

How Well Is Connect Doing? 2011



How well do we...

- Work with you?
- Work in your home?
- Work in your neighbourhood?
- Work with our empty properties?
- Work with your rent?
- Work for value for your rent money?
- Work to make sure Connect is open and transparent?


Welcome to the 2011 Tenant Report.


We have promised to tell you about our performance every year so that you can check up on how well Connect is doing. The aim of this booklet is to tell you how Connect is performing and how we plan to improve.




This booklet tells you how we are:

Working with you	Page 3
Working in your home	Page 5
Working in your neighbourhood	Page 7
Working with empty properties	Page 11
Working with your rent	Page 12
Working for value for your rent money	Page 13
Working to make sure Connect is open and transparent	Page 14

Throughout this booklet, you will notice the symbol 

We have worked with you to write “Connect Commitments” or s in service areas that you chose as especially important.

We now have 6 s:

- Responsive Repairs (published September 2010)
- A Well-managed Estate (published September 2010)
- Landlord Services (published December 2010)
- The Standard of Your New Home (published November 2010)
- Youth Services (published November 2010)
- Anti-Social and Nuisance Behaviour (published March 2011)

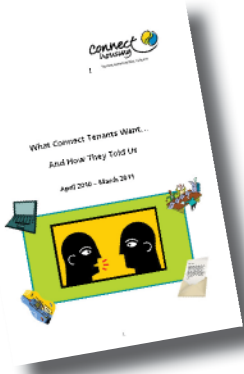
When you see  in this booklet...

it refers to something in one of these Connect Commitments that is measured and monitored.

P.S. If you would like a copy of any of the s, just phone the hotline and they will be happy to post you a copy—or look on our website.

Working with You

Working with our tenants is a priority for Connect. We understand that you may not wish to be involved in working with us to improve our services to you. But, if you want to be involved, we very much welcome your ideas and feedback in whatever way you choose to give it.



Every year we write the 'What Connect Tenants Want' report which summarises all the information that you give us. This is then used by both staff and tenant groups to make sure that tenant priorities are used by Connect to make decisions about how money is spent and how services are developed.

In the big survey of all tenants in 2010 (STATUS):

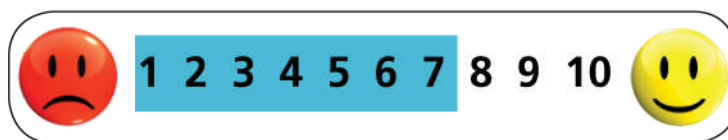
90 out of 100 tenants found staff helpful

86 out of 100 tenants said that they felt well informed by Connect

76 out of 100 tenants said that they felt that their views were taken into account

How did we do (on a scale of 1—10) when we compared Connect's scores for tenant satisfaction that their views are taken into account with other housing associations across the country?

We did quite well—we were within the top quarter!




Comparison with other HAs -
Satisfaction with views taken into account.


However, this means that tenants in one quarter of housing associations think that their housing associations listen to them better than you think we listen to you. So we want to do an even better job of listening to what you say and doing something with that information.

About complaints...

We received 88 complaints, of which half were about repairs (but remember that we do over 12,500 repairs a year). Tenants have been involved this year in helping us review our complaints policy and procedure leaflet.



We asked a tenant focus group if they thought a  for complaints would be helpful...

...but they suggested that a better, more positive commitment would be "Listening to Tenants".

So this new  has just been published.




Plans for improvement


-  Work with you so that we tell you about performance in a clear and meaningful way.
-  Work with you to develop tenant inspection and tenant scrutiny.


Working in Your Home



We know that, for most of you, **our repairs service** is a big priority.

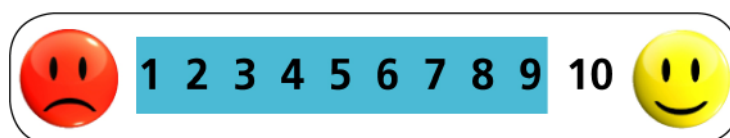
 We received more than 12,500 repairs requests over the year. Almost 4000 of these were classed as 'emergency' repairs (these include all problems with boilers and heating systems) almost all of which were dealt with in 1 day.

 Almost 9000 repairs were classed as 'non-emergency'. Connect has 21 days to complete these repairs but, in fact, the majority of these jobs were completed in much less time. 8 out of 10 jobs were completed within 10 days.


 Almost all of these repair jobs received an appointment which was kept. 9 out of 10 jobs were completed on the first visit—for 1 in 10, the contractor had to come back again. Over 9 out of 10 tenants told us that the workers wore ID badges, were professional and courteous and left their home clean and tidy. 1 out of every 10 jobs done by a contractor was checked for quality by Connect staff.

 In the big tenant satisfaction survey in 2010, 87 tenants out of 100 were satisfied with the repairs and maintenance service.


How did we do (on a scale of 1—10) when we compared Connect tenants' satisfaction with repairs and maintenance with other house associations across the country? We did **really** well—we were in the top 10%! That means that only 1 in 10 of other housing associations' tenants think that their landlord does a better job with repairs than our tenants think we do.



Comparison with other HAs—Satisfaction with repairs and maintenance.

 We try incredibly hard to make sure that every one of our 2700 homes has a current gas certificate. If a home does not have a current gas certificate, we view this very seriously. Regrettably, this year 31 properties did not have a current certificate—the reason for this, in many cases, was that we had difficulties making an appointment to get into the home to do the necessary tests.

Plans for improvement





 All repairs requests now go directly to all the contractors. We expect this to mean that everyone receives an appointment when they first call and that the repair is diagnosed correctly so that it is more likely to be completed at the first visit. We will check that this happens.

We know, too, that **planned maintenance work** (when we replace kitchens, bathrooms, boilers, doors, windows, etc.) is really important to you.

A few years ago, tenants told us that they were really pleased with the final product but that the process sometimes went awry. The Tenant Inspectors have worked hard to investigate some of these problems this year and have suggested some solutions.

Expect a new  with Connect's revised commitments to Planned Maintenance.

Plans for improvement

-  Improve communication with tenants before and during replacement work.
-  Involve tenants more in planning priorities for replacement programmes.
-  Publish a  on Planned Maintenance.



We helped over 148 tenants get aids and adaptations so that they were able to live more comfortably in their own homes.

Satisfaction with this service was 100%!

Working in Your Neighbourhood


After getting your repairs done, the next thing that is most important to you is to live peacefully in a clean and tidy estate. In the big tenant survey in 2010, over 8 out of 10 people said that they were satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live. We are working to keep on improving this.



Well-Managed Estates

Tenants developed a “Well-managed estate checklist” which staff and tenants started to use in July 2010. We aimed to inspect estates and larger blocks of flats at least twice a year. So, by year end:

- Kirklees and Calderdale patch were on track with their visits. Inspections by staff triggered two full inspections and one estate meeting.
- Leeds West patch was not on track with visits, but a full inspection has been triggered by a tenant and one more by staff.
- Leeds East patch was also not on track with visits, but one full inspection was triggered by staff.

So, overall, patch teams are still learning about this process—which means that we are not meeting all the promises set out in the .

BUT... as a result of the regular visits, estate improvement plans have been set out.

AND... when a full or formal inspection was triggered, Tenant Inspectors were recruited to help. Performance was reported back to responsible CRF members and they are monitoring progress.



Plans for improvement



Training session with patch staff to sort out some teething problems.




Recruit more tenant volunteers to fill in a checklist for their own estate (volunteers please!)



Anti-Social and Nuisance Behaviour (ASB)

We had a focus group with tenants who had recently experienced and reported ASB...

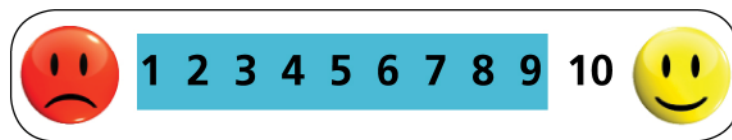
...in order to develop and write the ASB 

It was not published until March 2011 so we can't report against it this year. But we can tell you that:



- We received 220 reports of ASB and almost all of them (97%) were responded to within the target time. 23 of these reports were of such a serious nature that they had to be responded to within 24 hours.
- The average time taken to respond to a report of ASB was 3 days.




How did we do (on a scale of 1-10) when we compared tenant satisfaction with our ASB service with other housing associations? We were well above average.



Comparison with other HAs—Satisfaction with ASB services

We were pleased about that ... but we know Connect still wants to do a lot more work to keep improving this service that tries to support and help our tenants who suffer from ASB.

Plans for improvement


-  Design a pack to help those suffering from ASB.
-  Give regular feedback to all those with an open ASB case.
-  Reduce the time it takes for the Neighbourhood Housing Office to contact those who report a new case of ASB.



Youth Activities

Connect works intensively with young people on some of our bigger estates to help them develop their potential and realise some of their ambitions. Involving YP in creative and constructive group activities can also help some of them from getting involved in things that are less helpful to the local area.



Young people in Osmondthorpe, Seacroft, Harehills and Crows Nest worked with Connect staff in the Community Services team to write a  that also included their own commitments to be responsible youth activity members.

We are pleased to report that everyone is keeping to their commitments!

Some highlights are:

- Connect staff have been reliable and everyone was informed if clubs had to be cancelled (usually due to snow).
- Connect assesses risks for all venues, activities and participants.
- Connect clubs have an excellent reputation and work hard with partners (such as the police, education and the NHS) to bring benefits to young people and to their families.

The clubs help older young people develop job skills by giving them opportunities to act as mentors. One mentor said:

“Being a mentor made me feel like someone had noticed me for something good instead of being bad.”

Current clubs include the Dewsbury Art Club, the Bramley Futsal Club, the Drumming group and the Games Club.

Young people rate both the clubs and the approachability of staff at 9 out of 10.

One young person said:

“Art club is summat good to do instead of sitting on the street.”

One parent said:

“We were very pleased for our son to be given this opportunity—it is right up his street.”



Landlord Services

The tenant review panel looked in detail at the results of satisfaction surveys about landlord services. They suggested some follow-up actions to Connect and have gone to inspect some services themselves.

In summary, the average scores for satisfaction with individual landlord services on a scale of 1 to 10 were:






Gardening	scored 7.3 out of 10
Communal cleaning	scored 7.7 out of 10
Window cleaning	scored 6.3 out of 10
Lift servicing	scored 7.2 out of 10
Fire alarm system	scored 7.5 out of 10
Door entry system	scored 6.4 out of 10



Better value for money was gained this year amongst the gardening contractors by buying grit (for winter maintenance) and plants in bulk. The lift maintenance and fire detection contracts were both tendered and saw an improved specification at no extra cost. Better use of money to upgrade systems has seen a reduction in call-outs and repairs.



Plans for improvement

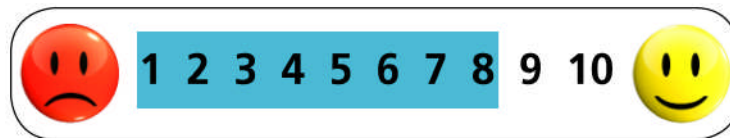
-  Cleaning contracts going out to tender this year.
-  Improve door entry systems in some schemes.
-  Investigate the possibility of a tenant working group to look at common tenant problems in some landlord services.

Working with Empty Properties

We know that you don't like to see Connect properties empty for a long time. This year we let 154 general needs properties. The average time these homes were empty was 28 days. This is a big improvement on last year when it took 49 days. This means that, this year, we lost very little rent money while the homes were empty.





How well did we do (on a scale of 1 - 10) when we compared the amount of money we lost because of properties being empty with other housing associations? We did well—we were well into the top 25%! This means that, compared with 10 other housing associations, we do better than 8 of them about keeping our rent loss due to empty properties low.




Comparison with other HAs—Rent loss due to empty properties.

We always want to balance letting our properties as soon as possible with the time it takes to make sure that it is repaired properly and that it is let to the person or family that is best suited to it.

 More than 9 out of 10 new tenants that we let homes to were very satisfied with their experience of renting a home from Connect—this is keeping the same high standard as in previous years.

 9 out of 10 new tenants were also happy with the standard of repairs in their home. This is better than in previous years. We think that this improvement comes from the new standards our contractors work to, and the fact that all empty homes are inspected by our own staff before they are let. 9 out of 10 properties now pass this quality inspection the first time. Any which fail go back to the contractor. Because of this, only in exceptional circumstances does repair work need to be done once someone has moved into their home.

Plans for improvement

 Increase the number of times that we are able to inspect a property before the old tenant moves out. If this happens, repair work can be planned and done more quickly when the previous tenant leaves. (Unfortunately, some people just leave our homes and don't tell us when they are going or why—21 people did that this year and it wastes Connect lots of money).

Working with Your Rent



Connect is committed to keeping rents as affordable as possible. We also try to give as much help as possible so that tenants avoid getting into rent arrears and know how to deal with other debt.

This year we needed to collect over ten and a half million pounds in rent. We managed to collect almost 10 million pounds. Some of the rent we didn't collect was due to outstanding Housing Benefit owed to some tenants. The rest was due to individual tenants being in rent arrears.

How well did we do (on a scale of 1 -10) when we compared our rent arrears with other housing associations? We were just below the middle. This means that half of other housing associates manage to collect rent better than we do.



Comparison with other HAs—Current tenant arrears.



We know that this is because many of our tenants, especially those who are young or who are single parents, struggle with loss of employment or increasing demands on limited incomes.

Connect does **NOT** want to evict tenants—but we **DO** need to collect the rent. Please **ALWAYS** contact us if you have problems paying your rent. We want to help you work out ways to pay and stop the rent you owe getting too much.

We try to help tenants with low levels of arrears before the arrears get too high. Almost all (nine and a half tenants out of ten!) are satisfied with the help we give when they get into arrears. However, there were 264 tenants with arrears of more than £500 at the end of this year. This is less than last year (295 tenants).

Our “£s Positive” service helped 50 tenants who had average arrears of £900 and other debts of more than £6,000. Everyone who worked with this service gave it 10 out of 10 and felt much less stressed.

Plans for improvement

-  Increase the help available to tenants just as they start to get into arrears by reorganising our phone hotline.
-  Target help to the younger people who are more likely to get into arrears.
-  Expand our “£s Positive” service.

Working for Value for Your Rent Money

We have worked especially hard this year to get better value for money from our repairs contractors and our telephone hotline. All our contractors now take your calls directly and this means our staff can do other things to help our customers. With money we have saved across Connect's services, we are getting ready to:

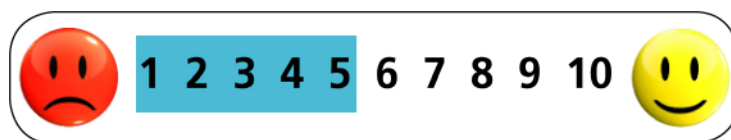
- Employ 2 more Neighbourhood Rangers to join the 2 we already have.
- Employ 1 new person to help tenants find training and get skills for work.
- Put in more resources to expand the "£s Positive" service to help tenants who struggle with their finances and debt.



We are also working on employing our own team of painters so you get a better quality of work.

In our large tenant survey in 2010, 8 out of 10 tenants said they were satisfied that they got value for their rent money. That's pretty good, but some groups of people were not so satisfied.





How well did we do (on a scale of 1 - 10) when we compared the satisfaction of our tenants with value for money with tenants from other housing associations across the country? We came out somewhere in the middle.



Comparison with other HAs—Tenant satisfaction with value for money.

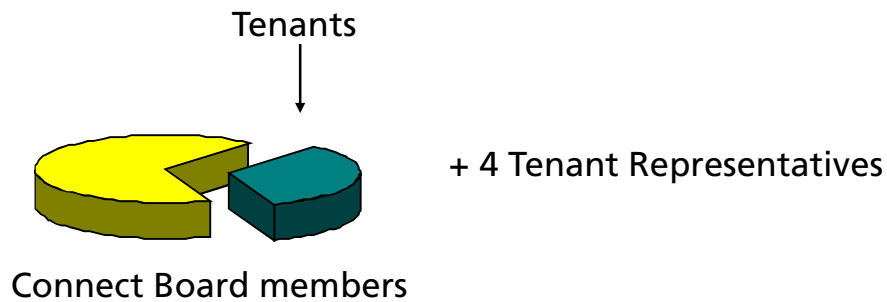
That means that tenants in half of housing associations think that their housing association does better than you think Connect does. So we can do better!

Plans for improvement

-  Have a focus group sometime this winter to understand your views about value for your rent money (please let us know if you would like to come).
-  Tell you more in "Get Connected" about how we get value for your rent money. Look for this symbol: 
-  Work on service charges, especially for flats in shared houses.

Working to Make Sure Connect is Open and Transparent

Connect is governed by the Board to make sure that we operate legally and with the best standards of good practice. Out of twelve Board members, 4 are tenants. Also, the Connect Residents' Federation send up to 4 representatives to Board meetings. So this means that tenants' views are well represented and understood at the highest levels of Connect.



Looking at us from the outside, our government regulator (the Tenant Services Authority) said in its latest report that our finances are in a good position and that Connect “offers a range of ways for tenants to influence and be involved in the shaping and delivery of services.”

Looking at us from the inside, the Connect Residents' Federation has been working hard at being a “Critical Friend” to Connect, making sure that our tenants influence what Connect does and holding Connect to account for all the services that you receive.




Plans for improvement



Continue to work on making co-regulation (Connect staff working together with Connect tenants and the Tenant Services Authority) work for the benefit of tenants and Connect as a business. The CRF's new “Critical Friend” strategy and the Service Improvement Forum are all helping this and will continue to be developed.

The Small Print

P.S. Connect's year is actually a financial year. And Connect's financial year runs from April of one year to March of the next year. So, when this booklet says "this year", it means the time period of April 2010 to March 2011.

P.P.S. The Tenant Report 2010 gives a detailed look at the TSA National Standards and how Connect performs against them. This report does not attempt to repeat this, but concentrates on performance (especially against the ) and the plans for improvement.

The Tenant Report 2010 is on the website at www.connecthousing.org.uk - or you can ask for a paper copy by phoning the hotline on 0300 5000 600.

P.P.P.S. The Tenant Report 2010 also has, at the back, lots of detail about how you can get more involved or how to find out more about getting involved.

Again... just ask for a copy.



homes, communities, cultures

We very much welcome your comments or queries about this report or any other aspect of our tenant involvement activities. Please contact Christine L. Hartley (Service Improvement Manager) or Barbara Kempf (Community Services Manager) by phone or e-mail (using the details given below) and we will try to answer your questions or, if we can't, we will put you in contact with someone who can.

Thanks for making the time to look at this. We hope that it helps you know how we are working to keep our commitments to our tenants and to improve the services that you receive.

Huddersfield Office
The Media Centre
6 Friendly Street
Huddersfield HD1 1RD
Tel: 0300 5000 600
Fax: 01484 353545

Leeds Office
205 Roundhay Road
Leeds LS8 4HS
Tel: 0300 5000 600
Fax: 0113 285 0401
Minicom: 0113 235 0416

Email: corporate.services@connecthousing.org.uk

www.connecthousing.org.uk