

Leaseholders' Forum

Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday, 19 May 2026 at 1pm in Barrow Town Hall

Present:

9 Leaseholders were present in person

Westmorland and Furness Council:

Nigel Clarke, Housing Maintenance Manager

Georgina (George) Bridgens, Case Worker

Cathy Kirk, Performance & Engagement Officer (minute taker)

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from three leaseholders.

Nigel explained that Bex Halton (Senior Manager Housing and Homelessness Service) was unable to attend but had delegated chairing responsibility to him going forward.

2. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 February 2026 were reviewed and approved as a true and accurate record.

3. Matters Arising

There were limited matters arising due to the previous meeting being the first held after a significant gap. However, concerns were raised regarding the level of weeds on Grange and Cartmel Crescent. It was noted that power washing had commenced several weeks earlier but had not been completed, and the issue has since worsened.

Action: Officers to investigate and provide an update.

4. Maintenance Update

4.1 Planned Maintenance Works

Re-roofing programme continues. Consultation with leaseholders is required on:

- Ormsgill
- Blake Street
- Eamont Close
- Exmouth Street
- Derwent Bank
- Byron Street

- Napier Street
- Vernon Street
- Wordsworth Street

Works will be progressed within the current financial year where possible.

The roofing work on Grange and Cartmel Crescent has been temporarily delayed due to seagull nesting, which is protected under wildlife legislation. Work is now expected to recommence in July or August. Works in unaffected areas will proceed where possible.

4.2 Section 20 Consultation

Nigel outlined the Section 20 consultation process, confirming that works cannot commence on blocks containing leaseholders until consultation is complete.

The process includes:

- Notice of intention (30-day consultation period)
- Notice of estimates (30-day consultation period)

Concerns were raised regarding the perceived lack of transparency in contractor selection.

Nigel clarified that procurement processes ensure compliance with statutory requirements and demonstrate best value for tenants and leaseholders.

4.3 Responsive Repairs Contract

There are two types of repairs which can be carried out to leasehold property:

- Planned works (for example, re-roofing)
- Day to day responsive repairs

The current responsive repairs contract with Hughes Brothers is nearing expiry (following approximately 10 to 11 years in place) and a procurement process for a replacement contract is underway.

It was confirmed that leaseholders will be consulted as part of this process in accordance with Section 20 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985.

Under this legislation:

- Where the Council intends to enter into a qualifying long-term agreement (such as a responsive repairs contract), and
- Leaseholders are expected to contribute more than £100 per year towards the cost of that agreement, the Council is legally required to undertake a formal consultation process.

This consultation will:

- Inform leaseholders of the Council's intention to enter into the agreement
- Provide an opportunity for leaseholders to submit observations
- Allow leaseholders to nominate alternative contractors for consideration

An update on the procurement and consultation process will be provided at the next meeting.

4.4 Fire Safety Information and Communal Areas (Zero Tolerance Approach)

As part of the Council's updated fire safety communications (issued in line with current regulatory requirements), a zero-tolerance approach to items stored in communal areas has been introduced.

This forms part of the fire safety information being issued to all residents of multi-occupied buildings every 12 months (or at such time as the information is amended) and is intended to reduce fire risk and ensure safe means of escape.

The fire safety information states that:

- Communal areas, including staircases and landings, must be kept completely clear at all times
- The policy applies to all items, including:
 - Furniture
 - Bicycles and scooters
 - Plants and decorative items
 - Doormats and small personal belongings

To ensure compliance:

- Items left in communal areas will be removed without prior notice
- Removed items will be stored for 14 days
- After this period, items may be disposed of, donated, or sold

Nigel highlighted that this approach follows fire safety reviews and reflects national expectations for management of multi-occupied residential buildings.

He also advised the group of an incident early this year in which items left in a communal area were deliberately set alight, obstructing residents' escape route. This example demonstrated the potential severity of such risks and reinforced the need for strict enforcement of the policy.

Leaseholders acknowledged the safety rationale, although some concerns were raised regarding practical implications and the need for consistent enforcement.

With regard to monitoring and inspections of communal areas, Nigel advised that existing monitoring includes:

- Monthly emergency lighting checks
- Biannual system tests
- Contractor inspections with photographic/video records

It was noted that there is scope to improve contractor awareness in identifying and reporting issues.

5. Service Charge Update

George advised that service charge bills have been delayed due to IT issues and delays in obtaining insurance documentation. Bills are expected to be issued in June.

A leaseholder queried what the service charge covers. A breakdown of applicable charges is always given on any demand or statement and details can also be found in the Information for Leaseholders booklet. Charges may include:

- Ground rent
- Buildings insurance
- Routine and major repairs
- External decoration
- Communal systems and services
- Cleaning

Leaseholders are advised to review itemised demands and statements upon receipt.

6. Questions and comments

6.1 Managing Agents

A suggestion was made to invite managing agents to future meetings to improve engagement and standards.

Officers advised that:

- Invitations to the Leaseholders' Forum are issued directly to leaseholders (property owners), who are the Council's contractual parties
- The Council does not hold information on which properties are managed by third-party managing agents
- As such, it was considered that issuing invitations to leaseholders is appropriate and sufficient, with leaseholders responsible for sharing relevant information with any appointed agents where necessary

6.2 Information on website

Concerns were raised about difficulty navigating leaseholder information on the Council website.

Action: Cathy agreed to review this and liaise with the web team in order to make the pages easier to find.

Post meeting update: The Council Leaseholders general information page has been moved from the Council Housing section to the main Housing section of the website to improve visibility and make it easier for leaseholders to find relevant information: <https://www.westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk/housing>

6.3 Security Concerns at Blake Street

Leaseholder BB raised issues regarding unauthorised access to rear areas.

Post meeting note: Nigel has requested a surveyor visit to assess the security concerns.

6.4 Damaged benches on Ewan Close

Leaseholder PG reported damaged benches at Ewan Close

Post meeting note: Nigel has issued the necessary works orders for repairs to the benches.

7. Any Other Business

None

8. Date of Next Meeting

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

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