

CONNECT

The magazine for Connexus commu

Winter 2024

Serving up friendship

Community cafe opens

You're hired

New apprentices start
work

**Bumper
edition**
.....
Includes special
pull-out and keep
annual review

Billy Billingham

**The Ex-SAS and TV star talks to Connect Magazine
about life in the military and his new live tour**



**Hereford River Carnival • Apprentices • Inclusion cafe
Recipes • WhatsApp and live chat • Community alarms**

ARE YOU COVERED IN YOUR NEW HOME?



SCAN ME

IF YOU'VE JUST MOVED HOME, OR AREN'T COVERED, MAKE CONTENTS INSURANCE THE FIRST THING ON THE TO DO LIST

Connexus doesn't cover loss, replacement of possessions or damage to your home, but home contents insurance can cover the cost of replacing things like furniture, carpets, clothes and electronics.

Find out more by visiting [connexus-group.co.uk/contentsinsurance](https://www.connexus-group.co.uk/contentsinsurance)

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You could win £25 in vouchers in this issue's word search.



In this Issue



Viewpoint

New features for a bumper edition

Welcome to a bumper edition of Connect Magazine, perfect for those cold winter nights, when there's nothing good on TV!

We've taken a different approach this time and are excited to share our first interview, catching up with SAS veteran Billy Billingham in his Herefordshire home (page 8).

To help customers better scrutinise our services, we're publishing new tenant satisfaction scores in a *How are we doing* feature (page 14), which explains how you can

get involved with shaping our services. There's a fantastic curry and side dish recipe ideas (page 16), and a first look at completed renovation work in Ludlow (page 17)

We round out the mag with news from CEO Kate Smith and our winter word search, where you can win a £25 voucher by finding the missing word.

Have a great Christmas, whatever you're up to!

Sophie

Sophie Mellings
Editor

Children watching a circus workshop at one the Hereford park events.



Snapshot

If you have a local story you'd like us to cover, get in touch with the team by emailing connect@connexus-group.co.uk, calling our number **03332 31 32 33** or messaging us on social media [@weareconnexus](https://www.instagram.com/weareconnexus)

Community Communities come together to party

Over 600 people attended a series of free community events at three parks across Hereford this summer.

The events, run by Hereford River Carnival, were supported by the Connexus Community Development Fund and other sponsors. Over 20 volunteers helped organise the events and activities.

Circus workshops, paper aeroplane making, crafting and

bouncy castles were just some of the events taking place. There were also baby chill tents for the youngest visitors. One parent commented "I thought the kids would only want to stay an hour, but we've been here all day!"

The organisers of Hereford River Carnival were delighted with the success of the events and hope to hold them again next year.

Cooking up a storm

Residents at Connexus Bath Street's younger persons scheme have created a community garden and kitchen with grants from Herefordshire Together, the Foyer Federation, and the Iron Fund.

The young people, supported by Connexus staff, are learning gardening skills while renovating a nearby garden. The funding has provided tools, seeds, and a greenhouse for growing vegetables, herbs, and pollinator-friendly flowers. Cookery classes on preparing healthy meals with the produce will start in the new year.



The new apprentices with Connexus chief executive Kate Smith

You're hired - new apprentices start work

Fifteen new apprentices have joined Connexus following a recruitment campaign this summer.

An incredible 375 individual applications were received from 250 candidates, reflecting the growing interest in apprenticeships in the area.

Now they're a few months in, plumbing apprentice Hayley Evans said "The work is really interesting, and the team are so supportive. I'm enjoying my

course as well. I love meeting the customers and I hope I'll be able to stay with Connexus when I've qualified."

Apprenticeships are a key part of Connexus' commitment to investing in the future of local communities as detailed in Rural Ambition.

To find out more about apprenticeship opportunities at Connexus visit [connexus-group.co.uk/apprenticeships](https://www.connexus-group.co.uk/apprenticeships)



One of the amazing floats on display at Ledbury Carnival

What's the story? 2024 was a record-breaking year for Ledbury Carnival, which saw around 7000 people attending the event on August Bank Holiday. The carnival was supported by the Connexus Community Development Fund.

Life at the foyer



Residents at Ludlow Foyer and the Grain Loft recently met with local MP Stuart Anderson to share their experiences of Connexus supported housing.

In the last 12 months, 34 young people have been supported at the Ludlow Foyer and Grain Loft. Residents learn new skills, either by taking up formal education courses or getting involved in centre-led projects. The training is tailored to each resident, enabling them to become more independent, so that eventually they can have a home of their own.

Ludlow Foyer provides support and accommodation for 18-25 year-olds, and includes a crisis unit and specialist accommodation for those with lower support needs. It provides a safe environment for young people to gain the confidence to lead their lives in the community.

New communal cafe is bringing residents and their families together in Hereford.

Residents of Connexus independent living schemes in Hereford are enjoying their very own cafe at Bryngwyn Court.

Named the Inclusion Cafe, it is the brainchild of retired cookery teacher and Bryngwyn Court resident, Maggie Byram.

The cafe is held in the Bryngwyn Court communal area and the idea behind it is for the residents to have an opportunity to come together, enjoy a home-cooked lunch, chat and have a laugh.

On the menu

Serving lunches, cakes and tea or coffee for the residents of Bryngwyn Court, Stallard Court and Richard Weaver Court, the cafe is open on Fridays between midday and 2pm.

A group of willing resident volunteers help Maggie with the



Maggie with some of her home cooked meals at the cafe.

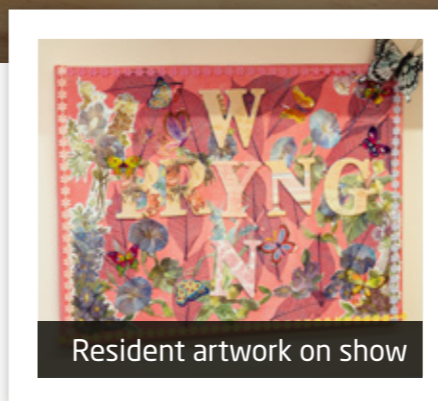
Serving up friendship

cooking, serving and, most importantly, the tidying up! Residents can invite their families to come and join them for lunch, and all the money

raised from the food and drinks goes back into running the cafe. Maggie and her team also provide take away lunches for residents who are working or not able to attend the cafe.

Pounds and pence

To help keep costs down, the residents at Bryngwyn Court are starting a community garden to grow salad, fruit and vegetables for the cafe. And while everyone won't be able to plant, weed and dig the garden, each resident has donated a packet of seeds, so it really is a community garden which everyone has a stake in. When the space for the garden was being cleared, old pieces of



Resident artwork on show

crockery and glass were dug up. This inspired the arts and crafts group to make a mosaic as a garden centrepiece. The cafe is very popular with residents and regularly has up to 30 people attending over the two hours. Maggie is delighted with its success and said "I've always wanted to run a cafe, so this is a dream come true for me."



Residents enjoying a meal at the Inclusion Cafe

Community alarms



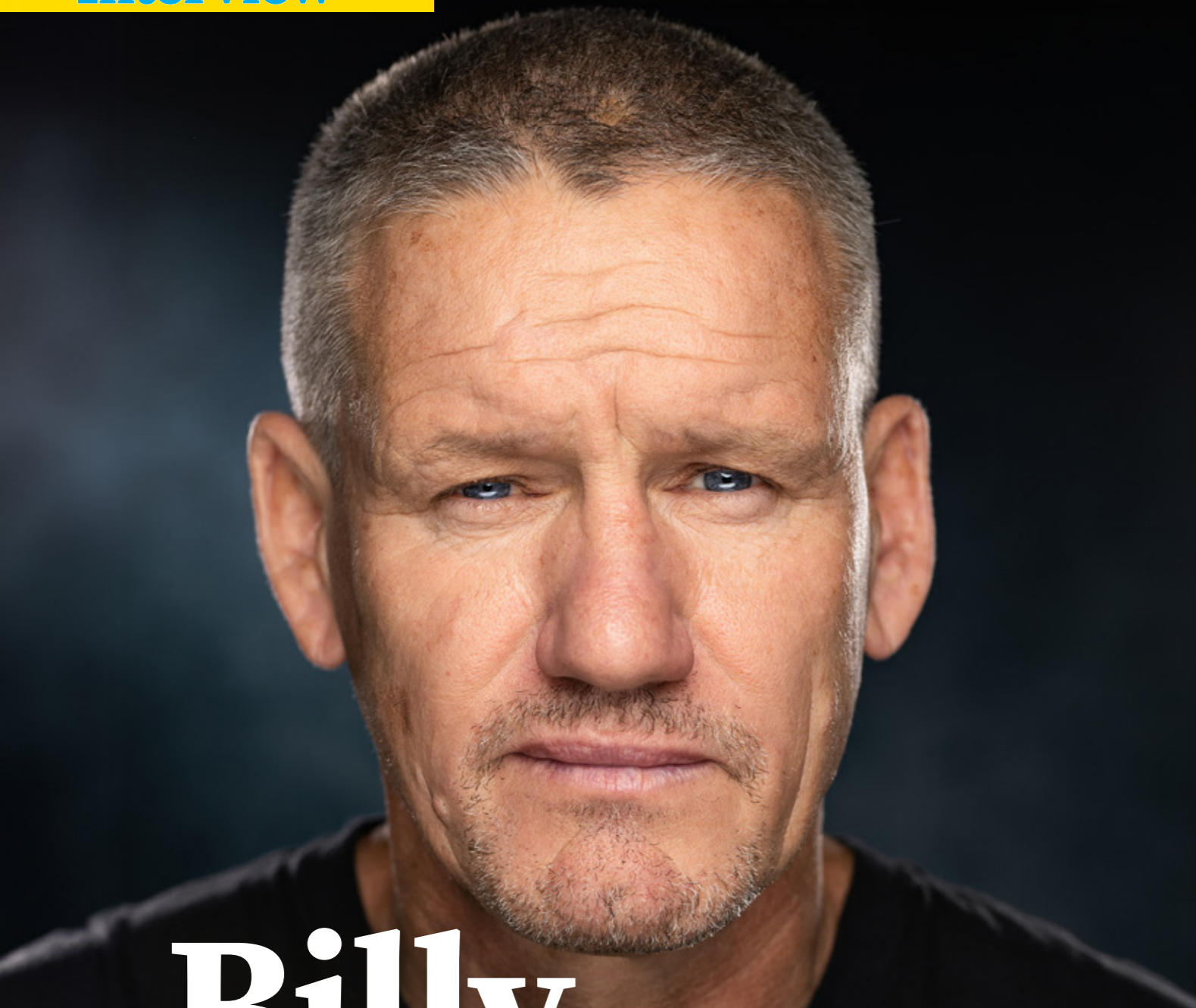
Customers attended demonstrations and met suppliers

Connexus has been working with customers to find a new community alarm system. Now two new service providers have been chosen to deliver the service using brand new technology.

Community alarm systems support customers to live independently safe in the knowledge that they can raise help when they need it. In 2017 the telecoms industry announced that they'd be changing the technology they use to provide telephone services and community alarm systems would not work once the change was completed in 2027. For Connexus this meant finding a community alarm system that could replace the existing one in time for the switch over.

Working with customers, Connexus began looking for companies who could provide an updated alarm system. Customers met possible suppliers and attended

demonstrations of the equipment that they could provide. Two suppliers were chosen. Alertacall will be providing the system for independent living flats and bungalows that have a colleague on site. The system will offer services including a report a repair button and one to contact customer services. There will also be an 'OK each day' button which customers can press to let the on-site staff know that they're okay. Careium will be supplying the service to independent living schemes that do not have a support officer. This service will include a GPS pendant which customers can use outside of their home and if pressed, the call centre will know where the customer is to alert the emergency services. Alertacall and Careium will be working with Connexus and customers, to develop an installation programme and arranging demonstrations of the equipment to explain how it works.



Billy Billingham

The Ex-SAS and TV star talks to Connect Magazine about life in the military and his new live tour.

Recently we sat down with Billy Billingham, the star of *SAS: Who Dares Wins* and *SAS: Catching the Criminals* - to chat about his TV career, what he's learned from working with celebrities and his latest tour *Always a Little Further*.

Away from trouble

Growing up in the West Midlands, Billy was restless and often on the lookout for trouble. After being stabbed in a fight, he knew he had to make some big changes. Billy told us: "I was a rogue kid; I grew up in a tough area. Not to make excuses, because I knew what I was doing, but I was getting into a lot of trouble.

"Then I found the cadets - the marine cadets, actually. I learned medical, navigation, communications, and it all made sense to me. I could see where I could use that in life, as opposed to being at school - that made no sense to me at the time.

"I ended up getting stabbed and nearly dying, so I realised, I've gotta get away from here. I missed the family, of course. But I didn't miss that lifestyle."

Joining up

Billy joined the armed forces and after nine years in the Parachute Regiment he decided to try for SAS selection. "When I joined the Parachute Regiment, 70 of us

started. I looked around and I thought, oh my God, I'm out my depth here. As we all do sometimes at a job interview, you kind of underestimate yourself, overestimate others. Only seven of us finished.

"When I went to try out for the SAS a few years later, 283 of us started. So, I'm now back in the same boat, although a little bit older. And I remember looking down the line and thinking wow, everybody looks bigger, everybody looks fitter, everybody looks better.

"And guess what? At the end of it, six months later, seven of us were left again, out of 283 this time."

Time for reflection

During his time in the military, Billy experienced life in war zones and violent conflicts across the globe, using his training to stay focused and calm in the most dangerous situations. Talking about what he experienced, discussing what's happened with a specialist, and spending time in nature has helped him deal with it. "I've had my dark moments where a certain noise or smell, something will remind me of a situation that I've been in, like seeing a good friend getting killed. I think about it, spend that little moment of quietness, and deal with it that way."

A change of direction

On leaving the military Billy became a bodyguard for some major celebrities and has since become a celebrity in his own

"I felt more comfortable with a gun pointed at me than a camera"

right, but he doesn't see it that way.

"I never say I'm a celebrity, I don't like that word. I just say I'm pretty well known because I've been on TV. I think I was fortunate because I was a bodyguard to celebrities before, so I saw how people treated them. But it is awkward, it really took a while to understand what it means. I went from being under the radar, no one knows who I am, what I am, to all of a sudden - the first job I get out of the military - I'm in magazines, I'm on the TV, and oh my God, it was petrifying. I soon realised I felt so much more comfortable with a gun pointing at me than a camera!

"When I first started, I'd just left the military, I needed a job. But because I'm so used to the military, where everything's on time and ready to go, it just seemed chaotic. I just had to adapt to their world, they're not going to adapt to me."

TV break

During his time as a bodyguard and with an extensive military career behind him, Billy was regularly approached to get involved in different TV

Billy can be seen on his extended *Always a Little Further* tour at venues across the UK into 2025.

programmes, but didn't think they were for him at first. "I got asked many times to be on shows, probably because I was seen around celebrities, and I had a certain type of face. I always turned them down. I've always wanted to do something with people who have gone through hard times, to try to turn them around.

"And then a friend approached me about this programme, special forces guys putting people through mental, physical and emotional challenges, to give an insight into how we work. I thought okay, that doesn't sound too bad. So, I said, what's it called? And as soon as he said *SAS: Who Dares Wins*, I went, oh, no, I'm not interested. Because I thought it's going to be cheesy.

"I then get approached about doing a programme with Freddie Flintoff about people being pushed through training, one week it's Delta Force, next week it'll be Spetsnaz, next week it'll be the SAS with me as an instructor and I thought, OK - I like Freddie Flintoff, so I'll do that. Then the night before we were supposed to film, I'd come back from a body-guarding job

"Most of the people come to the show to see Alfie. People love him."



Billy on active service

"I've always wanted to do something with people who have gone through hard times..."

out in Nigeria and almost died. I'd had malaria four times, but this time I had cerebral malaria. I ended up in intensive care."

With the opportunity to work alongside Freddie Flintoff off the table, Billy once again heard from the production team on *SAS: Who Dares Wins*. The director got in touch directly. "He got my number and kept ringing me, saying we want you to come on the show. It got to the point where I said, listen, mate, I'm not coming to London. He goes, I'll come to Hereford to meet you, and he was literally here two hours later."

With Billy on board the show went from strength to strength and has even spawned a celebrity spin off with those

taking part put through their paces all over the globe.

Billy puts its success down to the way the instructors are able to connect with the contestants. "It's not about 'look at us, we're four special forces guys, we've done this.' It's actually about the people, and it's about giving our experiences from the lifestyle we've had to them. I love it because it helps so many people. It turns them into a better version of themselves, and that's a fact."

A new passion

Away from his TV commitments, Billy has been able to carve out enough time to find a new passion, writing. His family were instrumental in getting him to put his experiences down on paper. "I

daughter's waiting to take me home. On the way home she started crying and said, 'you know what, Dad? I don't know you. I've listened to all these stories, and I and my sisters don't know any of that. You've never told us, we know nothing.'

"So that was really the kick up the backside for me to sit down and write my memoirs."

After autobiography *The Hard Way: Adapt, Survive and Win*, Billy turned to fiction, with his military experiences helping to shape new characters and stories in thrillers *Call to Kill* and *Survive to Fight*.

Tour of duty

And while Billy's books may take place in far flung locales in Africa and the Middle East, it's closer to home that we find Billy working on his most recent project - a speaking tour in the UK. "I take people on a journey, which is my journey: trials, tribulations, lessons learned, influential people, things I'm proud of, things I'm not proud of, what I got wrong. I think everybody in the audience from the 14-year-old to the 80-year-old walks away with something they can relate to."

Accompanying Billy on tour is pet bulldog Alfie. "Most of the people come to the show to see Alfie. People love him. He pops on stage at the end and says hello to the audience, he's a little show boat. If you go on Instagram, he's got 7000 followers!"

Billy can be seen on his extended *Always a Little Further* tour at venues across the UK into 2025. Visit www.fane.co.uk/billy-billingham for the latest dates and to book tickets.



Billy with Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

got asked many, many times 'would you write a book?' And I never wanted to do that. And then I was with a bunch of my mates, chatting and having a laugh and a joke, and my

Claims warning

Connexus is warning of approaches by 'no win, no fee' legal firms trying to encourage customers to make a legal claim instead of reporting the repairs or making a complaint to Connexus.

If a repair is needed and there are delays, or you're unhappy with a repair, please speak to Connexus first before considering making a legal claim. Although Connexus doesn't always get it right, its complaints policy and the Housing Ombudsman Service are available if you're unhappy.

While these companies will say they've made successful cases in the past, they probably won't tell you the whole story. Customers of these firms will have to sign a Conditional Fee Agreement which gives them a percentage (usually between 25% and 50%) of any compensation or damages. There may also be legal costs to pay too. This means that you will be left with very little, if any, compensation.

If you come directly to Connexus, report the repair and are unhappy with the service and make a complaint, you're awarded any money that is due to you.



Connexus

**More
online**

To read the full annual
report, check out the
documents section of
the website.

Annual Review 2023-24

Find out how Connexus performed in this **special pull-out feature**

Annual review 2023-24

For the period 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024

A year of change

Kate Smith, chief executive

The past year has been one of change for Connexus. We've worked to concentrate the focus of the organisation, especially on the aims set out in our previous corporate plan.

Although progress has been made, it has been a challenging year.

The cost-of-living crisis has made things very difficult for our customers, colleagues, and those we work with. Connexus has responded by working in partnership with local agencies to support customers. We have also been investing more into our repairs and maintenance service and changed our approach to resolving damp, condensation and mould issues by creating a specialist in-house team.

With the economic picture still challenging, we have had to make difficult decisions about selling properties that are not viable to improve to the standard we aspire to for our customers. The money does not leave Connexus though, it is re-invested to improve existing homes and develop new ones.

Where properties are sold, we will always try to build new homes in the same locations and aim to build more homes than we sell. Development of new rural affordable housing is important, despite rising costs, over 150 homes were built or acquired in the year. To make best use of our resources we are reviewing how we manage new developments, with a focus on regenerating existing properties and areas.

As part of this approach, we'll be looking at the land we already have so we can become more self-sufficient with development opportunities.



Another challenge came in the form of a cyber-security incident in late 2023, which we have been open about with our customers.

We responded quickly and took the opportunity to change how we deliver some services. We established and have maintained a same day repair service which has proved popular with customers, with repairs satisfaction rising to 82%. While it is taking time to recover from the incident, the impact on customers has thankfully been minimal. The dedication and professionalism shown by colleague teams and



Regenerating existing homes has become a major focus

partners meant performance dropped only slightly and is now back on track.

We now move forward by using our resources more effectively and efficiently, providing the right services for our customers in a more cost-effective way.

We know we still need to focus on embedding major changes in our repairs service and improve how we manage homes, and that will be a big priority in the future.

Like other housing associations, we face additional scrutiny, with new consumer standards introduced by the regulator and new laws to improve customer safety. The hard work we have put in places us in a good position to adapt to these changes. Despite all the challenges we have faced and will face, I am confident that with a re-focused approach, we have the right foundations, ambition, passion and determination to deliver good quality affordable homes.

Better value together

Getting value for money is extremely important, particularly when it comes to understanding what matters most to our customers.

We always want the best possible service for the best price, but that doesn't always mean choosing the cheapest option. To reflect this more accurately, we now call our value for money activity Better Value Together. Better Value Together balances understanding what matters ►►

2023-24 in numbers

Repairs

Description	Number
Repairs reported	27,869
Repairs completed	24,026

Improvements

Description	Number
Kitchens	76
Electrical rewires	66
Heating systems	133
Boiler installations	261
Window replacements	82
Door replacements	121
Bathroom replacements	155
Roofs	162

New homes

Type of home	Completed in year
Shared ownership	42
Social rent (approx 60% market rate)	19
Affordable rent (approx 80% market rate)	68
Rent to buy	12
Total	141

Contacts

Description	Number
Contacts (calls, emails, social media)	128, 351
Comments and feedback received	640
Compliments received	130

Complaints

Description	Number
Complaints received	282
Number upheld	182
Number partly upheld	61
Number not upheld	39

Pull-out feature

most to customers and delivering the best possible service for the most efficient costs.

Our Better Value Together log shows we delivered **£668k** of savings throughout the year by operating effectively. The total includes costs avoided through good procurement (buying goods and services) and how we negotiated prices.

Next year Connexus will monitor performance against efficiency targets, which will identify and deliver more savings. These can be reinvested back into services, refurbishment work, and developing new homes. ■



CEO Kate Smith presents a special fund plaque at the cafe

📷 What's the story? Connexus continued to invest in communities as well as bricks and mortar, with funding from the Community Development Fund supporting community groups and good causes. This included *Bake and Create*, which offers a cafe and meals on wheels service in Hereford.

Developments

93 affordable homes for Ledbury

2023/24 saw significant work on the final phase of a 93-home affordable housing development at the Full Pitcher in Ledbury, Herefordshire, with final homes handed over earlier this summer.

The development is one of the biggest Connexus schemes of recent years and provides much-needed new homes for the area. Properties are a mix of one, two and three bedroom houses for affordable rent, with rent to buy

and shared ownership options available.

As well as semi-detached and terraced homes, the development includes 2 two bedroom bungalows for residents on the council's accessible homes register.

The Full Pitcher marks the first time Connexus has taken on the role of main contractor, after the original contractor went into administration. Connexus managed the development in-house, retaining as many of the original sub-contractors as possible, and directly re-employing two of the contractors' former employees to help get the build over the line. The scheme received nearly £3m in grant funding from Homes England.



Homes at Ledbury as they neared completion earlier this year



Ask Emma

Each issue customer services manager Emma gets to the bottom of your questions. If you have something you'd like answered, please email connect@connexus-group.co.uk or write to us at the usual address.

Q. My neighbour told me I need to apply for Pension Credit to get my winter fuel payment this year, is that right?

A: Changes to winter fuel payment rules mean that you will only receive an automatic winter fuel payment if you are over State Pension age and receiving one of the following benefits: Income Support, Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Pension Credit, or Universal Credit (through a joint claim with your partner, for example). You can check if you're eligible for pension credit on the government website:



www.gov.uk/pension-credit-calculator or speak to one of our Tenancy Sustainment Officers who can check for you, as well as help you to make any claims. Or call the Tenancy Sustainment team on 03332 31 32 33. Although the qualifying week for this year's winter fuel payment has passed (between 16

- 22 September 2024), if you make a successful claim to Pension Credit on or before 21 December 2024 (and would have been entitled to Pension Credit if you had claimed during that qualifying week in September) you will still be automatically eligible. Remember to ask for your claim to be backdated when you make your claim.

If you don't qualify now, but your circumstances change, for example getting Attendance Allowance or claiming Carers Allowance, it will increase your chance of a successful Pension Credit claim.

Q. I regularly get letters asking me to give engineers access to my home to carry out checks. Why do you need to do checks?

A. As your landlord, Connexus is committed to keeping you and your family safe in your home. It is a legal requirement that we carry out annual servicing on gas appliances. We also carry out safety checks on solid fuel, oil, and renewable heating systems and every five years the electrical wiring in your home will be inspected to ensure it meets safety standards.



We must visit to carry out these checks, but they usually don't take long. We offer flexible appointments and are happy to talk to you about this.

Q. I want to pay my rent by Direct Debit, what do I need to do to set it up?

A. Paying by Direct Debit is a convenient way to pay your rent and means you're less likely to forget and get into arrears. To set up a Direct Debit you will need to call our customer services team on 03332 31 32 33. You will need your tenancy number, the account number and sort code of the account you want to pay the rent from. Paying by Direct Debit means your rent will be paid automatically on the date you've set. You just need to make sure you've got enough money in your account to cover the amount.

Q. What's the best way for me to report a repair?

A. How you report a repair depends on whether it's an emergency or a non-emergency repair.

An emergency repair is something like no water or heating and you should always report these by calling 03332 31 32 33 and select option 1.

You can also report a repair using the form on our website: connexus-group.co.uk/form/report-a-repair or you can email the details to repairs@connexus-group.co.uk

Please include as much information as possible including full name and address.

We've also introduced more ways to contact us for non-emergency repairs and general enquiries as you will see in the 'Getting in touch just got easier' article on the right.

Online Getting in touch just got easier



Customers can now use WhatsApp and web chat to get in touch

Connexus has launched three new ways to get in touch! You can now use WhatsApp or web chat for general enquiries, and the repairs customer service team can start video calls to better diagnose repairs.

Recent improvements to systems have enabled Connexus to add the new channels to provide simple and more convenient ways to get in touch with customer services. This will mean less time waiting in telephone queues or on hold.

WhatsApp enables one-to-one chat directly from the

app. Messages can be sent 24/7 by contacting 07860 003 150, and like email will be responded to in working hours. Web chat will be available weekdays between 10am and 4pm. Video calling allows a secure link to be sent

to customers who can then begin a video call. This enables the repairs team to better diagnose repairs right away, reducing callouts and providing help more quickly.

When discussing account details, security checks will still be needed as with any other method of getting in touch, and to speed up enquires customers are asked to have their full address and contact number handy.



How are we doing?

The latest information from Connexus on how we're performing and working with customers to improve our service



Connexus, like all landlords, gathers feedback on how it is performing in a number of areas including property condition, complaint handling and repairs known as **Tenant Satisfaction Measures**.

The information is gathered through telephone surveys carried out by an independent company throughout the year and we are pleased to be able to provide you with an update of how we are performing.

Working together

Customer feedback is really important to Connexus. All feedback is analysed to highlight the areas where customer expectations have not been met and to consider what action needs to be taken to improve.

The Connexus Voice of the Customer Forum meets quarterly to discuss performance and develop action plans to help improve the service. The Forum is made up of colleagues from around the business and members of the Involved Customer Group

Tenant Satisfaction measures performance

April to September 2024

Measure	% Satisfied	% Dissatisfied
Overall satisfaction	77.4	22.6
Satisfied with repairs	81.5	18.5
Time taken to complete repairs	77.9	22.1
My home is well maintained	78.7	21.3
My home is safe	87	13
Connexus listens to me and acts on my views	68.2	31.8
Connexus keeps me informed about things that matter to me	74.4	25.6
Connexus treats me fairly and with respect	82.4	17.6
Satisfied with how my complaint is handled	43.4	56.6
Communal areas are clean and well maintained	73.5	26.5
Connexus makes a positive contribution to my neighbourhood	70.3	29.7
Satisfied with how my ASB case was handled	66.5	33.5

The group is carrying out some more research including a review of our complaints and feedback from the Housing Ombudsman. We'll feedback on the recommendations in the next issue of Connect.

If you'd like to find out more about becoming an involved customer, we have a range of opportunities.

Please visit the Connexus website at [connexus-group.co.uk/be-involved](https://www.connexus-group.co.uk/be-involved) to find out more.

New customer charter sets out service levels

Connexus has published its new customer charter, developed using feedback from customers and staff. The charter sets out the level of service customers can expect from Connexus and replaces the previous Customer Offer.

The commitments in the charter detail how Connexus will be open and transparent, work collaboratively in communities, deliver a comprehensive range of tenancy services, and ensure homes are safe and well-maintained.

As well as explaining what Connexus will do, the charter outlines what the expectations

are for customers, such as managing their home and tenancy effectively and keeping Connexus informed when it comes to changes in circumstances.

Gary Darlington, head of communities, said: "We want to provide an excellent service to our customers and our customer charter sets out how we can achieve that."

"It has been developed using both customer and colleague feedback. It's not just a set of guidelines for us, this is a joint commitment with our customers, and we clearly set out what our expectations are for customers too."

Vantastic value



Customers will see trade teams arriving in something a little different soon, as 105 new silver vans join the Connexus vehicle fleet over the next eight months.

The switch to silver, from traditional white, will save around £100,000 over the course of their five year-lease, as silver vans command higher prices when they're resold.

The newer models are more fuel efficient, kitted out with the latest shelving units to hold materials, inverters to power equipment, and come with better support for linking technology - which will help when new systems come in as part of improvements to the repairs service.

Nick Hatfield, Fleet Manager at Connexus, said: "By making a slight change to the colour, we've been able to make a big value for money saving, without compromising on the make, model or specification."



Ingredients

- Left over roasted chicken (approx 200g per person) chopped into bite-size pieces
 - 200g mushrooms, sliced
 - 1 medium onion, chopped
 - 1 clove of garlic, chopped (you can use more depending on your taste)
 - 1 teaspoon of coriander seeds
 - 1 teaspoon of cumin seeds
 - 2 teaspoons of curry powder
 - 1 litre of chicken stock
 - 2 tablespoons of vegetable oil or butter
-
- Naan breads
 - Jasmine or long grain rice

Making your own curry means you can add more garlic and spices depending on how hot and spicy you like your food.

Using leftovers Chicken curry

If you enjoy spicy food, making a homemade curry with leftover chicken is a quick and handy weekday dinner.

For an even quicker meal, you can use a shop bought curry sauce, add the chopped chicken, heat thoroughly and serve with naan bread.

Method (serves 4)

1. Remove the remaining meat from the roast chicken and chop into bite size pieces.

2. Heat the oil or butter in a deep frying pan over a medium heat, add the mushrooms and fry until soft. Add the onion, fry until it's soft then add the garlic, coriander and cumin seeds and fry for around a minute.

3. Make the chicken stock using a stock cube and boiling water and carefully add to the pan. Add the curry powder and bring it back to the boil.

4. Turn down the heat and add the chopped chicken. Bring

the mixture to a simmer and cook for around 20 minutes or until the chicken is heated thoroughly.

5. If using rice add half a cup per person to a pan of boiling water and cook as per the instructions on the pack.

6. If using Naan bread pre-heat the oven and cook as per the instructions on the pack.

To serve

Serve in large warm bowls and sprinkle with the chopped coriander.



Sides Bombay potatoes

Bombay potatoes make a great main or side dish, and you can even add some spinach to make a tasty saag aloo.

You will need:

- 3 large potatoes
- Thumb-sized portion of root ginger, peeled
- 3 garlic cloves, peeled
- 2 large tomatoes, skinned and cut into pieces – keep separate
- 4 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- 1 tsp mustard seeds
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 2 tsp turmeric
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp garam masala
- 1 tsp mild chilli powder
- Chopped coriander leaves

Method (serves 4)

1. Boil salted water, add potatoes, and cook until tender (up to 30 mins). Cool, peel, cube.

2. Blend ginger, garlic, and one tomato until smooth.

3. Heat oil in a non-stick pan. Add mustard seeds and cumin, then sauté onion until translucent. Add ginger-garlic-tomato mixture, ground spices, and salt. Cook for 5 minutes.

4. Add tomato pieces and cook for 3-4 minutes. Stir in potatoes and cook for 3-5 minutes. If using spinach, add some in and cook until wilted. Stir in coriander, serve.

Regeneration First glimpse of completed homes



A fully refurbished living room at Sandpits

Some of the first residents have moved back into homes completely renovated as part of refurbishment work taking place at Sandpits Avenue in Ludlow.

The photos (above and right) show the scale of work needed to modernise the homes which requires taking interiors back to a brickwork shell, removing all the plaster from walls and ceilings. New central heating systems have been installed, as well as new kitchens and bathrooms.

The outsides of homes have also seen extensive work completed, including a new render finish being added. Roofs, gutters, fascias, and soffits have also been replaced, as well as new windows and doors installed.



Stripping homes back to the brickwork

Work to identify the next homes to be refurbished is underway, with support being provided to residents who will need to move temporarily while work is carried out.

Once refurbishment is complete Connexus has also committed to improving the environment around the site, planting mature trees and hedgerows to give nature a helping hand.

Welcome on board



The new non-executive directors

Connexus has welcomed four new non-executive directors to its board and committees. Julian Bill (centre right), Anne Turner (centre left), James Savage (left) and Helen Southwell (right) took up their positions in September.

Michele Ibbs, chair of the board at Connexus, said: "I'm really pleased to welcome Julian, Anne, James and Helen to Connexus. They all bring a wealth of experience in social housing or related sectors, understanding the challenges of rural environments and have a strong customer focus. They will add further strength to our governance arrangements and help deliver continued improvements to services for Connexus customers."

Annual report 2024

In addition to the annual review insert in this magazine, the 2023/24 annual report and financial statements are now available on the Connexus website. They include performance information and full set of financial accounts.



CEO Kate Smith Committed to an improving service

In my last update I mentioned we were putting in place the building blocks for an exciting programme of change at Connexus.

This would see us make improvements to the services customers care most about while working more closely with our partners to support our communities.

Since then, we've been out talking to customers about a new plan to help us do this, which will launch in 2025 and run until 2030. The plan will have a new vision, 'homes you can build a life in' and is centred around four commitments: more and better affordable homes, driving efficiency and

improving services for customers, investing in communities, opportunities and skills and being a leading voice in rural affordable housing.

The commitments will deliver customer focussed outcomes including a 'right first time' approach, easier ways to get in touch, an improved and more convenient repairs service and delivering around 1000 new affordable homes. Improving the homes we already have will also be a major priority.

We'll be sharing more with customers about the plan early next year. Until then, from everyone at Connexus, have a great Christmas and a happy New Year.

Winter word search

Here is a list of 25 words associated with winter, but which one is missing from the word search?

Z	S	T	F	B	R	A	D	I	A	T	O	R	H	D
V	N	D	G	R	I	T	T	I	N	G	V	M	G	O
H	O	T	S	Z	E	M	G	G	I	H	H	B	N	B
A	W	F	H	I	U	E	I	L	K	G	C	S	R	L
I	S	R	O	E	N	B	Z	T	O	E	L	U	S	I
L	T	O	V	E	R	S	A	I	T	V	F	O	N	Z
S	O	S	E	Q	G	M	U	W	N	E	E	L	O	Z
T	R	T	L	U	V	P	O	L	I	G	N	S	W	A
O	M	Y	S	C	A	R	F	M	A	N	X	S	M	R
N	F	I	R	E	P	L	A	C	E	T	T	Y	A	D
E	T	S	L	I	P	P	E	R	Y	T	I	E	N	N
U	S	W	E	A	T	E	R	Z	W	D	E	O	R	I
U	V	V	T	D	I	C	I	C	L	E	I	R	N	P
O	V	I	T	O	B	O	G	G	A	N	O	I	C	P
S	L	U	S	H	I	B	E	R	N	A	T	E	C	Y

- | | | | |
|-------------|------------|-----------|----------|
| THERMOMETER | IGLOO | GRITTING | FREEZING |
| HAILSTONE | MITTENS | TOBOGGAN | SWEATER |
| SNOWSTORM | ICICLE | SLIPPERY | SNOWMAN |
| RADIATOR | SCARF | SHOVEL | NIPPY |
| GLOVES | INSULATION | SLUSH | |
| WINTER | SLEDGING | FIREPLACE | |
| FROSTY | HIBERNATE | BLIZZARD | |



The word missing from the word search is

Name Address

The first correct answer drawn from entries will win £25 in Amazon vouchers. Draw closes Friday 14 February 2025. To enter, cut out this section of the page and send in an envelope to **Connexus, The Gateway, The Auction Yard, Craven Arms, SY7 9BW** or email us your answer (including your full name and address) to **connect@connexus-group.co.uk** - good luck! For full terms and conditions visit the Connexus website.

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Next edition due summer 2025.

Well done to everyone who entered the fruity word search last time. The missing word was **apple**. The winner of the £25 Amazon voucher was Mrs Ashley from Whitchurch.



#ChargeSafe

E-BIKE AND E-SCOOTER FIRE SAFETY IN THE HOME

Make sure you charge your e-bike or e-scooter battery safely. Follow these simple steps to reduce the risk of fire.



Don't leave your device charging unattended or when you're asleep.



Don't charge or store your battery in the hallway or where it could block your escape.



Only use the correct charger for your battery.



It is recommended that a professional carries out an e-bike conversion.



Only buy e-bikes, e-scooters and batteries from trusted retailers and manufacturers.



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