy link	Outcome by 2026
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bathrooms - 600 homes</li> <li>• Gas boilers - 1232 homes</li> <li>• Roofs - 535 homes</li> <li>• Windows - 460 homes</li> <li>• Doors - 199 homes.</li> </ul>
Delivering 200 future proofed new homes each year.	Homes.	Delivered through the Homes Strategy.	<p>200 new mixed tenure homes delivered across Shropshire and Herefordshire each year appealing to a diverse customer base in sustainable locations.</p> <p>Homes that are future proofed, demonstrated through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• designed out service charges</li> <li>• reduction in maintenance</li> <li>• communal areas only for older persons accommodation.</li> </ul>



## BAU achievements

- Ensure our homes are safe by maintaining 100% compliance in gas safety
- Maintain all our homes at Decent Homes Standard
- Undertake five yearly electrical checks, asbestos, fire safety, water hygiene and LOLER (Lift Operating and Lifting Equipment Regulations).

## Significant improvement in customer service

Customers are at the heart of everything Connexus does. The organisation needs to listen to and have greater understanding of customer needs and respond with a high-quality service.

Objective	North Star link	Strategy link	Outcome by 2026
Have a customer focused culture driven by systems thinking that lives the PRIDE values.	For All.	Delivered through the People Strategy.	<p>High levels of customer satisfaction to reflect how much our culture is viewed as being customer focused overall customer satisfaction 92%.</p> <p>Measurable improvements in colleagues belief that Connexus lives the PRIDE values colleague survey 85%.</p> <p>Embedded systems thinking and the utilisation of continuous</p>

Objective	North Star link	Strategy link	Outcome by 2026
			improvement methodologies achieving measurable improvements in customer service and efficiency.
Provide segmented customer offers and a holistic locality model to deliver business wide services to our customers.	Good Quality, Affordable, For All.	Delivered through the Customer Strategy.	<p>We will have in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Client-specific offers</li> <li>• A holistic cross team locality model</li> <li>• Patch-specific KPIs to provide local accountability to customers.</li> </ul>
Customers who are listened to and empowered to engage with us and scrutinise and influence our services.	Good Quality, For All.	Delivered through the Customer Strategy.	<p>Local and "special interest" customer groups in place with a clear line of communication to Board and Customer Services Committee.</p> <p>Customer improved and approved methodology and Voice of the Customer programme</p>

Objective	North Star link	Strategy link	Outcome by 2026
			implemented with demonstrable outcomes.
Digital access - internal and external.	For All.	Delivered through the Corporate Strategies.	Hybrid access for customers to our services through online portals whilst maintaining access through our Customer Service Team.

### BAU achievements

- Be fully compliant with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code
- Target for satisfaction with letting - 90%
- Net Promoter Score for new customers - 60%.

## Build a positive reputation

Customers are at the heart of everything Connexus does. The organisation needs to listen to and have greater understanding of customer needs and respond with a high-quality service.

Objective	North Star link	Strategy link	Outcome by 2026
Recognised as an employer of	Good Quality.	Delivered through	Measurable improvement in our ability to attract

Objective	North Star link	Strategy link	Outcome by 2026
choice in the region.		the People Strategy.	<p>candidates who closely meet our specified requirements - first time recruitment 90%.</p> <p>Substantial improvement in colleague perception of Connexus and their recommendation of the organisation as a good employer - employee NPS 40%.</p>
Support services that enhance our community offering, contribute positively to social impact and enhance partnership working.	Homes, For All.	Delivered through the Customer Strategy.	A holistic model for delivering support services in place that is aligned with our locality model.

## BAU achievements

- Continue to nurture and develop partnership working with our customers and stakeholders to deliver our services and use the community investment fund and available grants to benefit the communities in which we serve
- Have an apprenticeship scheme and other people initiatives embedded in Connexus to form part of our workforce planning and contribute to our wider community objectives.



# Remain resilient in a changing world

Strong governance and financial viability are the critical foundations to any successful organisation. Connexus is committed to maintaining these strengths to enable the successful delivery of what matters to its customers.

Objective	North Star link	Strategy link	Outcome by 2026
Long-term sustainable funding.	Homes.	Delivered through the Corporate Strategies.	Long term ESG funding in place, replacing existing drawn RCFs and liquidity of minimum 18 months.
VfM to support investment into Customer services.	Affordable.	Delivered through the Corporate Strategies.	A minimum of median quartile performance achieved across all areas of the business compared to peer group.  Productivity improvements identified and embedded into the long-term financial forecast.

## BAU achievements

- Retain our governance grading of G1 with viability no less than V2
- Ensure all regulatory and statutory reporting will be of high quality and timely
- Ensure our compliance with the Regulatory Standards and National Housing Federation (NHF) Code of Governance on an annual basis

- Minimise security risk to computer data, and as such maintain as a minimum, accreditation with Cyber Essentials Plus
- Maintain strong finances through embedding efficiency measures across the business delivered through service improvements, that drive improved service delivery for our customers. Delivering asset cover no less than 167%, operating margin (including void/RTB sales/staircasing) 27% and interest cover better than 230%
- We will maintain rent arrear levels at 3% to ensure healthy business and affordability of rents for customers  
Develop a renovation and disposal plan.

## Our strategies



*Connexus' strategies set out how the plan's priorities will be developed and cover homes, customers, people, and corporate areas.*

To support the delivery of the plan over the next three years a series of strategies have been developed. The outcomes outlined in the plan's priority areas form part of these strategies which are in turn linked to a supporting team or delivery plan. This ensures focus is maintained and there is clear accountability from strategy through to operational delivery.

## **Homes Strategy**

The Homes Strategy emphasises the importance of good-quality homes, and the vital role in developing neighbourhoods, communities and contributing to the economic growth of surrounding areas. It acknowledges the role of homes in enabling individuals and families to thrive, and emphasises Connexus' commitment to affordable, comfortable, and secure housing.

## **Customer Strategy**

The Customer Strategy works hand in hand with the Homes Strategy, aligning with Connexus' PRIDE values, Voice of the Customer delivery framework, and Make it Count approach to shape the business around our customers. These principles ensure that interactions with colleagues, customers, and external stakeholders are meaningful and result in positive outcomes.

## **People Strategy**

The People Strategy aims to support Connexus in achieving its corporate objectives through well-planned initiatives that optimise the contributions of its employees. Safety, well-being, equality, diversity, and inclusion form the foundation of this strategy at every stage.

## **Corporate strategies**

A series of corporate strategies are focused on maintaining strong governance and robust financial viability for the organisation. These strategies are designed to further strengthen Connexus' ability to serve its customers without compromising on service delivery.

# Our values

Our values lay the foundation for what we the care about most. They provide a common purpose for our colleagues to understand, work towards and live by, and set the standard for what our customers can expect to see from us. The PRIDE values signify the behaviours we ask our colleagues to display in their work from how we do things, how we treat others, what we say, how we say it, and how we can expect to be treated.

They shape the way we act every day, which is why we place them at the heart of delivering a customer focused culture. Our PRIDE values will form the basis of a



behavioural framework, which will detail the behaviours and attitudes required from all colleagues to support the delivery of this corporate plan.

Our PRIDE values are:

**Passionate** - We care deeply about our work and our customers and take pride in serving people and communities. This shows in our energy, enthusiasm and commitment to going the extra mile, and building for the future.

**Respectful** - We deal with people of all ages, all backgrounds, all needs and requirements and we treat everyone fairly, considerately and as individuals.

**Involving** - We develop services for people, making sure we listen to what they need and involve them all the way. We learn from our experiences and always look to grow and develop together.

**Determined** - When we start something, we see it through. We are decisive, focused, and tenacious and work around challenges to find the best outcome.

**Effective** - We aim to get it right first time and to do the simple things well, because that sets the standard and everything else follows. We deliver.

## Making it count

Connexus' make 'Make It Count' approach will ensure all interactions across the business with colleagues and customers, as well as external stakeholders, are meaningful and deliver a positive outcome. Colleagues can ensure a meaningful outcome by asking themselves and positively challenging others through their interactions whether they have:

- Resolved an issue
- Prevented an issue
- Answered a question or query
- Acted on feedback
- Used insight and data to improve performance
- Aligned processes, policies, responses to ensure consistency
- Delivered better value for money



- Improved team-working
- Improved partnership-working
- Enhanced communication
- Completed or progressed actions or projects.

“Did you make it count?”, “Have you made it count?”, “Not sure you made that count?” are also useful questions and comments that can be employed by colleagues to challenge others in a non-confrontational manner using accepted “business-speak”. The outcomes from meetings can also be gauged using this approach – “did we add value to our business by having that meeting? What did we achieve? Did we make it count?”

Connexus will also be building the ‘Make it Count’ principles into the roll-out of our locality model which provides a framework to deliver services in a focused, collaborative way that meets the needs of our customers. The model brings together key colleagues to work directly for the benefit of customers, communities, and stakeholders within their defined area. Through collaborative working, the locality team will make decisions and respond directly to the needs of their customers, improving and delivering services in the most effective and efficient way.

## Planning for 2026 and beyond

At Connexus we want to deliver our core services to the highest standard, and this will always be our priority as we strive to achieve our North Star.

However, we also want to nurture our ambition and innovative thinking beyond the life of this corporate plan.

**During the lifetime of the corporate plan, we will be taking the business forward by planning for the delivery of the following objectives:**

Objective	North Star link
<b>Major investment in homes</b> Consider our approach to energy efficiency and Net	Good Quality, Affordable, Homes.

Objective	North Star link
Carbon Zero following successful completion and assessment of our SAP B pilot project.	
<b>Significant improvement in customer service</b> Consider a range of other tenure types in consultation with our partners. Existing tenures will remain the priority and these must be meeting performance targets before we will widen our offering.	For All.
<b>Remain resilient in a changing world</b> Consider outright sale opportunities to provide profits to deliver more quality affordable homes in Shropshire and Herefordshire.	Good Quality, Affordable, Homes.
<b>Significant improvement in customer service</b> Develop services and approaches that exceed customer expectations through intelligence based and automated systems which anticipate, respond and meet need, allowing a faster more efficient response for our customers.	Homes, For All.

## Thank you

A huge thank you to the customers, colleagues and stakeholders involved in the creation of this corporate plan. Your views, feedback and insight were crucial in developing its themes and shaping the outcomes it will deliver.

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