

LEASEHOLDERS' FORUM

Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday, 24 February 2026 at 1pm
in Barrow Town Hall

Present:

15 Leaseholders were present in person
1 Leaseholder joined online

Westmorland and Furness Council:

Nigel Clarke, Housing Maintenance
Manager
Georgina Bridgens, Business Support
Officer
Cathy Kirk, Projects Officer (minute taker)

Apologies were received from 8 leaseholders

1. Welcome and Introductions

Nigel opened the meeting and welcomed attendees. He explained that Rebecca Halton (Senior Manager – Housing Landlord & Homelessness Services) was unable to attend.

This was the first Leaseholders' Forum since June 2019. Significant organisational change -including senior staff turnover, the Covid pandemic and the formation of Westmorland and Furness Council - had contributed to delays in reinstating the forum. Nigel apologised for this and confirmed there was no formal agenda to enable an open discussion.

2. Asset Management Update

Nigel provided an update on progress with asset management following local government reorganisation. Work had initially begun under the former Barrow Borough Council's asset management plan, but progress slowed during transition. The service is now largely back on track, with a small number of exceptions.

A five-year stock condition survey completed in 2024 is now informing updated asset management plans and external repair programmes. Consultation has begun on these programmes.

3. Questions from Leaseholders

3.1 Reroofing – Cartmel Crescent

A leaseholder asked about outstanding roofing works. Nigel confirmed the remaining blocks are programmed for completion in April/May. Only one block has been completed to date.

3.2 Major Works Estimates & Sales

A leaseholder asked whether potential buyers would be advised of upcoming major works. George confirmed generally the majority of prospective purchasers are informed, but this relies on the solicitor dealing with the sale requesting that we complete the Leasehold Property Enquiries Form (LPE1).

Another leaseholder queried whether her estimated one-twelfth share of the estimated cost of re-roofing totalling £42,000 might increase. Nigel advised the final cost should not exceed the estimate and may be slightly lower.

4. Walney Tribunal

Nigel confirmed that the outstanding matters arising from the Walney tribunal (which contributed to the pause in meetings in 2019) had now been resolved. These issues will be revisited within the wider review of external works.

5. Outstanding Repairs

Two leaseholders reported long-standing ceiling damage caused by leaks in upper flats. Nigel took their details and will arrange follow-up.

6. Service Charges

A leaseholder asked when service charge invoices would be issued, noting delays last year.

George apologised and explained delays were due to changes associated with LGR and changes in staff at Zurich. Service charges are usually issued in April/May after the rent review has been completed for council tenants.

A leaseholder also queried an outstanding request for Section 20 information. Nigel confirmed this remains on his to-do list.

7. Section 20 Consultation

Nigel outlined the statutory Section 20 process, which applies when:

- major works exceed £250 per leaseholder, or
- annual recurring maintenance exceeds £100 per leaseholder.

The three-stage process involves:

1. Notice of Intention – 30 days for comments/contractor nominations
2. Notice of Estimates – 30 days for observations
3. Notice of Reasons – issued where required to explain selection of contractor

8. Administrative Charges

A leaseholder asked for reassurance that administrative charges relating to resale would not be introduced. Nigel advised that if we introduced a charge for completing presale enquiries via the Leasehold Property Form (LPE1), this charge would not be passed onto the Leaseholders via the service charge. He could not give an assurance at present with regard to introducing a management charge for administering the service charges.

9. Disrepair Claims

Nigel reported that shortly after LGR, the service received over 70 disrepair cases. Each case must be surveyed within 20 working days and assessed for defence or settlement. Many claims originated from “claims farming” companies targeting vulnerable tenants.

Between November 2023 and November 2024, despite more than 100 claims, total damages paid were under £7,000. In the handful of cases in which the Council admitted liability, legal costs averaged around £6,000 per case.

A leaseholder stated two of her tenants had been approached by such firms.

10. Asbestos, Condensation and Ventilation

A leaseholder raised concerns about asbestos identified in the cavity walls of her property and expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of communication on the issue. Nigel clarified that asbestos located within cavity walls is generally considered low-risk and usually harmless but acknowledged the need to ensure communication with affected residents is timely and clear.

The group discussed condensation and dampness, noting challenges where ventilation is limited.

11. Affordability of Major Works

A leaseholder asked what happens if someone cannot afford their contribution. Nigel confirmed affordable payment plans can be arranged and no interest is added.

12. Stock Condition Survey & Windows

A leaseholder asked whether the 2024 stock condition survey or forward plan of works could be shared. Nigel confirmed the survey has informed reroofing and external repair priorities (eg repointing, roughcasting).

Windows remain the responsibility of individual leaseholders. Leaseholders were reminded to consult the council before fitting windows or doors to ensure compliance.

It was also noted that, where leaseholders prefer, windows can be fitted by the council as part of a planned programme with the full cost recharged to the leaseholder.

Nigel noted that some legal advisers do not adequately inform leaseholders of these responsibilities.

13. Lease Extensions

Georgina explained that leaseholders may extend their leases through a formal statutory process.

Guidance and a cost calculator can be found at www.lease-advice.org.

14. Fire Safety Signage – Clarification

Information circulated with the meeting invitation regarding fire-safety signage was clarified: the requirement for fire-safety signage applies only to blocks with enclosed communal stairways.

The flats at Chiltern Crescent (and similar designs at Pennine Gardens and Cheviot Green) do not have enclosed communal stairways. When residents step out of their front door, they are immediately outside rather than in an internal shared area. As a result, these blocks do not fall within the category of buildings requiring fire-safety signage under current regulations.

15. Communication of Meeting Dates

A leaseholder raised concerns about reliance on online notifications. Cathy confirmed dates will also be included in the *Housing Matters* newsletter.

Regular attendees will be placed on a circulation list.

- Those with email addresses will receive updates by email.
- Those without email access will receive communications by post.

Paper copies of the agenda and minutes will be provided at each meeting.

16. Future Meetings

All meetings will take place at Barrow Town Hall. Leaseholders should arrive at least 15 minutes before the start:

- Tuesday 19 May at 1pm
- Tuesday 8 September at 1pm
- Tuesday 8 December at 1pm