



Raising the Standard



Annual Report 2011

Raising the Standard

*Thank you for taking the time to read our 2011 Annual Report.
It has been quite a year!*

Amidst a whirlwind of white papers and burning quangos, Connect has re-focussed its vision, strongly re-affirming our commitment to our purpose and values to hold us steady in these turbulent times.

Part of this commitment is to 'raise the standard' for social housing in every sense of the phrase.

You will read in the pages that follow how, by listening to the people who really matter, our customers, we have risen above simply maintaining standards, and have continued to improve.

In January 2011 we were delighted by the results of our comprehensive tenant survey (STATUS) which showed a 9 point

increase since 2007 in overall satisfaction to 90.4%, placing us in the top 10% of all housing associations.

Our customers and the communities where they live face immense pressures from policy changes, adverse economic conditions and hostile commentary. During such times confident local leadership is required, and Connect is already there – working creatively and collaboratively with a range of partners to help people improve their lives and build vibrant, resilient communities.



Our Values...

*Connect gives respect to people
Connect creates solutions
Connect includes the whole community
Connect loves making a difference*

Keeping the village together



*Connect loves
making a
difference.*

Connect's involvement in the Colne Valley reached an exciting milestone this July with the opening of Ancion Court, our new housing scheme for older people in Marsden.

Marsden is the last village in the Colne Valley heading south from Huddersfield, before everything rises to windy moorland. The area may be picturesque on a sunny day, but steep hillsides and harsh winter weather can make life difficult for older residents.

With the completion of **Ancion Court**, Connect has made a positive difference for 13 households: the scheme is at valley level, close to the village centre, and applications were accepted only from people with local connections.

The result is that these residents have been able to improve their quality of life whilst remaining in Marsden – in fact, they're more a part of village life than ever.

To celebrate, we threw an old-fashioned summer garden party, complete with ice cream, lawn games, live music and other fun. Despite a forecast of rain the morning started full of sun, and the weather held off just long enough for everyone to have a great time.

The Ancion Court homes are designed to be super-energy-efficient, with lots of insulation and ground source heat pumps to help keep residents' energy usage low, plus allotments – truly green homes for a green valley!



Want to know more?

Please call **0300 5000 600** and ask for Martyn Broadest or Phil Lacey, or reach them by email at phil.lacey@connecthousing.org.uk and martyn.broadest@connecthousing.org.uk

From the STATUS survey

88% of tenants were satisfied with the quality of accommodation across Connect (national avg. 84%)

Keeping the lines of communication open

Whether it's to report a repair or talk about rent arrears, customer service often begins when one of our tenants picks up their phone to call us.

With this in mind we undertook a major review of our customer services team this year, with the goal of providing a simpler, more efficient service in which most enquiries are dealt with at the first point of contact, without the need to be passed from team to team.

This began by combining existing teams to create a **Single Contact Centre**, staffed by our newly named Housing Liaison Officers. Although experienced in their specialist areas, the HLOs underwent an intense in-house training programme to enable them to handle the widest possible range of enquiries, with a new, simpler telephone menu system to put callers in touch with the right person as quickly as possible.

Of course, communication means more than just telephones. Through the **My Account** service on Connect's website, tenants have access to their rent information and repairs history on-line, and they can send a repair request without having to pick up a phone.

And as part of our commitment to **digital inclusion**, we've installed public computers in the reception areas of both our Leeds and Huddersfield offices, free to use on a drop-in basis. These PCs offer access to helpful websites where tenants and applicants can browse and bid for properties, get benefit information, contact their local Councillors, and compare utility prices to save money. Our Information Services Team has also been busy installing tenant-access computers in our supported housing schemes, providing vital digital access to some of our most vulnerable tenants.

From the STATUS survey

90% of tenants were satisfied with the helpfulness of staff (national avg. 84%)

83% of tenants were satisfied with the ease of getting hold of the right person (national avg. 73%)

84% of tenants were satisfied with staff's ability to deal with problems (national avg. 77%)



Connect creates solutions.

Want to know more?

Please call **0300 5000 600** and ask for Roma Rollinson, or reach her by email at roma.rollinson@connecthousing.org.uk

Keeping our oldies golden

This has been a banner year for our Older People's Services.

Hawthorn Mill, our sheltered housing scheme for people 55 years and older, was shortlisted for an Elderly Accommodation Council (EAC) Award. Staff and tenants headed to a glitzy awards ceremony at the Ascot Racecourse – and walked away with a **Gold Award!**

More Hawthorn Mill glory came when Connect was shortlisted for a **Bloom Award** for the support given to one of Hawthorn Mill's tenants to realise his dream of having one of his compositions performed by a Yorkshire brass band and recorded for posterity. Although first prize went to another entry, Connect was one of five nation-wide finalists, which brought with it money toward helping our tenant achieve his dreams.

Connect Older Peoples Strategists (COPS), a group of Connect tenants dedicated to steering and improving services for our older tenants, have had a busy year – as usual. Their new 'Connect to Me' project aims to identify older tenants from across Connect communities who may be having difficulty accessing services, and to provide them with information and guidance about the range of resources available. COPS has also produced and distributed 'A Keepsake of My Wishes', a booklet which allows older tenants record their wishes regarding end-of-life decisions.

COPS members also contributed to writing the Older People's Strategy 2011/12, an example of tenants directly influencing the services they receive at a strategic level.



Want to know more?

Please call **0300 5000 600** and ask for Simon Calland (simon.calland@connecthousing.org.uk), or call **0113 231 1561** and ask for Sue Hendry (sue.hendry@connecthousing.org.uk)

*Connect gives respect
to people.*

Keeping Yorkshire green

With energy prices on the rise and everyone feeling the pinch, it's never been more important for us to keep improving the environmental credentials of our homes, as every bit of energy saved means more money in our tenants' pockets.

That's why we've continued to upgrade and replace boilers, windows and other fittings across our properties. We replaced 227 boilers last year – over a hundred more than the year before. And we are continuing to survey our older properties to identify where these improvements are most needed.

The **ground source heat pumps** at our new Ancion Court scheme work by using warmth stored deep in the ground to heat a home, and help to give these homes their Category A rating for efficiency. We've been installing other green energy technologies, such as solar hot water panels and photovoltaic tiles, in our new schemes, which have the potential to halve the cost of tenants' utility bills.

We've also installed water butts at Ancion Court and elsewhere, so residents can tend to their new allotments without draining the local reservoir.

Joanne Wilson, our Regeneration Officer, offers a one-to-one **energy efficiency advice service** for tenants needing help to manage their home's energy use. Whether it's advice about how to make the most of their home's heating system or help finding a cheaper energy tariff, the service is available free to all of our tenants. 108 tenants made use of the

service last year, and we hope that number will continue to grow.

But energy efficiency isn't only to do with our properties: at Connect we're always on the lookout for the chance to improve the way we work. We've introduced a new recycling system for our Leeds office, ensuring that even more material is recycled, and that none of the waste goes to landfill. Other office improvements include filter taps and low capacity toilets.



Connect loves making a difference.

Want to know more?

Please call **0300 5000 600** and ask for Joanne Wilson or Martyn Broadest, or reach them by email at joanne.wilson@connecthousing.org.uk and martyn.broadest@connecthousing.org.uk



Keeping our communities strong

Our work begins by providing homes for families and individuals. But it's just as important to us to bring people together, fostering the connections which can turn a street into a neighbourhood, and a neighbourhood into a community.

This was the inspiration behind **Junk Beatz**, Connect's junk drumming project for young people. The project gave a group of young people from neighbourhoods across East Leeds the chance to perform on their own homemade instruments whilst learning about the music of other cultures. The self-esteem boost which comes from performing in front of a crowd has made a real difference to their lives, and along the way they've had the opportunity to meet an African Jali (travelling storyteller) and a Japanese Tyco drummer, among others.

The project has been a stomping success, and to top it off Alan Metcalfe, Connect's Community Youth Officer and the driving force of Junk Beatz, took home the trophy for Outstanding Individual in the National Housing Federation's What We Are Proud Of awards! The project was also shortlisted in the Best Partnership Working category, and the young people have continued to perform at galas and events across the Leeds area.

Junk Beatz is just one of the positive activities run by our Community Services Team. 2011

has been a busy year, with our Arts Club expanding to a second location in North Kirklees, our ever popular Games Club continuing into its fifth year, and the first ever Leeds club for Futsal, an exciting type of skills-based football.

Healthy eating & cooking sessions have been delivered across West Yorkshire, and we are also supporting **Harmony**, a new community choir based in East Leeds. Harmony includes men and women of different ages from all over the world who come together to sing together and teach each other songs from their own culture.

Strong communities include strong families and our Community Child and Family Support Workers continue to support individuals with a diverse range of needs whilst delivering sessions on parenting and family relationships.

Our work may begin with providing a home, but that is truly only the beginning.



Connect includes the whole community.

Want to know more?

Please call **0300 5000 600** and ask for Barbara Kempf, or reach her by email at barbara.kempf@connecthousing.org.uk

From the STATUS survey

83% of tenants were satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live (National avg. 81%)

Keeping our tenants involved



Long before the Tenant Services Authority (our current regulator) made co-regulation a buzzword for social housing, Connect has been dedicated to involving our customers in designing, inspecting and improving our services - respecting our tenants' right to shape the services they're paying for.



Tenant involvement takes several different forms at Connect, all of which combine to exceed the TSA's expectations for co-regulation. Our Community Services Team has supported the work of the **Connect Residents Federation** (the CRF), now in its 11th year, which continues to strengthen under the banner of its 'critical friend' policy of tenant scrutiny. This year the CRF commissioned Connect's Tenant Inspectors to undertake an inspection of our Planned Maintenance Service. The report of their findings is being used to make improvements to the service.

The Service Improvement Forum (SIF) is another powerful tenant scrutiny body within Connect. With members drawn from the CRF officers and Tenant Inspectors, the SIF meets with key staff members to ensure that tenant priorities are given a high profile in Connect's Business Plan, which they then follow up to ensure that they are translated into action. This year the SIF helped to shape Connect's approach to repairs, maintenance and financial inclusion services, among other areas.

Another important area of tenant involvement has been the development of the **Connect Commitments** (CCs), our 'local offers'. There

are currently seven CCs, offering clear statements about what our customers can expect from us in a range of service areas. This has been a tenant-led project from the beginning, with tenant focus groups prioritising the order in which CCs were needed, and suggesting how different services could be measured and reported.

Many aspects of these commitments are monitored, and our second annual Tenant Report has just gone out to our tenants, laying out how Connect has performed in all of these areas. Our first was cited as an example of good practice by TAROE (Tenants And Residents Organisations of England) for the way we consulted tenants on the contents and style of the report.

This is the essence of co-regulation: giving tenants the power to shape the services they receive, and giving them the information needed to challenge us if things don't go as they should.

From the STATUS survey

76% of tenants were satisfied with the way Connect takes account of their views (national avg. 68%)

86% of tenants were satisfied with how Connect keeps them informed (national avg. 80%)

Want to know more?

Please call **0300 5000 600** and ask for Christine L. Hartley, or reach her by email at chris.hartley@connecthousing.org.uk

Keeping the future bright

Conditions are particularly unfavourable at the moment for anyone starting a career or looking for work. But Connect can help.

We are recruiting a **Neighbourhood Enterprise and Skills Co-ordinator**, who will build strong links with networks of partners, putting our tenants in touch with the best help available to gain new skills, grow their confidence, and find their way back into economic activity.

Even before the creation of this post, we've been busy with projects to help kick-start new careers. Connect joined with other Leeds-area housing providers to create **Passion 4 Fashion**, which saw a group of aspiring fashion enthusiasts trawl through charity shops for old clothes which could be customised into brilliant new outfits. A team of fashion designers was brought in to provide expert tuition at a series of workshops, and the project finished off with a glamorous catwalk show at Leeds Town Hall. Job skills training of a different sort has been taking place in the Colne Valley, where Connect has employed eight local people to renovate properties as part of the **Colne Valley Futurebuilders**. The eight trainees, all of whom hope to pursue a career in the building industry, attend college one day a week but do most of their training on the job, under the guidance of our Site Manager. Nine properties in all will be renovated under the Futurebuilders scheme, and the trainees will emerge from the two-year programme with NVQ2s in Maintenance Operations.

Once finished, the properties will be let to people with connections to the villages of Marsden and Slaithwaite. We're making every effort to maximise the benefit to the local economy by using local suppliers and subcontractors wherever possible for the materials and specialist works required on the houses. This has also been a fantastic chance for us to strengthen our relationship with partner agencies, working closely with 'build' (the construction sector development agency for Kirklees) and Calderdale college, with funding from the Regional Housing Board via Kirklees Council.

And on the topic of bright futures, we couldn't fail to mention our new Neighbourhood Ranger, Jamie Fawcett. Jamie took up a six-month trainee post with our Neighbourhood Ranger team (Connect's successful in-house handyman service) last year, assisting one of our full-time Rangers with minor repairs and adaptations.

Luckily for Jamie, Connect was planning an expansion of the Neighbourhood Ranger service, and a vacancy was advertised just as Jamie's trainee contract was coming to an end. He saw off strong competition from other applicants, and has now been confirmed as a fully-fledged Neighbourhood Ranger.



From the STATUS survey

90% of tenants were satisfied with services provided by Connect (national avg. 82%)

87% of tenants were satisfied with repairs & maintenance (national avg. 79%)

Follow Futurebuilders

Follow the project online at

www.facebook.com/colnevalleyfuturebuilders

Want to know more?

Please call **0300 5000 600** and ask for Helen Lennon or Martyn Broadest, or reach them by email at **helen.lennon@connecthousing.org.uk** and **martyn.broadest@connecthousing.org.uk**



Connect loves making a difference.

Growing Team Connect

Recruiting, retaining and supporting the best people around is the foundation for Connect's success - and the core of what our Human Resources Team does.

Our Human Resources Team has provided an especially robust programme of staff training this year, which began with the introduction of **BiteSize People**. These one-hour training sessions provide an overview of a variety of people management topics, offering practical guidance and keeping our line managers informed about changes to policy and best practice.

Additional training was provided on equality, diversity & inclusion in recruitment, and the Be a Connect Manager programme gave new and aspiring managers an all-round grounding in successful people management.

And the benefits of this training are already being seen – for instance, in a reduction in average sickness absence by 2 days per year, placing us among the top-performing housing associations.

We have also signed up to the **Mindful Employer** initiative which aims to increase awareness of mental health at work.

Getting the best out of our staff is all the more important in these difficult times, and Connect's HR Team continues to meet this challenge in new and creative ways.



Want to know more?

Please call **0300 5000 600** and ask for Yvonne Inniss or Rachael Hall, or reach them by email at **Leeds-HR@connecthousing.org.uk**

Connect gives respect to people.

Keeping our tenants '£s Positive'

When household finances reach the breaking point and debt seems unmanageable, our tenants are increasingly turning to us for help.

Through our **£s Positive service**, Connect is providing tenants with a specialised one-to-one service aimed squarely at improving their financial situation, offering benefits advice and helping them to get a handle on their debt. Our Financial Inclusion Officer (FIO) meets with tenants in their own homes and provides intensive support to negotiate with creditors, maximize income from benefits, and set detailed budgets to enable these households to recover their financial health.

The success of the service has attracted considerable attention from other agencies,

and our FIO has taken a few days out of her busy schedule this year to take up invitations to speak at conferences. Connect is clearly leading the way in finding new approaches to tackling financial exclusion.

All of our staff are increasing their efforts to inform tenants about help with financial matters – encouraging the use of credit unions, for instance, as an alternative to high-interest lenders – and urging anyone struggling to pay the rent to get in touch with us as soon as possible.



Connect creates solutions.

Want to know more?

Please call **0300 5000 600** and ask for Ilyas Lunat, or reach him by email at ilyas.lunat@connecthousing.org.uk

From a £s Positive service user

'I was scared of the phone ringing, scared of door knocking, scared of post. Now I feel that all arrangements have been done. So now I no longer feel scared. Thank You.'

In 2010/11 our £s Positive service...

- received a 99.5% user satisfaction rating
- helped 52 people
- prevented 4 evictions
- helped reduce abandonments from 31 to 21 per year
- succeeded in recalling 11 Council Tax debts from bailiffs
- arranged an average of £1617 per annum in additional benefits for service users

Rallying support

Connect does more than just provide homes. For a large number of people across West Yorkshire, we deliver support services which enable them to pursue their goals whilst gaining the skills and confidence to live independently.

It hasn't been a sunny year for the support sector, with cutbacks to government spending creating a difficult environment, but Connect is rising to the challenge.

Kirklees Safer Stronger Communities has extended funding for our **Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy (IDVA) service**, which provides crisis-level support to people at high risk of experiencing domestic violence. During the 2010/11 year our IDVA worker supported 31 clients through the court process, helping to secure 26 convictions for domestic violence. Connect has also secured funding to develop a domestic violence perpetrator service in Kirklees, which will take a bold approach to reducing domestic violence by working directly with those who commit it.

We have been reviewing the breadth of our support services, resulting in a number of improvements aimed at keeping costs down. Our **Single Homeless Service** has brought what used to be three separate schemes under single management, boosted by the acquisition of three extra units (with another two on the way), so we can offer accommodation to even more young homeless people, and provide the support which will help

them toward a brighter future.

Our **Mental Health Survivor's Group** has really taken off this year, with new funding secured and more members from the community joining in for skills training, social activities and mutual support.

The **North Kirklees Women's Refuge** has been temporarily relocated whilst we convert the original refuge into modern self-contained units. The conversion is due to be finished by the end of 2011, and will provide women and children with superior accommodation and facilities.

And we were delighted that the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) accepted our recent bid for funding, which means we can go ahead with plans for new supported housing schemes for older people and for people with complex mental health needs.

Want to know more?

Please call **0300 5000 600** and ask for Christine Fox, or reach her by email at **christine.fox@connecthousing.org.uk**



Connect loves making a difference.

Making every penny and minute count

'Tenant satisfaction with overall services is 9% higher than found in the previous survey undertaken in 2007; this is an achievement to be proud of.'

(The National Housing Federation's Feedback service)

The results of this survey have been included throughout this report. Achieving these results for customers has required ongoing investment in, and careful management of, our maintenance, estate management and support services.

In these times of austerity, we are doubly keen to keep our rents as affordable as possible whilst continuing to invest in services which meet the needs and aspirations of our customers, particularly as other local services are scaled back. This requires us to be smart in the way we buy our goods and services and the way we organise ourselves. This year our staff team have been working on a **Beat Bureaucracy** campaign, stripping away unnecessary activities to meet customer requests as quickly and straightforwardly as we can.

By canny tendering of contracts and budgeting we have saved enough to expand our successful Neighbourhood Ranger Service, from two to four Rangers and will be employing our own painting

team. The in-house handyperson service has received excellent feedback from our tenants during the last two years, and it saves us money to boot – so growing the service only makes sense.

Although, as is average for most landlords, 79% of our tenants consider they get value for money from their rent, we want to improve this position. As maintenance is an area of high expenditure for us, we are working with colleagues from other landlords to carry out a value for money review of our repairs service. We also want to understand more about how our customers judge value for money and will be asking them in a series of focus groups in the coming year.

Want to know more?

Please call **0300 5000 600** and ask for Helen Lennon, or reach her by email at **helen.lennon@connecthousing.org.uk**



Connect creates solutions.

Leading the way

Connect's Board of 12 members is the ultimate decision-making body for business.

The Board members are all volunteers, giving their time and expertise freely to ensure that Connect fulfils its purpose of raising housing standards, building successful communities and promoting inclusion.

Our Board members provide skilled leadership and strong control for the Association, with commitment and energy, ensuring that Connect is viable, properly governed and well managed. The Board plays a leading role in business planning for Connect, establishing and upholding our vision and values.

Four members of the Board are tenants or leaseholders of Connect, who bring to the Board personal knowledge of Connect's services, as well as their wider skills and experience. In addition, formal tenant representation comes through four Representatives, selected by Connect Residents Federation, who participate in all Board meetings and events.

Board members take part in six Board meetings each year, and a number of strategy seminars

and committees. Regular Briefings and scheme tours enable members to keep up-to-date with Connect's work in practice, and the wider environment in which we work.

Each year one or two Board members stand down and new members are recruited, to ensure that the Board as a whole has all the skills and experience that are needed, and helps Connect to reflect the communities where we work. If you are interested in joining the Board when vacancies arise, we will be delighted to hear from you. Please get in touch with Jenny Brierley, Chief Executive, at jenny.brierley@connecthousing.org.uk or find out more on our website.

During 2010-11 two long-serving members left the Board and we thank them both for the exceptional commitment and expertise that they brought to Connect. Shabir Hussain stood down in 2010 due to the demands of his business. Richard Smith very sadly passed away in July 2011 after a long fight with illness, while contributing to Connect's work right up until his death.



Board members - September 2011

Name	Occupation
Vin McCabe (Chair)	Area Director
Paul Webley (Vice-Chair)	Director of Business Development
Pat Ashby	Retired Purchasing Officer
Delroy Bygrave	Retired Clerical Officer
Frances Clarke	Head of Operations
Kath Dalby	Career break/Retail Manager
Jenny Harron	Auditor, Higher Education
Nigel Hunt	Customer Service Consultant
Mark Turnbull	Head of Legal Services
Andrew Raby	Business Development Manager
Susan Waterson	Senior Project Manager

The Board delegates implementation of Connect's strategies to the Association's 150 staff through the Management Team of the Chief Executive and four directors:

Name	Title
Jenny Brierley	Chief Executive
Martyn Broadest	Director of Regeneration
Sean Flynn	Director of Finance & Resources
Christine Fox	Dir. of Neighbourhood & Community Services
Helen Lennon	Director of Service Development

Connect includes the whole community.



Facts and figures part 1

Housing Stock as at 31 March 2011

Properties owned and managed

Number	
33	Keyworker Accommodation
1728	General Needs
736	Older People
119	Supported Housing
3	Staff units in supported housing
198	Leasehold

Owned but managed by others

177	Supported Housing
14	Staff units in supported housing

Managed but owned by others

20	Student Housing
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Total **3266**

Change in stock 2010-11

We were delighted to add 22 new units to our stock.

Performance Information

Complaints

We received 88 complaints about our service in 2010-11, 92% of which were resolved at the first stage of our complaints procedure.

Two complaints were considered by the Housing Ombudsman, who found no maladministration.

Void loss

2011	2010	2009	2008
1.1%	1.3%	1.3%	2.4%

Total Rent Arrears as % of Gross Rent

2011	2010	2009	2008
5.4%	5.8%	6%	6.1%

Connect Housing Association Limited is a charitable housing organisation registered with the Tenant Services Authority.

Reg No L2285. Vat Reg No 644 8458 90
Registered Office: 205 Roundhay Road, Leeds LS8 4HS



Facts and figures part 2

Average Gross Housing Association Rents as at March 2010

	Bedsit	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4+ bed
All general needs housing association stock in Leeds	£58.33	£67.11	£73.27	£78.65	£81.81
Connect's general needs stock in Leeds	£63.71	£67.19	£73.55	£79.16	£81.25
Total general needs stock in Leeds = 1,384					
All general needs housing association stock in Kirklees	£61.04	£67.33	£74.67	£80.29	£88.80
Connect's general needs stock in Kirklees	£61.04	£64.63	£72.17	£77.46	£88.25
Total general needs stock in Kirklees = 239					
All general needs housing association stock in Calderdale	£50.60	£58.06	£63.37	£69.64	£84.22
Connect's general needs stock in Calderdale		£60.69	£69.79	£77.70	£63.35*
Total general needs stock in Calderdale = 87					
*only 1 property					

These figures are average weekly rents as at 31 March 2010 and show the gross rents including service charges. Figures for 2011 are not yet available. Further breakdowns of individual Housing Associations' rents are available on request.

Connect's average weekly general needs gross rents across West Yorkshire as at March 2011

	Bedsit	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4+ bed
Rent	£63.47	£66.92	£74.46	£80.07	£85.96
Properties	10	271	650	573	216



Summarised or full accounts are freely available. Please contact David Troupes on 0300 5000 600 if you would like a copy.