

# CONNECT

The magazine for Connexus communities

Winter 2022

## Get Festive For less

with our money saving top tips

### Complaints

A fresh approach to receiving feedback

### Glorious gardens

Hear about the amazing gardens that won this year's Connexus gardening competition



# ARE YOU COVERED IF THE WORST HAPPENS?

## REPLACING YOUR HOUSEHOLD POSSESSIONS IN THE EVENT OF AN ACCIDENT, DAMAGE OR THEFT COULD COST THOUSANDS

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](http://connexus-group.co.uk/contentsinsurance)



SCAN ME

## Winter '22

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



# In this Issue



## Viewpoint

## Get set for a fab festive season

**W**elcome to the winter edition of Connect. Thank you for your feedback so far on the new look and content of your customer magazine.

This time we've got you covered with local stories, tips on how to spend less this Christmas, a winter soup recipe, plus information on how customers are getting involved with Connexus.

We know that the festive period can be a very hard time of year, so we've

included some helpful contacts on the back of the magazine, should you or a family member need support. Help is available, don't struggle in silence.

I hope you have a great time this festive season and wish you a very Happy New Year.

*Sophie*

**Sophie Mellings**  
Editor



Graeme Perks put his woodworking skills to good use to restore a memorial bench.

# 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](mailto:connect@connexus-group.co.uk), calling our number **03332 31 32 33** or messaging us on social media [@weareconnexus](https://www.instagram.com/weareconnexus)

## Memorial bench 'Howard' you like to be remembered?

When Graeme Perks, a Ludlow War Memorial Fund member, spotted a bench that had fallen into a state of disrepair, he had a bright idea: restore the bench in the memory of well-loved local resident Howard Cheese.

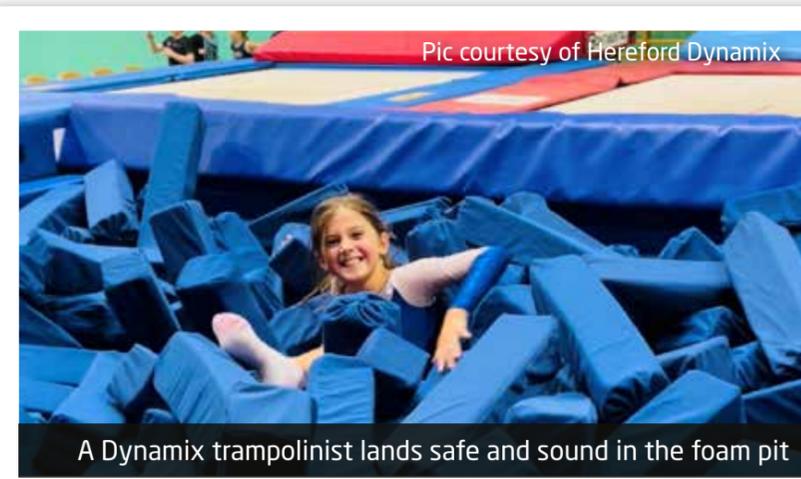
Howard was a well-known figure in the local Ludlow community, having worked for over 40 years at the Ludlow Museum and been involved in countless local organisations.

After seeking permission from Connexus, the Ludlow War Memorial Fund collaborated with Howard Cheese's family, and Graeme was soon putting his woodworking skills to excellent use!

Howard's bench is located on a Connexus green space in Ludlow, Shropshire, close to where he lived and will provide residents with a place to rest on their way into town.

## Word search winner

Well done to everyone who entered the word search competition in the last edition of *Connect*, the missing word was **susurrous**. The winner of the £25 Amazon voucher was picked at random; the winner is Shaine from Hereford.



A Dynamix trampolinist lands safe and sound in the foam pit

**What's the story?** Hereford Dynamix Trampoline Club received funding from Connexus to purchase hundreds of foam protective socks, the covers will ensure the trampoline foam pit will last a lifetime.



A float at Strettfest 2022

## Summer Strettfest success

**What an amazing day everyone had at Strettfest 2022 earlier this summer!**

The usually tranquil hillside town of Church Stretton, Shropshire was taken over by an energetic and colourful samba-influenced carnival parade, with dancers young and old performing in the streets alongside huge homemade puppets and loud drummers.

Part-funded by the Connexus Community Development

Fund, Strettfest 2022 also saw the community join in with music workshops, a 'mini-beast' trail for younger children to enjoy and a family-friendly film night.

Do you have a community project that needs funding? The Connexus Community Development Fund offers grants of up to £3,000 to fund local projects. To find out more and to apply check out [connexus-group.co.uk/cdf](https://www.connexus-group.co.uk/cdf)

# Your feedback matters



**Lots of customers got in touch to have their say about the first issue of Connect, published back in September.**

The feedback was positive, with readers enjoying the new style focussing on local stories. Many wanted to get involved with the creation of the magazine too which is fantastic.

In the new year, the team that produce the magazine will be getting in touch with those who volunteered to create an editorial panel which will help shape future editions of the magazine.

If you would like to get involved, there's still time! Simply email [connect@connexus-group.co.uk](mailto:connect@connexus-group.co.uk) or call 03332 31 32 33 and ask to the communications and marketing team.

# Glorious Gardens

Over the summer customers took part in the Connexus gardening competition. Here are the winning entries!

Below. Sian Davies, customer experience officer (left) with winner Jenny from Whitchurch (right).



## Zero carbon Homes are (retro) fit for purpose



Connexus has started a programme of retrofit works to improve the energy efficiency of over 230 properties across Shropshire and Herefordshire.

Scheme 2 (LAD 2) will go towards replacing costly and inefficient oil heating systems (shown inset) and the fitting of thermostatic showers.

Rising energy bills are a huge part of the cost-of-living crisis for Connexus tenants.

Work has already been completed in Hereford, where flats with 'Cornish-style' tiled roofs have had vastly improved external insulation installed, replacement windows added, and new roofing (amongst other improvements).

Grants from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and other funding will improve air tightness around windows and doors, upgrade heating controls and provide new heating systems for 102 homes across the region (work will vary depending on surveys).

The energy efficiency works will also aid Connexus' contribution to the Government's "net zero" target, which aims to reduce fossil fuel usage, decarbonise industries and hit net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Meanwhile, funding from Local Authority Delivery



Connexus is delighted to share the winners and runners-up of this year's customer gardening competition.

The winner of the grow your own category was Paul, from Wem. Paul grew French and runner beans, carrots, potatoes, chillies, garlic, and tomatoes – yum! Jenny from Whitchurch won most imaginative garden. Her entry was full of bright colours and a play area for her cats to enjoy.

The winner of the neat and tidy category was Chris, from Hereford, with the judging panel of customers



selecting Chris' lively and homely garden. Rachel from Church Stretton took home the recycling and re-purposing award. Using her creative skills, Rachel makes beautiful things from items that would normally be thrown away. A huge well done too to runners-up Bryn and Diane, from Market Drayton.

Connexus' very own Sian Davies visited the winners and runners-up to present their prizes and grab some pictures of the gardens.



Winner Paul



Winner Chris



Winner Rachel

# Get festive for less this Christmas

Whether you're looking for festivities on a budget, or gifts from Santa on a shoestring, our editorial elves have you covered.

## With soaring inflation meaning less money in our pockets, Christmas will be more expensive this year.

Follow our top tips for getting into the Christmas spirit without spending a fortune. You could keep a bit more cash in your pocket and surprise friends and family with some truly original festive ideas.. Let's get started.



## Planning ahead

Planning your Christmas budget before you go shopping can save cash. Write down what you can afford to spend on Christmas, and then break it down again into food, gifts, decorations, drinks.

Making a list is a great way to plan too and helps work out who you need to buy for, avoiding unnecessary purchases. If you know what you'd like to buy, keep an eye out or set an alert for any discounts or decent prices.

## Delivery smart

Planning to do your shopping online? If you need to order multiple things from the same place,

doing it all in one go can save on delivery costs. Some shops have delivery passes which can make it cheaper too.

## Present price limits

Agreeing limits with family and friends can help remove the fear that someone has brought you something much more expensive, and it allows everyone to manage their budgets more easily.

## Gift memories

One of our favourite ideas is gifting a memory. It can be relatively cheap to print your favourite photos (you can do this online, in some supermarkets & chemists). You can buy a multi pack of frames from most supermarkets and shops to get that perfect memory framed. A personal gift can be lovely present without breaking the bank. Want to get creative? Why not decorate the frame for family and friends? (inset). It can also be nice to have things to look forward to after Christmas, so why not plan a day



## Home made Christmas decorations and crackers

Making your own Christmas decorations, crackers and party poppers can be fun for all the family using kitchen rolls, cardboard, and any other items you find. You can find cheap craft materials at most supermarkets and choose plenty of Christmassy colours!

sew. Materials are cheaper if you make similar gifts for different people.

## Reuse and recycle

Save money by cutting the front of old Christmas cards and using them as gift tags for this year's Christmas presents.

Reusing gift bags and wrapping paper is a good idea too.

## Buried treasure

To make presents go further on Christmas morning, why not hide presents for a fun treasure hunt? Hide clues around the house that eventually lead to the gift.

## Feeling the pinch?

If you're struggling financially this Christmas, you're not alone. Be honest with those around you. Opening up can mean you feel less pressure to buy gifts, and if you're hosting Christmas this year, why not talk to those coming? A great way to share the cost is to ask friends and family to 'design a course on the menu' and bring it along!

▼ **Homemade bracelets like the ones below make a great gift for kids.**

out? (check the last issue of Connect for some great days out in Shropshire & Herefordshire). After all, the perfect gift can be spending time together.

## Voucher book

Ever created your own voucher book? You could make your own collection of IOUs for a friend or your family. Ideas could include making a cuppa, cleaning the hamster cage, having a pizza night, babysitting or anything else you know a loved one would like.

Another neat idea is gifting some delicious bakes to friends and family or getting creative and making a homemade gift. This could be jewellery, decorations or clothes if you can knit or



# Make sure to cash in



## The Government's Energy Bills Support Scheme is providing a £400 non-repayable discount to eligible households to help with their energy bills over winter 2022 to 2023.

Although the discount is available through vouchers for those with pre-payment meters, many people aren't claiming them.

If you have a pre-payment meter you should receive vouchers each month, and your energy supplier will typically let you know how you'll receive these. The vouchers are redeemable at Post Office or PayPoint stores, where customers usually top up. The vouchers are only valid for 90 days.

Customers not using prepayment meters will receive money off their energy bills automatically.



# 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](mailto:connect@connexus-group.co.uk) or write to us at the usual address.

**Q. I've had a call from a research company saying they are acting on behalf of Connexus, but their number is different from other times I've been contacted. Is it a scam?**

A. Our research partner IFF Research has changed their number recently from the one previously published. Their new number is 0203 148 7717. Calls from this number are genuine and you'll only ever receive a call between 9am-8pm Monday to Friday and Saturdays between 11am-4pm.

IFF Research carries out customer surveys to find out

how we're performing, so if you do get a call, please let us know how we're doing. Your feedback is important and is reviewed by our teams to make improvements in our service.

**Q. I've had a claims company contact me saying I could be eligible for some compensation from my landlord if I submit a disrepair claim. How do I make one?**

A. We've had a few customers get in touch to ask about this. Many were called by companies offering a no-win, no-fee service. Unfortunately, these arrangements turn out to be

nothing of the sort, with your information sold on to solicitors. Arrangements are then often agreed upon with charges buried in lengthy legal contracts. Tenants who have lost their cases have found the court ordering them to cover their landlord's legal fees.

If you are not happy with your home and feel it has not been maintained by Connexus to the correct standard, tell us. If you have already told us and feel we have not listened, please make a complaint. Our robust complaints process means your case will be investigated thoroughly. At any time, you can contact the Housing Ombudsman for their support and advice, which is free.

**Q. I've had a water leak and it's damaged my carpet. I've called to try and get it replaced but have been advised I need to claim on my home contents insurance. As I rent, I thought Connexus would cover the cost?**

A. Connexus is responsible for completing a repair. We don't cover loss, the replacement of possessions, damage to decorations or other things in



your home in the event of an accident such as a leak. This is covered with a suitable home contents insurance policy. To help decide whether home contents insurance is right for you, Connexus has teamed up with Thistle Tenant Risks, and Ageas Insurance Limited who provide the My Home Contents Insurance Scheme, a contents insurance policy designed for tenants living in social housing.

The My Home Contents Insurance Scheme can offer you insurance for the contents of your home including cover for items such as furniture, carpets, curtains, clothes, bedding, electrical items, jewellery, pictures and ornaments. For information ask your housing officer for an application pack, call Thistle Tenant Risks on 0345 450 7288. Alternatively, visit [thistlemyhome.co.uk](http://thistlemyhome.co.uk) for more information or to request a call back.

**Q. When are you closed over the Christmas period?**

A. Our telephone lines will close at 5pm on Friday 23 December 2022 and re-open at 8:30am on Tuesday 3 January 2023. During this time we'll only be taking emergency calls on our main number. If you need to make a payment or would like advice about your home or tenancy, visit [connexus-group.co.uk](http://connexus-group.co.uk)

## Complaints A fresh approach



A new complaints policy and procedure is now in place

**Connexus has launched a new complaints policy and procedure to put things right quickly and effectively if they go wrong.**

The new approach makes it much clearer what happens at each stage and what customers can expect.

The review stage, which was part of the previous complaints process remains, meaning there is an option to have a complaint reviewed if a customer is not satisfied with the outcome.

The new approach meets the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code which Connexus must complete a self-assessment against each year.

You can see how Connexus is learning from complaints by searching *complaints* on the Connexus website or by looking at the annual report, available in the documents section of the site.

### To make a complaint

**Send a letter to** Connexus, The Gateway, The Auction Yard, Craven Arms, SY7 9BW

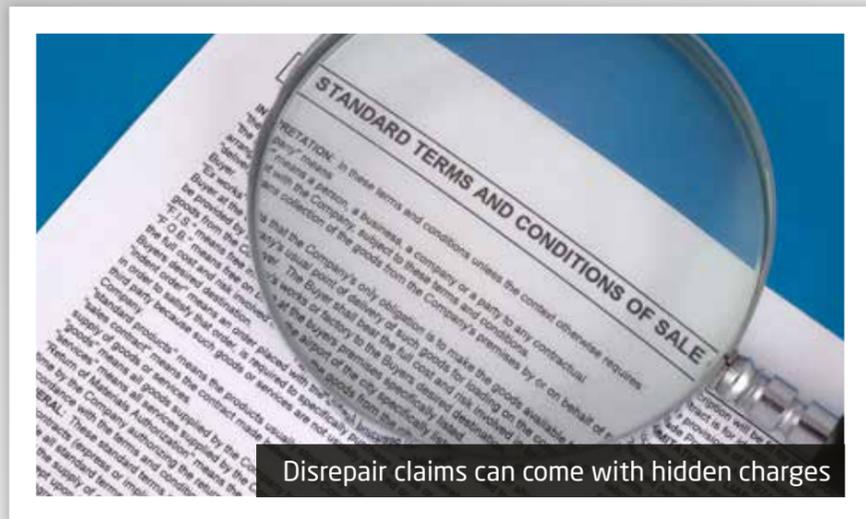
**Email** [hello@connexus-group.co.uk](mailto:hello@connexus-group.co.uk)

**Message us on social media:** @weareconnexus. Always make contact using a direct message and include your full name and address

**Call** 03332 31 32 33

**In-person** when you see one of the team

**Online form** - available on the Connexus website using the contact page (works on all devices including phones) [connexus-group.co.uk](http://connexus-group.co.uk)



## Recipes



A super easy soup recipe which takes under half an hour to make. Try our four tasty options.

## Easy eats

# Hearty winter soup

**These soup recipes are all made using the same easy method but with different ingredients.**

Ours include just vegetables which helps keep costs down. You can also freeze them once cooled and defrost them for a quick and easy lunch.

### Method (serves 6)

**1.** Prepare and chop all vegetables into small chunks. Place the vegetables into a small or medium saucepan.

**2.** Add 1tbsp oil and seat over a medium heat, stirring continuously for 5 minutes.

**3.** Add the liquids, flavourings, stock cubes and black pepper. Bring back to the boil.

**4.** Adjust heat and simmer for 10-15 minutes or until the vegetables are tender.

**5.** Blend in a food processor or with a hand blender. Adjust consistency to your liking and serve.

## Ingredients

### Carrot & coriander

- 2 carrots
- ½ white onion
- 1 medium potato
- Black pepper
- ½ chicken or veg stock cube
- 250ml water
- ½ dried coriander or 1 table spoon freshly chopped

### Tomato & basil

- 3 tomatoes
- 1 medium carrot
- 1 stick celery
- ½ red onion
- 1 clove garlic
- 2 rashers bacon cooked – optional
- ½ chicken or veg stock cube
- ½ carton tomato passata
- 125ml water
- Black pepper
- ½ tsp dried basil or 1 dessert spoon freshly chopped

### Leek & potato

- 1 leek
- 2 medium potatoes
- ½ white onion
- Black pepper
- ½ chicken or veg stock cube
- 125ml water
- 125ml milk

### Curried parsnip & potato

- 1 medium parsnip
- 2 medium potatoes
- ½ white onion
- ½ chicken or veg stock cube
- ¼ tsp curry paste
- Black pepper
- 125ml water
- 125ml milk

## Bake

# Muffins

**Try our muffin recipe. Ready in just 25 minutes!**

Why not experiment by using different combination of fruit and spices to give your muffins something a little extra? Apple and cinnamon are our faves!

### You will need:

- 9 muffin cases
- 225g plain flour
- 75g margarine or butter
- 150ml milk
- ½ tsp vanilla essence or 1tsp of a spice of your choice e.g. cinnamon to go with apple
- 1tbsp baking powder
- 150g sugar
- 1 egg
- 125-150g fresh fruit of your choice

### Method (makes 9)

1. Set oven to 200c/ gas mark 6
2. Put cases into muffin tin
3. Sieve flour and baking powder into mixing bowl.
4. Rub in butter or margarine.
5. Stir in sugar and flavourings (prepared).
6. Measure milk into jug. Add egg and vanilla essence if used. Beat.
7. Make a well in flour mixture. Pour in liquid mixture.
8. Lightly mix together.
9. Spoon mixture into muffin cases. Bake for 20-25 minutes until golden.
10. Test with skewer. Cool. And enjoy!

## Home safety

# Keeping safe with compliance checks



Compliance checks are important to keep customers safe

**Compliance checks on electrical and heating systems are a big part of keeping safe at home.**

Connexus is committed to completing an annual heating system check in every home, with an electrical inspection carried out every five years.

Connexus was fully compliant in 2021/22, with

all heating systems in Connexus properties checked - but this can only happen with customer help!

And remember, it's a tenant's responsibility to allow Connexus access into their home to complete annual safety checks. So if you can't make an appointment, get in touch straight away.

## Helping raise the alarm

**Connexus supports customers to live independently safe in the knowledge that they can call help when they need it, in the form of alarm systems fitted in their homes.**

Connexus provides just over 1,800 alarms to some of the most vulnerable tenants.

When looking for a new provider for community alarms, who better to ask than customers? A group of residents recently got involved with the tender process interviews to listen to what potential providers were offering and question whether it met their needs.

## Meet 'n greet



Michele Ibbs

### Connexus has welcomed Michele Ibbs as its new chair of the board.

As chair, Michele will be responsible for leadership of the Connexus board and work with executive and senior teams to determine the business' priorities. Michele brings a wealth of experience to the organisation, having spent time in the public and private sectors including roles in food and drink, higher education, financial services, and the NHS.



## Annual report 2022

The 2022 annual report is now available on the Connexus website. It includes information about how services have been performing and the work that has been done listening and learning from feedback.



## CEO Richard Woolley Forward focus

### Much of my work recently has involved preparing Connexus for the future.

A big part of this is a new corporate plan due out next year. I mentioned last time I'd been out and about talking to customers to get their take on what this should look like.

Although some of the detail is still being ironed out, I can say that our customers will be at the heart of it. Whether that be the experience you have when you get in touch or the opportunities we can create for you to get involved.

The plan will also help address other priorities we know are important to you such as more energy-efficient homes, building homes each

year to keep our communities thriving and improving the quality of homes in general.

This needs to be done during a very financially challenging time for us all. Connexus is stepping up to the challenge here as well.

Since the pandemic, lots of our back-office teams work a large amount of time at home, so we will be working to reduce the number of office spaces we have in the future, with more front-line staff based and working in our communities. This will save money which we can invest back into services.

We'll let customers know more about these plans soon.

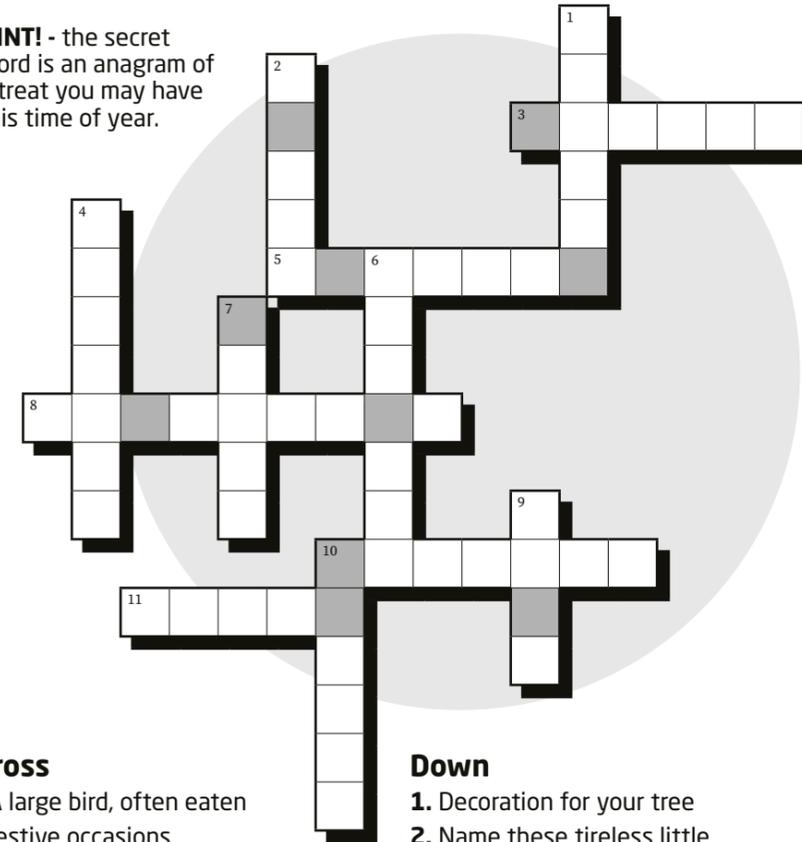
I hope you have a great Christmas.

## Word puzzle

The shaded squares make a secret word, but what is it?

Send in your answers for a chance to win.

**HINT!** - the secret word is an anagram of a treat you may have this time of year.



### Across

- 3. A large bird, often eaten at festive occasions
- 5. The main character in A Christmas Carol. Don't be one of these at Christmas
- 8. You might land a festive kiss beneath this plant
- 10. How is Santa getting in?
- 11. Chief sleigh operator, fond of mince pies?

### Down

- 1. Decoration for your tree
- 2. Name these tireless little seasonal helpers
- 4. Leave some room for this at the end of your Christmas meal
- 6. The most famous reindeer of all
- 7. Evergreen shrub with prickly leaves
- 9. Dreaming of a white Christmas? You'll be needing some of this
- 10. Sing these on Christmas Eve

The secret word in the word puzzle is .....

Name ..... Address .....

The first correct answer drawn from entries will win £25 in Amazon vouchers. Draw closes Friday 20 January 2023. 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.

### Editorial and design

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### Printing

Orphans Press

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The Auction Yard,  
Craven Arms,  
SY7 9BW

### Telephone

03332 31 32 33

### General enquires email

hello@connexus-group.co.uk

### Ask Emma a question or have your say on the magazine

connect@connexus-group.co.uk

### Connexus website

www.connexus-group.co.uk

### On social media

@weareconnexus

### Next issue due Summer 2023.

Check out previous issues on the Connexus website.





Stay safe and well this

# Christmas

The Connexus telephone lines will close at **5pm Friday 23 December 2022** and re-open at **8:30am Tuesday 3 January 2023**.

For emergency repairs during this time call

**03332 31 32 33**

For help managing your home and tenancy visit

**connexus-group.co.uk**

Other help and support during the festive season



**0800 144 8848**  
citizensadvice.org.uk



**0300 123 3393**  
mind.org.uk



**116 123**  
samaritans.org



**03444 775 774**  
anxietyuk.org.uk



**0808 801 0327**  
mensadviceline.org.uk



**0808 808 4000**  
nationaldebtline.org



**0808 2000 247**  
nationaldahelpline.org.uk