

We are Connexus Magazine



Hello
Connexus

New vans, new uniform,
same team. All the info
you need to know...

Issue 2 - Spring/Summer 2019

Your new look
magazine from



meres & mosses
housing association

We are Connexus

Hello team Connexus.
Making sure we have the right people to help us be the best that we can be is vital and we've got some new starters joining us to continue the development of our Connexus journey.



Our new Chief Executive is Richard Woolley

Richard has been with the organisation for several years as the Director of Resources - he's really passionate about Connexus, its customers and its colleagues; so we're excited that he's taking the helm!

Our new Director of Development is Vicki Tomlinson

Vicki has wide ranging experience of delivering development programmes within the social housing sector and will be ensuring we have the right housing across our counties.

Our new Director of Assets and Repairs is Lynsey Squair

Lynsey joins us from Sanctuary Housing Group and will be driving a customer focussed approach to the way we manage and maintain your homes.

One Connexus

We continue to work hard to ensure we're an efficient and effective organisation, delivering value for money services and investing in your homes.

As part of this we are growing our Connexus brand - starting with our repairs colleagues and their vehicles. We needed some new vans, as they were past their best. Our new vans are really efficient, so we'll be saving money on fuel and repair costs, as well as being more eco-friendly. We're also taking the opportunity to change them from Total Response or Herefordshire Housing vans, to Connexus vans! And we're changing our uniforms too - but

you don't need to worry, it's still our same great colleagues delivering these services - as modelled by Rory and Dale on the front cover!

Throughout June and July there will be a transition from old to new, so you'll see a combination of vans throughout that time. All of our colleagues have ID badges though, so please ask us to show this to you before letting anyone into your home. If you do have any concerns, just call our customer services team.



We're Hiring!

We're passionate about providing the very best services for our customers, but we can't do this without an awesome team. Come join our teams.

Roles with Connexus are located across Herefordshire, Shropshire and Gloucestershire.

Happy applying!

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



Sign up!

If we haven't got the perfect job for you right now how about signing up for our job alerts? It's quick and simple and takes the hassle out of searching. We'll simply alert you by email when your ideal job becomes available!

Voluntas calling

You may have noticed calls from a company called Voluntas. We'd like to reassure you that these are legitimate calls that we've asked them to make on our behalf.

Voluntas are an independent organisation who are professional market researchers. We've worked with them for some time and they're now working with us more widely across Connexus. They'll be calling you about satisfaction surveys, so we can find out how we are doing.

Why are we doing these surveys?

We want to know how we can make our services better, so we're contacting you to find out your opinions. We want to know what you think about us, our services, your home and your neighbourhood. We also want to know if there are other ways in which we can help you, we have lots of services on offer!

Thank you

for talking to the Voluntas team, your time and opinions really matter to us!



Get onto the property ladder

Ever thought about owning your own home but can't quite afford a mortgage on the open market? If so, Shared Ownership may be just right for you.

Shared Ownership gives you the chance to buy a share of your home and pay a subsidised monthly rent for the remaining share. In some cases you can staircase to owning 100% of the property at a later date. With Shared Ownership you can buy a newly built home or an existing one through re-sale programmes from housing associations like us.

We have lots of Shared Ownership properties available across Connexus and have lots more to come. To find out more check out our website.

Passion for your community

Do you have a passion for your community? Would you like to help Connexus deliver improved services to our customers? If so, we need you to join our Customer Involvement Panel!

Our Customer Involvement Panel (CIP) is made up of a small group of customers who are actively working on your behalf. CIP review our services to ensure we are performing as well as we can, but are also involved in organising fun activities and community events.

Here are just a few examples of the work our panel get involved in...

Tenants Together

We're part of the National Housing Federations groundbreaking Together with Tenants. For more information check out the page opposite.

Independent Living Centres

Our Independent Living Centres help older residents enjoy their home environment for as long as possible while providing reassurance about safety and community. CIP play a key role in coming along with us to visit these centres and getting residents' views on how the service is supporting them.

Fun, Fun, Fun!

CIP organises a range of activities for our communities, including summer holiday activities for kids, indoor kurling, and so much more! Maybe you have an idea for an activity or event that could really bring your whole community together?

CIP are always happy to welcome new members and new opinions. For more information, simply call us or email: hello@connexus-group.co.uk



Tenants Together

We're proud to be an early adopter of Together with Tenants, the National Housing Federation's plan to create stronger relationships and clearer communication between housing associations and their customers.



Together with Tenants reinforces our commitment to improving our services by putting our customers first. We love trying out new evidence-based approaches and Together with Tenants promises to be just that!

Our Customer Involvement Panel (CIP) and colleagues from our Customer Services team attended the first Together with Tenants forum in Birmingham earlier this year. This event brought together customers and housing associations from across the West Midlands to discuss the Together with Tenants plan, which includes:

- A new requirement in our code of governance for boards to be accountable to their customers
- A new charter setting out what customers can expect from their housing association
- A focus on customer scrutiny of our commitment to the new charter
- A closer link between regulation and our customers

Being an early adopter means we'll be the first to test out proposed changes to the Together with Tenants plan. A new national tenant advisory panel will be working with us to advise, support and challenge us on how we carry out the Together with Tenants plan. We'll be collecting evidence throughout the process and presenting our findings to the National Housing Summit in London this September.

If you are interested why not find out more about our CIP panel on our website.



Saving you money on bills - Evolve

We're teaming up with energy sector experts Evolve to deliver grant-funded cavity wall insulation – so you may receive a letter from us and them. This is a legitimate letter and Evolve are working with us to improve your energy efficiency.

The insulation will both improve the energy efficiency of your home and will help to reduce your fuel bills. The Energy Savings Trust estimate that the average detached home could save as much as £255 per year by installing the correct cavity wall insulation (based on fuel prices as of April 2019).

If your home is heated by an electric heating system you may be eligible for this insulation review and installation. If this is the case you will receive a letter from us letting you know that your home will be surveyed. Evolve will then contact you to arrange a convenient appointment to conduct the survey and determine if your home is truly eligible. Work will then be carried out at a future date and usually takes 2 - 3 days to complete.

So, how does this work?

- Most houses built after 1920 have cavity walls, made up of two walls with a gap in-between - known as a cavity
- Your home will already have some form of cavity wall insulation, however this is often old and not very effective. The installers will review this and then they will drill holes into the outside of the walls, inject insulation through these holes and then seal them with cement
- The cavity wall insulation that we are using is a beaded insulation and is highly regarded for its energy efficiency properties

If you'd like any more information, please contact us.

Surveying your homes

We want to make sure that your homes are modern and safe to live in. To make sure that this is the case every 5 years our surveying team will need to inspect your home. This visit is to check the condition of the property and to log any improvement works that need to be done. This isn't a check on you as a customer, this is only a property condition check and so we will need access to all areas of the home -inside and out. Our team may ask to take photos, this will help us when we are back at the office. It also lets us get our right trades teams involved. You can ask us not to take some photos but this can make some jobs harder.

We will let you know when we plan to visit and if it's not convenient, we'll work with you to arrange another time.

When we need access

We want to make sure your homes are safe. Sometimes we need access to your property to carry out essential safety works and compliance checks. Our teams will work with you to agree a mutually convenient time for us to carry out this work - but sometimes this isn't always easy. We do have a legal obligation to ensure you are safe in your home. Unfortunately if your appointments keep being missed and access is not granted to us, within a reasonable timescale, we will take legal action to help us gain access. Allowing us access to your home is part of your tenancy agreement and not allowing this to happen is a breach of your tenancy.

We look at each case individually and will work with you to avoid legal action, but sometimes it's unavoidable. So please work with us and let us know if you are having difficulties with appointments or if you need any additional support.





Universal Credit

Across Connexus over 1,100 of our customers have moved over to claim Universal Credit, aka UC.

Currently anyone of working age that is new to claiming benefits or anyone who has a change of circumstances, is moving away from the traditional benefits and being moved onto Universal Credit. The main difference is that with UC all money you are entitled to, including rent money, is paid directly to you, the claimant, on a monthly basis, in arrears. You are then responsible for paying your rent directly to us.

We've been working with our customers and found that many of you are finding the transition to being paid monthly and having the responsibility for paying your rent stressful and hard to adjust to. If you are finding this change difficult please do speak to us, we can help.

Managing money can be difficult, especially if you haven't had to do this before, but your rent should still be your number one priority. If you don't pay your rent you will fall into rent arrears and could end up owing a lot of money, and ultimately breaching your tenancy with us. This can eventually result in you losing your home. We are here to work with you to make sure that this doesn't happen and we have ways that we can help - maybe building up credit on your rent account is an option. Or maybe setting up a direct debit so it's one less thing to worry about. Let us know and we can help you with this.

If you aren't sure whether you should be claiming Universal Credit please visit our websites, contact us or visit www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk

Repairs and Maintenance

The way we work:

As part of our commitment to ensure we continue to deliver and improve the quality of our services we've been looking at how we deliver our repairs and maintenance services across Herefordshire and Shropshire.

Understanding what matters to our customers is a key part of this. We've been working with our Customer Involvement Panel (CIP) to develop a way that will work for everyone. This means that we now apply the same principles across Connexus and there have been a few changes.

Heating repair changes

During the winter months heating repairs increase and so we've had to look at the way we prioritise these to help support our customers more. Our winter period comes into effect 1st November 2019 until 31st March 2020 and during this time any urgent category repair will now be resolved within 1-5 working days, with all emergency category repairs being made safe within 4 hours and repaired within 24 hours.

What's the difference between urgent and emergency heating repairs?

Emergency repairs are all repairs that have an immediate threat to your health and safety, life or are a security risk. Urgent repairs are all other heating repairs that don't immediately threaten your safety.

Our repairs team

We've been listening to what you told us about your repair needs and being more flexible with appointments; we've really taken this on board. The team are moving towards a more customer focused service and are changing how our repair teams work with you. Within Shropshire we will no longer run the traditional rotation based repairs service where we only visit your area every 4 weeks. Instead we now have permanent repair colleagues in your area, throughout the year. This allows us to be more flexible with appointments and be more responsive to your repairs.



Developments across Connexus

We're dedicated to creating not just homes, but communities too, across Connexus. Here's some of what we're building.

Hereford - Beattie Avenue

Our proposal is to replace existing pre-fab homes. Plans are with the local authority for consideration, and the works are being tendered. We plan to start work in Autumn 2019.

Hereford - Blackfriars Street

This development is nearly finished with 31 affordable rent homes (22 for over 50s), and 20 private rent homes. They will be ready for Summer 2019

Whitchurch - Queensway

This redevelopment of a garage site will provide 5 independent living bungalows. Ready for Summer 2019.

Ludlow - Marstons Hub

This scheme will provide an iconic extension to the Ludlow Foyer, providing 11 more apartments, in addition to upgrading and modernising the Foyer.

Hereford - Pyefinch Meadow

We're taking ownership of some high quality properties from a local builder. At this site we already own 2 properties with another 6 (3 rented and 3 shared ownership) to be handed over between July 2019 and July 2020

Bishops Castle

24 properties started on site in March 2019 (12 rented and 12 shared ownership) and are due to complete by Summer 2020

Ford

32 properties on this site consisting of 16 affordable rented and 16 shared ownership houses. They are due to be completed in the summer of 2020.

Hereford - Highmore Street

We're replacing existing pre-fab bungalows with 6 shared ownership and 1 affordable rented property. Planning permission has been awarded. Start on site anticipated winter 2019

Condover

The project comprises 20, 2 and 3 bed homes that commenced in March 2019 and is currently rising out of the foundations. Completion is scheduled for March 2020.

Hereford - Bath Street

74 properties are now being built. The first phase consists of 27 flats (15 private rents and 12 affordable rented). The second phase commences in about a year, and will provide a further 47 affordable rented properties.

Shrewsbury - Radbrook

The first phase of Radbrook, an open market site is going well with 15 properties in phase 1a either sold or reserved. In March the show home for the apartments (phase 1a) was opened, and of the 17 apartments, 8 are already reserved. Phase 2 is now being built (21 homes), and 2 are reserved

Withington - Whitestone Chapel

We plan to build 33 properties, a mix of shared ownership, affordable rent and rent to buy. Work is due to start imminently with completion expected in Summer 2020.

Hereford - Brummie Stokes Court

35 affordable rented apartments on the site formerly occupied by The Ship Inn. We held our official open day at the end of May.

Bomere Heath

This site comprises 12, 2 and 3 bed homes and 1 detached 2 bed bungalow and work began in January 2019. We hope to complete work in 2020.

Information on our developments can be found on our websites.

Alternative formats: Available in audio, large print, braille and other languages. Please contact us for more information.

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Connexus
People > Places > Partnerships