



homes, communities, cultures



Tenant Report 2010

A Word from our Board and the Connect Residents Federation (the CRF)

The Board warmly welcomes this important report about whether Connect is meeting the Tenant Services Authority's new standards. It hides nothing and that is what the Board expects – if there are things that need attention, let's try and get them right.

We are very pleased that Connect's tenants have contributed to this report, adding credence and value to the words that are written. Of course, the challenge for us all is to act upon it. The Board is confident that the work of its dedicated staff and the involvement of its tenants will ensure that this happens.



Vin McCabe
Chair of the Board of Management

The CRF is very positive about its job as Connect's "critical friend". We are happy to confirm that we think that this report is accurate. Tenants have been involved in both producing it and checking it. There are always things that need improving and we see it as our job to work with Connect to change the things that matter most to tenants.

We would like to draw your attention to a few things:

- Tenants have their own Community Priority Fund that is given over fully to the CRF to make decisions about.
- Our Tenant Inspectors are a new and exciting development for us, with the CRF deciding which services the inspectors look at.
- We know that the work of Connect's contractors is really important to all of us. That is why the CRF helps to write specifications for contracts and is on interview panels to recruit contractors.



There is a lot of work to do, so you are very welcome to come and join us!

Eunice Clarkson
Chair of the CRF

A Guide to Reading the Report

Why have we written this report? We have new national standards to meet and our regulator, the TSA (Tenant Services Authority), asked us to produce an annual report for our tenants. This report tells you where we think we are doing okay and where we need to improve.

Five “standards” are covered. Each standard is laid out in the same way.

The **green** box tells you what the TSA says we have to do.

The “smiley face” is the assessment made by Connect staff and tenants:



... means that we think that, for the most part, we meet the standard.



...means that we think that we meet a good part of the standard but there are significant areas that we need to work on.



...means that we fail the standard.

This is followed by a couple of different sections:

Facts and Figures are things that you might find interesting which back up the assessment, and **VFM Facts** will give you information about value for money.

How We Plan to Improve shows what we plan to do and helps you keep an eye on if we are really doing it.

How did we arrive at these assessments? Both tenants and staff have looked in detail at what we are doing. *Some* of the ways that tenants have been involved and listened to include:

- The “What Connect Tenants Want” report which pulls together over 3,000 tenant opinions from satisfaction surveys, complaints, special tenant events and from the work of the CRF. *(You are very welcome to a copy if you would like to read it!)*
- The CRF’s direct involvement in checking services, looking at performance and meeting other landlords so they can compare how Connect is doing.
- The Tenant Inspectors who looked at what a well-managed estate looks like and who are now looking at planned maintenance.
- The Service Improvement Forum which makes sure that tenants’ priorities go into Connect’s business plan... and then look to see if it happens.
- The “Big Ask” conference that looked especially at the standards in this report.

You may say that these standards don’t mean much to me. Well ... the TSA also want us to agree some even higher standards which are of importance to *our* tenants. Connect tenants have already decided that these are going to be called “Connect Commitments”. The end of this report tells you about what these are and when they will be published. If you want to help us work on them, please let us know.



1

The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard

The TSA standard says that Connect has to...

Customer service, choice and complaints

- Provide choices, information and communication that meet the variety of needs tenants have.
- Have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible. Make sure that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly.

Involvement and Empowerment

- Offer all tenants a wide range of opportunities to be involved in the management of their housing.
- Consult with tenants and act reasonably to agree standards for service delivery.
- Provide tenants with a range of opportunities to influence how Connect meets all the TSA's standards, to look at performance against all the standards and to develop the annual report.
- Provide support to tenants to build their capacity to be involved more effectively.

Understanding and responding to the variety of needs that tenants have

- Treat all tenants with fairness and respect.
- Demonstrate that they understand the different needs of tenants.

Assessment



We met the standard!

Customer Services, Choice and Complaints

Customer Services: We provide lots of information (sometimes tenants tell us it is too much!) about our own services and also about other organisations' services that might be of help. We mainly do this through leaflets and the quarterly newsletter "Get Connected". The tenancy agreement and the very detailed Tenant Handbook make clear what Connect's responsibilities are... and what tenants' responsibilities are! We provide for those who need bigger print, audiotapes or interpretation. Our customer services and repairs hotlines are open 5 days a week for any queries. We have "out-of-hours" hotlines to deal with emergency repairs and reports of anti-social behaviour. Our new website means that those who have the internet can get information 24x7, including details about rent accounts and repairs. We know that many tenants prefer talking face-to-face, so we still have "drop-ins" for queries at both our receptions and many of our staff visit tenants in their own homes.

Choice: We give tenants choices about the ways to contact us... and we also know the ways that tenants prefer *us* to contact *them*. We give lots of ways that tenants can pay their rent – some ways are more expensive for us, but we keep them because tenants like and appreciate the convenience. For all our repairs, we now offer choices of 2-hour appointment “slots” and, as tenants have requested, there are “slots” in the early evening and on Saturday mornings. When we replace a kitchen, bathroom, boiler, windows or door, we give as much choice about colours, designs and materials as possible. Whenever we offer a choice that may involve an extra cost for tenants (e.g. some “added extras” in a kitchen, a special type of bathroom tile, help with gardening, servicing a stair lift, etc.), we say how much this will cost. This means that tenants can decide if they can afford to pay the extra and if they really want the additional service.

Complaints: We plan to give good services, but sometimes we make mistakes or we don't meet the standards that we say we will. When tenants tell us that they have a problem, we try to resolve it as quickly as possible. But when tenants do need to complain, we give a number of ways to do this. Tenants can make a complaint by the phone hotlines, e-mail, letter or by talking to a member of staff. We will provide interpretation if that is needed. We are also happy to take complaints from another person who has been authorised by a tenant to help. Every year we give feedback in “Get Connected” about the complaints that we have received and, importantly, how we have used complaints to improve our services.

Involvement and Empowerment

We all gain when tenants are involved with us in prioritising, designing and commenting on Connect's services. Connect is able to understand more about the services that tenants want. Tenants may also gain some new experiences or skills. However, we also understand that many tenants do not want or do not have time to attend events, so we give a very wide “menu” of involvement so that tenants can choose what is best for them.

The majority have told us that their favoured method is written surveys. Others like phone surveys, using e-mail or the website to give us feedback. Others choose to attend “focus groups” or day conferences – we always make sure that we provide transport and childcare for these events and that the venue is accessible for anyone with a disability.



A smaller number of tenants, especially officers and members of the CRF, spend much more time and give lots of their talent taking part in working groups and recruitment panels, questioning performance, inspecting services, suggesting what services are needed and how they should work, taking part in Board meetings and suggesting priorities for future plans for Connect's business.



In addition to helping with practical arrangements to help tenants get involved, we also provide training when that is needed. For example, Tenant Inspectors have received training from an external consultant to help them do a good job. Some CRF officers and members have attended conferences and training events. Some people have even got jobs because of the training that they have received and the skills that they developed by being involved or by volunteering.

We report back to tenants about how we are doing against many of our service standards and performance targets in "Get Connected" and by annual reports (like this one). Those tenants who are more involved have access to *much* more performance information so that they can take part effectively in the groups that they are part of. The CRF can request any non-confidential performance reports to help them assess how Connect is doing and to make suggestions about how to improve services.

Two important developments this year have been the Tenant Inspectors and the Service Improvement Forum. The Tenants Inspectors are asked by the CRF to inspect services that the CRF believe need improvement. The Tenant Inspectors have looked at how to assess an estate and are now planning an inspection of the planned maintenance service. The Service Improvement Forum looks at tenants' priorities for improvement and makes sure that these are included in Connect's future plans.

Understanding and Responding to the Variety of Needs that Tenants Have

Treating all our customers with respect and fairness is absolutely key to our values. Tenants' feedback suggests that we do this and that they appreciate the attitude of our staff. Almost half of our staff team are, in fact, supported housing staff who are trained and experienced to help:

- Women fleeing domestic violence
- Homeless families
- People with mental health problems
- Young people (under 25)
- Refugees
- Older people
- People with disabilities and
- People with drug and alcohol problems

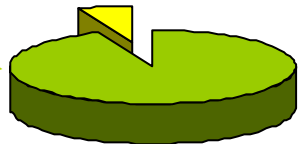
We know that sometimes tenants are surprised that we ask them about their sex, age, ethnicity, disability, employment, income and even sexuality and faith. We ask these

questions because we are trying to understand the needs of our tenants better. This means that we can make sure that everyone can get our services. Also, we can design some services for particular groups that might have special needs. For example:

- Feedback from the CRF and older people about difficulties in maintaining and staying in their homes resulted in the development of the Neighbourhood Ranger service in Leeds. This was so successful that a second Ranger was appointed this year.
- Information about low levels of household income and problems with debt resulted in Connect funding the “£s Positive” service to help tenants struggling with limited income.
- Information about the energy efficiency of properties and tenants struggling with fuel bills resulted in Connect training staff to give energy advice and employing someone to give advice about how to reduce fuel bills.
- Information about disabilities has helped us in the design of our homes, the provision of specialist staff and letting properties to allow a room for a resident carer.

We train *all* of our staff so that they are aware of the different needs of our tenants and how to respond when this difference requires changes or flexibility in our services.

Facts and Figures

- Over the year our hotlines answered over 30,000 phone calls. Most calls were answered within half a minute. **94% of callers said that they were satisfied with the helpfulness and attitude of hotline staff.**
- 
- An average of 450 people drop in at our two office reception areas every month.
 - There were 80 new complaints over the year. 33 complaints were about repairs (but bear in mind that we did do over 9,000 repair jobs).
 - Of the 12 members of Board, 4 full Board members are tenants – that is good compared with other associations. Also, the CRF always sends 2 members to question and contribute to Board and then to report back to the CRF.
 - We put together *all* the feedback we receive from over 3,000 tenants through satisfaction surveys, the CRF, comments made to staff, special tenant events, complaints and compliments, and put it into a report called “What Connect Tenants Want”. This report is then used by the Board, managers and the CRF to make improvements and to help decide priorities for the business.
 - We have a full summary of all our tenants’ “rights to involvement” called the “Community Involvement Compact” – this was revised in 2009 and will be revised again in 2011.
 - We spent almost £30,000 over the year on translation and interpreting for tenants with different language needs.

- **VFM fact:** This year we spent almost £100,000 or about £40 per home on tenant involvement – when that is compared with other housing providers, this shows we spend enough but not too much.

How We Plan to Improve

- We want to understand our tenants better so that we can make sure our services meet their needs.
- We want to improve how we report information back to all tenants through “Get Connected”, the website, this annual report and additional information on request, so that tenants can understand where we do well and where we don’t and can tell us if they agree or disagree. When tenants such as CRF members, working group members and the Service Improvement Forum need information to “check out” our performance in detail, we want to make sure it is clear. Also, we want to make sure that, if there are concerns about areas of performance, there are clear ways to communicate those concerns.
- We found that, although we offer choice, sometimes we do not manage the process of giving choice very well. As a result, tenants may not have understood what the choices were well enough or did not actually get what they chose. We are working on improving that this year.



““ The staff are always very helpful, polite and go out of their way to help... unlike some other customer services teams I have been dealing with recently. ””

**Customer comment about our
Customer Services Hotline**

““ Staff are brilliant and ring back when they say they will. ””

**Customer comment about our
Repairs Hotline**

2 Home Standard

The TSA standard says that Connect has to...

Quality of Accommodation

- Make sure that tenants' homes meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard.
- Have standards that are higher than the Decent Homes Standard for some homes.

Repairs and Maintenance

- Provide a cost-effective repairs and maintenance service to homes and communal areas. Respond to the needs of tenants and offer choices. Have the aim of completing repairs and improvements "right first time".
- Meet all relevant legal requirements that provide for the health and safety of tenants in their homes.

Assessment



We met the standard!

Quality of Accommodation

All our tenants' homes meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard and we plan to keep it that way. Our homes are maintained to the standard to which they were built. However, whenever possible, when we do planned maintenance work, we upgrade the quality of the home. The energy ratings of our new homes are very good, but we are working to improve the ratings of some of our older homes.

Repairs and Maintenance

We meet all the health and safety requirements that the law says that we must meet. We are very thorough about gas safety checks in every property every year. Electrical systems and fire safety are all checked regularly.

We work hard to give a cost-effective repairs and maintenance service to all our homes (including communal areas). As well as the responsive repairs service that is there for when something breaks down or doesn't work properly, we have a detailed Asset Management Strategy that plans work well into the future.

Our responsive repairs service offers choice about how to report a repair, 2-hour appointment slots including evenings and weekends and, in some cases, a choice of what we use to do the work. We now have 2 Neighbourhood Rangers in Leeds who work very flexibly and are extremely popular with tenants. Our contractor for Kirklees and Calderdale provides a similar



service to the Rangers and is also very popular. We try to get it “right first time” so that we don’t have to make repeated visits but sometimes, if there is the need to order something or if the repair is particularly complicated, we can’t manage this.

Tenants have been closely involved in the development of our repairs service since we carried out a big review in 2006. Before the new Leeds contractors were appointed in July 2009, tenants helped design the standards that went into the contracts. Members of the CRF were also on the recruitment panel. We are still “bedding in” the new contracts and we expect to see further improvements this year. We know that, at the moment, the service is better in some areas than in others.

Our planned maintenance service (when we replace kitchens, bathrooms, boilers, doors, windows, etc.) has had a lot of input and examination by tenants over the past year. The CRF and the Service Improvement Forum chose planned maintenance as a priority service for improvement. Tenants have taken part in phone interviews and the Changing Rooms day conference. The Tenant Inspectors are now looking at parts of the service. One tenant summarised the changes needed when he said: “The end product is very good but how this was achieved could be improved.” For example, we


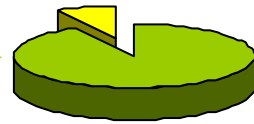
give a lot of choice for kitchens, but we found that the processes were not very efficient – so we used that feedback to design new “specifications” for the contractors and results so far show that tenants are very happy with what is being done. Feedback from tenants is helping us to expand choice while understanding more what tenants want choice for and how it needs to be given.

We want to help older or disabled tenants to stay in their own homes. We can provide a very effective service for smaller adaptations. This means that hand rails, lever taps and ramps can be provided quickly and are tailored to individual needs. Larger adaptations (like stair lifts) may be funded by the local authority and, unfortunately, take much longer. However, we are happy to help tenants in any way we can with making the funding application.

“ Nice guy. Good work. Listened to my concerns and added his. ”

**Tenant speaking about the
Neighbourhood Ranger Service**

Facts and Figures

- **Tenant satisfaction with our repairs service is very high at 93%** – and some contractors have even higher scores. 
- **92% of repairs received an appointment** – we are working towards 100%. 
- We regularly inspect work done by our contractors. All jobs that cost over £500 are inspected by Connect staff, plus 1 in every 10 of jobs that cost less than £500. If we find problems, we inspect more.
- The Community Priority Fund of £65,000 managed by the CRF is completely devoted to work requested by tenants.
- **VFM facts:** We have done a significant amount of “testing the market” to make sure that we get VFM from all our contracts. This year:
 - Each Connect home had an average of 3 repairs per year. Each repair cost, on average, about £100. Comparison with other housing associations showed that our repairs and maintenance services gave good value for money.
 - We employed our own Neighbourhood Rangers (£40 on average for each job compared with £60 for the same job by an external contractor).
 - A new partnership to complete electrical safety inspections saved £50 per inspection.
 - A new arrangement for kitchens and bathrooms resulted in a saving of over £470 for each kitchen and £300 for each bathroom, even though the “specification” had been increased following consultation with tenants.
 - We are offering energy efficiency advice for tenants in their homes that saves each tenant an average of £120 each year on bills.
 - We got funding for 22 energy-efficient homes in Hightown – the photo voltaic roof tiles generate electricity to reduce tenants’ energy bills.



How We Plan to Improve

- We want to improve our understanding of how much responsive repairs work done by our contractors is completed “right first time”. At the moment, we do this by using a limited number of inspections by our own staff and feedback from tenants who fill in satisfaction surveys.
- At the moment, when tenants phone in a repair, some will receive an appointment immediately and others will have to wait a few days for a phone call or a letter. We want everyone to get an appointment during the first phone call if possible – we are working on this.
- We plan to do more work on the quality of the repairs service given by the new Leeds contractors.
- We plan to improve communication about planned maintenance – keeping tenants better up-to-date with what is planned for their homes.
- When we offer choices for replacement programmes, we want to do more to make sure that this is done efficiently.



3 Tenancy Standard

The TSA standard says that Connect has to...

Allocations

- Let their homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way.
- Make the best use of available housing.
- Contribute to the local authorities' strategic housing function and to sustainable communities.
- Have a clear housing application, decision-making and appeals process.

Rents

- Charge rents in accordance with the framework set out by the Government.

Tenure

- Offer and issue the most secure form of tenure that fits with the purpose of the housing and the sustainability of the community.

Assessment



We are not satisfied we fully met the standard

Allocations

We think that we let our homes in a fair and transparent way, make the best use of the housing that we have available and work closely with local authorities to reduce homelessness... but we recognise that we have improvements to make.

We work with the Choice Based Lettings systems in Leeds and Kirklees to give people who are looking for housing the clearest choice and a common way to find a home. However, we are aware that sometimes the use of this system slows down the time it takes to let a home and that some groups find the system not easy to use. At the moment, we use a mixture of Choice Based Lettings and our own lettings short list. We advertise empty properties on our website.

We have worked with the local authority in Kirklees to reduce overcrowding and under-occupation. As a result, some families have been helped with re-housing and removals. Work on this in Leeds has been slower.

For tenants who wish to move, we provide information through our website, service standards and our customer-facing staff. For housing applicants who struggle for various reasons with the application process, we give 1:1 help, the use of language line or the use of an interpreter if needed. Interviews for housing can be done with signers and advocates and can be carried out in places like hospitals or care homes.

We provide information about why someone might be refused housing and there is a clear appeals process for anyone who is refused.

We do not lose a lot of money because properties are left empty, but we *do* think that some of our properties in some areas are taking us too long to let. The reasons for this are mixed, but include:

- Bed-sits and 1-bed flats that are too small for family needs (we are changing some of these back into family homes)
- Some housing in Leeds that is in less popular areas (we are working with lots of agencies in these areas to work on the problems)
- Some older people's homes which are above the ground floor are difficult to let (we have consulted with tenants to reduce the eligible age criteria from over 60 to over 50)
- Problems with a contractor (that we have now replaced) who did the repairs.

We record all lettings and sales in the Continuous Recording of Lettings (CORE) system and use monitoring from this to track our lettings and compare ourselves with other organisations that provide housing.

Rents

We set our rents using the framework that the Government says that we have to use. Our tenancy agreements show clearly how rents and service charges are set. This information is also on the website and in the tenants' handbook. This year we changed the letter we send out to explain the changes in rent and service charges to try and make it clearer. As a result of suggestions from the Tenant Inspectors, we also put an article in *Get Connected* to explain service charges more clearly.

Tenure

We give the most secure form of tenancy that fits with the type of housing that we are letting. Our long-term housing has assured tenancies (only short-term supported housing has less secure agreements). Our tenancy agreement was developed with the help of a leading firm of solicitors and it was revised when new guidance was issued by the Office of Fair Trading. Tenancy agreements and the tenant handbook give clear information about tenancy management policies. We provide a variety of support services ourselves and we

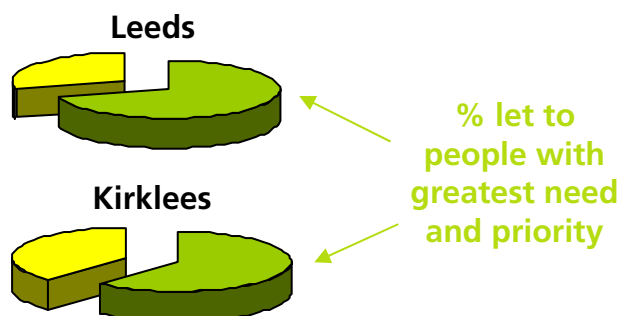


also work with a number of local support organisations to help people keep their tenancies so that the number of people we actually evict is kept low.

We do not have regular checks to see who is living in a property, but we do take action when we become aware of illegal occupancy or sub-letting. We took part in a national fraud initiative to check if anyone in our properties had tenancies with other social landlords, but no evidence of fraud was found.

Facts and Figures

- **71% of our empty homes in Leeds and 62% in Kirklees were let to people who the local authorities said had the greatest need and priority for a home.**



- The average time to re-let our homes was 27 days (this includes supported housing, which tends to be re-let very quickly). But the average time to re-let our housing that is not supported (general needs) was 47 days – we think that this is too long and have specific plans to reduce this.

- **Customer satisfaction with the lettings process is high at 91%.**



- Satisfaction with the condition of the home when people move in has increased from 80% last year to 88% this year. We have a new service standard that came out of lots of feedback from new tenants and we think that this is making a difference.
- There were only 2 evictions last year, but housing officers and support staff worked with *lots* of people to deal with problems that might have risked them losing their homes.
- Some people just leave our homes and don't tell us when they are going or why. This happened 34 times last year and wasted money in lost rent and the cost of repairs needed to bring the property back up to standard.
- The "turnover" of our tenancies went down – that is a good thing as it costs less money in property repairs and lost rent. It is also good for people who got help to keep the homes that they want. Most people leave because they need to move somewhere with more care or support.
- **VFM fact:** We do our own processing of legal action – that saves over £50 for each court application.
- **VFM fact:** We are investing £29,000 in a Financial Inclusion Officer to give the "£s Positive" service to tenants. This service is a direct benefit to tenants – and Connect also

benefits by less financial loss due to rent arrears, evictions, court action, abandonments and tenancy turnover.

How We Plan to Improve

- We want to be very clear about how many Connect homes are either overcrowded or under-occupied and then set targets to reduce these problems. This will be included in our new lettings policy later this year.
- We plan to publish revised “Mutual Exchange” guidance with clear information about who is eligible.
- We plan to ask customers if the information that we are providing is easy to understand and covers what they need to know. And then we want to update the information as needed.
- We plan to use Choice Based lettings more once we have made sure that the system does not slow down the process of letting a home.
- We plan to reduce the time it takes to let some of our homes by speeding up short-listing, viewings and property inspections.



“ From applying to being approached and offered this property, everything has been first class. ” **New tenant**

“ At my lowest ebb [a Housing Officer] came to speak with me as I was in debt with my rent. She said she would notify the right person to help me and that I don't have to struggle on my own. She did that and [the Financial Inclusion Officer] turned up on my doorstep. I couldn't have asked for more help – it was brilliant. ”

**Tenant who used Connect's
£s Positive service**

4

Neighbourhood and Community Standard

The TSA standard says that Connect has to...

Neighbourhood Management

- Keep the neighbourhood and communal areas associated with the homes that they own clean and safe.

Local Area Cooperation

- Cooperate with relevant partners to help promote social, environmental and economic well-being in the areas where they own properties.

Anti-social Behaviour

- Work in partnership with other public agencies to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour in the neighbourhoods where they own homes.

Assessment



We met the standard!



Neighbourhood Management

Connect does work hard to make sure that the neighbourhoods in which we have homes are kept clean and safe.

Our responsibilities for communal areas (such as window cleaning, gardening, lift servicing and communal doors) are made clear in our Landlord Service standard. Tenants asked for and were involved in the provision of notice boards that provide details of services received. Customer feedback cards provide a quick way to tell us about any problems. All tenants who receive any of these services are asked to complete an annual satisfaction survey. CRF members go out and check a number of services and schemes every year after consideration of the results of the survey. Tenants were involved this year in both the development of the service specification and the choice of a new gardening contractor.

A "Well Managed Estate Checklist" was developed by Tenant Inspectors and then tried out by tenant and staff members of the Estate Management Working Group. The checklist works by a "traffic light" system, grading various visible aspects of the estate. Staff will inspect all self-contained estates twice a year and the CRF is recruiting tenants who are willing to complete

the checklist for their own neighbourhood. It is planned that a high number of “red traffic lights” will trigger a full estate inspection. Housing officers and local residents will then agree a plan to address the problems. We think that this is a practical way to work together to look after our neighbourhoods.

Local Area Cooperation

We work extensively with local partner agencies to combine our resources to promote every aspect of well-being in areas where we own properties. Some examples of this include:

- Contributing to local youth clubs, local parenting services and arts activities by working with education services in Seacroft, Osmondthorpe, Roundhay Gardens, the Wythers and Crow Nest View.
- Providing opportunities for our unemployed tenants to get training and support to find work by working with community training organisations, other local housing associations and Job Centre Plus.
- Reducing the financial exclusion of our tenants by our own Financial Inclusion Worker working with a wide range of local authority and agency partners.

We work closely with Leeds, Kirklees and Calderdale local authorities to cooperate with all aspects of their work wherever we can.

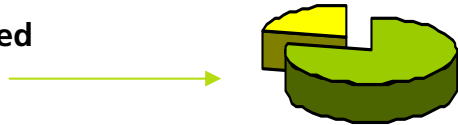
Anti-social Behaviour (ASB)

ASB isn't something that Connect can deal with on its own. We work in partnership with a number of other agencies (such as the police, community safety partnerships, local authority ASB teams, mediators and advocates and domestic violence services) to prevent and tackle ASB. We have published a policy about how we do this. We are signed up to the “Respect” standard which demonstrates our commitment to dealing with ASB. The tenancy and the tenants' handbook are very clear about Connect's and tenants' rights and responsibilities in relation to ASB.

It is easy to report ASB – this can be done through any member of staff, the website, phone, letter and an out-of-hours reporting service (although we are reviewing if we will continue to use this out-of hours service as it is not used much). Satisfaction surveys show high scores for the question about how easy it was to report a case. We demonstrate prompt and appropriate action in most cases. Although our target response time to an ASB report is 10 days, last year we actually took an average of only 3 days to respond. We respond to certain types of reports (hate-based incidents, threats of violence, arson, etc.) within 1 working day.

We try to prevent ASB by the use of children's and young people's activities, child support services, starter tenancy visits, estate agreements and referrals to support or mediation services. We try to support both witnesses and perpetrators of ASB. We have a specialist Senior ASB officer and an Independent Domestic Violence Advocate, as well as two residential schemes for people fleeing domestic violence.

Facts and Figures

- Satisfaction with Landlord Services continues to go up – this was especially noticeable for gardening and communal cleaning.
- We are doing what we can to help those who don't have a job. We have 2 trainee Neighbourhood Rangers in Leeds. We got funding to provide NVQ training in property maintenance for 8 unemployed people in Kirklees. We worked with a training agency so that two tenants in Leeds received the qualification they needed to become a security guard.
- **Satisfaction with the ASB service increased last year to nearly 80%.** 
- **VFM fact:** It costs about £730 on average to handle each report of ASB – when we compare this with other housing providers, we are about in the middle.
- **VFM fact:** We have a budget of over £20,000, plus a lot of staff time, to divert young people from causing ASB. This work reduced the number of ASB reports from 300 a year to 200 a year.
- **VFM fact:** We got £4,000 of funding to cover the costs of extending our domestic violence service to male victims of abuse.

How We Plan to Improve

- We plan to use the “Well Managed Estate checklist” filled in by staff and tenants to decide priorities for full estate inspections.
- We plan to revise the standards of the ASB service with tenants. This is likely to include the reduction of the response time from the current target of 10 working days.
- We plan to ensure that tenants who have reported ASB get more regular updates on the progress of work to deal with the problem.

“ The services are improving all the time. In the last 2 years the cleaners have improved. I think the best improvement has been the gardeners. ”

Tenant comment on the Landlord Services Satisfaction Survey

5 Value for Money Standard

The TSA standard says that Connect has to...

Value for Money

- Have a comprehensive approach to managing their resources to provide cost-effective, efficient, quality services and homes to meet tenants' (and potential tenants') needs.

Assessment



We are not satisfied we fully met the standard

We don't think we quite meet this standard. This is not because we do not have a "comprehensive approach to managing our resources" (we do!), but because we are not so good at telling tenants about what we do to provide cost-effective, efficient, quality services and homes. We do not currently tell tenants about how spending has been prioritised in relation to these TSA standards or how we make sure that VFM has been secured and tested. We hope that the **VFM facts** in the earlier sections show tenants that we do this!

The "What Connect Tenants Want" report, the CRF and the SIF have made sure that tenants' priorities for services and service improvement are central in the business planning process to decide the direction of future work. Tenants have been involved in VFM decisions that affect them on a day by day basis by consultation about materials to use in replacement programmes, the design of the "specifications" for contractors' work and the actual recruitment of contractors. The Director of Service Development has talked with the CRF about how Connect gives VFM and has heard tenants' views on VFM, but this has not been

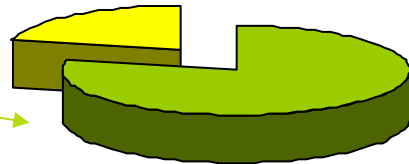
reported to the wider group of tenants.





Facts and Figures

- In 2007, 79% of tenants were satisfied with the value they got for their rent money. We will look at if this has improved in 2010.
- See “**VFM Facts**” in the earlier standards.



How we Plan to Improve

- We plan to consult with tenants about what they want to know about VFM and then provide that information in the ways that they requested.
- We plan to tell tenants about plans and priorities to get further VFM.
- We plan to give clear information about the additional costs for tenants when there are choices about services. We want to be clear about what the choices are and, where we can and tenants want this, expand the choices on offer.
- We plan to understand the comparison of our costs with other housing associations better and use it to improve our efficiency.



Connect Commitments

...raising the standard

The TSA says that Connect has to...

- Consult with tenants on the desirability and scope of “local offers” in relation to *some* services. These “local offers” must be agreed and be in place by no later than April 2011.
- Have “local offers” that cover aspects of at least *three* of the TSA standards – Tenant Involvement and Empowerment, Homes and Neighbourhood and Community – in order to give a higher standard of service.
- For each “local offer”, give a commitment about:
 - What standards of performance will be expected
 - How performance will be monitored, reported and looked at by tenants
 - What happens if “local offers” are not met
 - How and when “local offers” will be reviewed
- Tell tenants in this report about arrangements to put in place “local offers”.

The TSA has put in place six standards (5 are in this report – the sixth is about “Governance and Financial Viability”) that apply to housing associations and local authorities right across the country. They have also said that each local community has its own needs and hopes. So the TSA has encouraged landlords to “purpose build” some services to meet the wishes and priorities of their own tenants. These “local offers” will give a higher standard than the TSA’s national standards.

Connect has always been committed to giving clear standards for our services. We involved tenants closely in the development of our current 14 service standards. We already knew that we needed to revise our service standards. So the discussion of “local offers” came at a good time.

The “Big Ask” Tenant Conference in July 2010 decided that a better name for a “local offer” was “Connect Commitments”. The conference discussed what the priority services were for “Connect Commitments”. They also began to think about the content of the “commitments” for the 5 main priority areas and how performance would be measured and reported.

As a result of in-depth work already done by tenants over the last year plus the work done by the “Big Ask” conference, the timetable for a number of “Connect Commitments” is shown in Appendix 1. Some of these service areas are in our own control and can be decided after full discussion of priorities, quality and costs by tenants and staff. Others, such as ASB and Aids and Adaptations, require work with a number of other partner agencies in order to get successful results. We will make clear to tenants what is in Connect’s control and what needs agreement and cooperation with other agencies.

How will you know if we keep our “commitments”? Well... we will report back to tenants every year about how we are doing against the promises made in each of the “Connect Commitments”. The CRF and the Service Improvement Forum will look at this performance in even more detail to look at your experiences of different services.

What happens if we don't keep our “Connect Commitments”? The CRF Chair will take the problems to the regular meeting with the Chief Executive. If the CRF Chair is still not satisfied, the problems can be taken to the Board. We hope that there aren't problems, but we know that it is important to have things in place if services don't work properly.

There are lots of ways that you can get more involved or get more information (see Appendix 2 for more information). We look forward to working together to do this.



Connect has a **strong vision** to have a clear focus on the needs of the **widest range of our customers** and to give the **best quality services**. We know that we don't have it all 100% right yet, but we are **always working to improve**. We honestly welcome the input of all of our tenants toward this. **Thanks for reading** and please keep talking to us and telling us what you think.



homes, communities, cultures

Appendix 1: Timetable for Connect Commitments

"Connect Commitment" to...	In place by
Community Involvement Compact (TSA Involvement and Empowerment standard)	Available now. New version to be available in 2011/2012
Complaints (TSA Involvement and Empowerment standard)	Available now. New revision to be available in 2011.
Repairs (TSA Home standard)	Available now. New revision to be available in October 2010
Planned Maintenance (TSA Home standard)	April 2011
Aids and Adaptations (TSA Home standard)	2011/12
Standard of Your New Home (TSA Home standard)	December 2010
Landlords Service (TSA Neighbourhood and Community standard)	December 2010
Well Managed Estate (TSA Neighbourhood and Community standard)	December 2010
ASB (TSA Neighbourhood and Community standard)	April 2011

Appendix 2: How to Get More Involved or Find Out More

First of all, we would like to say that we understand that some people just want to live in their home and do not want to get involved in any way. We quite understand this and this is your right.

But we welcome your input in whatever way is most convenient for you – you can spend as little or as much time working with us depending on you and your lifestyle. Below is a list of things you can do, but there are always new things happening.

- Join **the CRF**. The CRF is an independent tenants body and elects its own officers or committee and holds general meetings every 2 months. Once you are a member of the CRF, there are lots of activities and groups that you can get involved in.
- Answer **the postal surveys** that we send out after you have received a service – we really appreciate and use any comments that you make.
- Join **a local tenant group** – phone us to see if there is one in your area.
- Go to **a local estate event** – these are advertised in “Get Connected”.
- Join the e-mail based **Communications Group** that looks at all forms of leaflets and letters to tenants to make sure that they are clear and don’t have jargon. Just phone up and say that you are interested.
- Just **phone, e-mail or write to us** and tell us what you think – ask for the message to be passed to the Service Improvement manager.
- Volunteer to take part in **“Well managed estate” inspections** – just phone up and say that you are interested.
- Volunteer to take part in a **tenant consultation event or focus group** – these are usually advertised in “Get Connected”.
- Train to be a **Tenant Inspector or a “Mystery Shopper”** – phone up to say that you are interested.
- Volunteer to receive **training to help with some of our young people’s activities** – phone up to say that you are interested.

You can get more detailed information about all of these activities by phoning up and asking the hotline staff to send you the “Community Involvement Compact 2009” and the “Tenant Involvement Menu”.

If you would like more information about performance:

- **Get Connected** is a good place to start – there are often articles that are about the performance of individual services and also say what you told us and what we have done or plan to do about it. Often the article tells you that more information is available if you would like it – we are very aware that tenants think it is very poor value for money to be deluged with information that they don't want. There is a lot more information you can have if you ask for it – just phone the hotline and ask for the extra information that you want.
- If you have access to the internet, the **Connect website** is always being updated with new information (go to www.connecthousing.org.uk).
- The **TSA website** also has performance information about different landlords so you can see how Connect compares with other landlords in West Yorkshire for example (go to www.tenantservicesauthority.org and look at their "Find and compare landlords" section).
- If you **join the CRF**, you will be able to join in other working groups or meetings that are linked to services that you are interested in and you will have access to lots of information linked to that group or service.
- **Phone, e-mail or write** saying what you want to know and ask for the message to be passed to the Service Improvement manager.





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