Westmorland & Furness Council

Tenants' Forum

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 16 September 2026 at 2pm in the Law Library, Town Hall

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Attendees present

Tenant Voices present:

Mandy Anderson, Chair and Tenant Voice for Reglan Court and Corporation Terrace

Bill McEwan, Vice-Chair and Tenant Voice for Bank Lane to Millstone Avenue, Ormsgill

David Pearson, Tenant Voice for Newton Road area, Dalton

Scott Jackson, Tenant Voice for Carleton Meadows

Gaynor Killip, Tenant Voice for Brathay Crescent

Westmorland and Furness Council:

Bex Halton, Senior Manager – Housing Landlord and Homelessness Services

Caroline Kendall, Service Manager – Housing Landlord

Councillor Judith Derbyshire, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness

Councillor Anne Burns

Cathy Kirk, Performance and Engagement Officer (minute taker)

Meeting minutes

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Tenant Voices Nicola Bull and Danny Green, Councillor Anita Husband and officers: Debbie Cubiss, Senior Neighbourhood Team Leader and Peter Rimmer, Senior Surveyor.

2. Minutes of Previous Meetings held on 2 June and 13 July 2026

The minutes were agreed and noted as a true and correct record.

3. Matters Arising

3.1 Roosegate Community Centre

Bex said we are still talking with the Corporate Assets Team about the future of the community centre. An update will be shared when more information is available.

Members said community centres are important because they bring people together, support local activities and help residents feel connected to their neighbourhoods.

3.2 Proposed Shed Permission

Information about sheds was included in the last edition of Housing Matters and is now included in information given to new tenants.

Action: Cathy to promote the shed guidance on social media.

3.3 Property Boundary Query and Estate Walkabouts

Gaynor raised concerns that some homeowners may have extended their gardens onto council land behind properties on Brathay Crescent. She will send the addresses and photographs to Cathy.

Action: Gaynor to provide Cathy with the addresses and photographs.

Bex said a programme of estate walkabouts has been planned. The first walkabout recently took place on North Walney.

Details of walkabouts planned up to December were included in the last newsletter. Future walkabouts will also be promoted through the newsletter and social media..

3.4 Shop on Mill Lane

Members asked for an update about overgrown vegetation and fly-tipping behind the shop on Mill Lane.

Bex said the shop is leased by the council and enquiries will be made about its current use and future plans.

Action: Bryan to provide an update on the vegetation and fly-tipping behind the shop.

3.5 Fly-tipping

Bex confirmed that the last newsletter included information about fly-tipping and tenants' responsibilities

3.6 Griffin Community Centre

Bex explained that the council has been working with local community group A Way of Learning (AWOL) to manage the centre and create a welcoming community space for people of all ages.

A relaunch event was held on 1 September. Residents were invited to share ideas for future activities and find out more about the new Tenant Charter. The event also promoted opportunities to become a Tenant Voice or get involved in Tenant Scrutiny.

As the relaunch has been successful, the council will look at whether a similar approach could be used at other community buildings. Tenants will be consulted as part of this work.

Members also heard that a community space above the Mill Lane shops may offer more opportunities for local activities and community involvement.

3.7 Fencing Complaints

An item clarifying maintenance responsibilities was included in the last newsletter.

4. Tenant Participation Compact Budget Updated

The latest budget information was shared with members.

Spending since the last meeting

Cost of Living Support

- Bed frames and mattresses: £3,368.65

Community Events

- Ormsgill Stronger Together community barbecue: £200.00
- Dartboard, stand and accessories: £148.94
- Love Barrow Families craft materials and children's party supplies: £105.74

Remaining budget: £11,146

5. Environmental Enhancement Budget and Officers’ Budget Update

Members considered a request for a friendship bench in the shared outdoor area on Cavendish Street.

Resident Barry Carter requested a bench after garden chairs were stolen from the area.

Members were asked to approve the purchase and installation of a three-seat recycled plastic bench, similar to one already installed in Dalton.

The estimated cost is £600.

Members approved the request. The final location will be agreed with local residents and the Housing Estates Team.

Action: Cathy to arrange the purchase of the bench and friendship plaque.

6. Service and Performance Update

Bex presented performance information for April to June 2026.

Overall, services were performing well. Safety checks were completed on time, homes were being re-let more quickly, anti-social behaviour cases had reduced and complaints were answered within target times.

We collected 95% of rent due, and unpaid rent remained at 4%.

The average time taken to re-let empty homes improved from 143 days to 123 days. However, rent lost from empty properties increased to 3.2%.

6.1 Repairs and Empty Homes

Members discussed challenges affecting repairs and empty homes.

Emergency repairs continued to perform well, with 93% completed within target times.

Seventy per cent of non-emergency repairs were completed within target.

Delays were caused by high demand, difficulties recruiting skilled workers and ongoing work from previous jobs.

Some empty homes need significant repairs before they can be let to a new tenant. This can increase costs and make the process take longer.

Gaynor raised concerns about how long she had been waiting for plastering work to be completed at her home.

Action: Officers to follow up the outstanding plastering repair.

6.2 Safety Checks

Bex advised that all required gas, fire, asbestos, Legionella and Decent Homes checks had been completed.

Electrical safety checks were 96% complete. Most outstanding cases were where access to the property had not been possible.

Members heard that changes to the rules for gaining access to homes for safety inspections could affect future performance. This is being monitored closely.

6.3 Main Priorities

Members noted that key priorities for the rest of 2026/27 include:

- Improving non-emergency repairs
- Completing electrical safety checks
- Reducing the time taken to re-let empty homes
- Managing risks linked to accessing properties for important safety inspections

7. Complaints

Members received an update on complaints and the work carried out to meet the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

During 2025/26, we received 24 complaints. Ninety-one per cent were answered within target times.

Repairs continued to be the main reason for complaints. Communication and helping tenants understand what service they could expect were also common issues.

Improvements are being introduced to make sure tenants receive clearer information after property inspections. This will include details of any work needed and expected timescales.

Members noted that four cases reviewed by the Housing Ombudsman found that the council had followed the correct procedures.

Information about complaints will be published on the council website and included in the next tenant newsletter.

8. Regulatory Improvement Plan

Members received an update on improvements being made following the inspection by the Regulator of Social Housing.

Progress includes:

- Better understanding tenants' needs
- Publishing Tenant Satisfaction Measure results and actions
- Putting the Tenant Engagement Strategy into practice
- Using tenant feedback to help shape the new repairs contract

8.1 Tenant Scrutiny

Members received an update on work to develop Tenant Scrutiny.

Information about opportunities to get involved has been shared with tenants and several people have expressed an interest.

The Tenants' Forum will help identify areas of the service that could benefit from review through Tenant Scrutiny.

8.2 Future Changes

Members were updated on upcoming national housing regulations.

This includes a new Competence and Conduct Standard, which sets out expectations around staff skills, training, behaviour and qualifications.

Members also received an update on proposed changes to rent rules. These may allow some rents that are currently below government guideline levels to increase gradually over time.

Members discussed the possible impact of future rent increases, particularly for tenants on lower incomes.

It was agreed that more information about the financial impact on different property types would be presented at a future meeting as part of the rent-setting process.

Members also received an update on preparations for Phase 2 of Awaab's Law, which comes into effect on 30 November 2026.

Officers said existing arrangements provide a good foundation for meeting the new requirements, with further work underway to improve how reported hazards are assessed and managed.

Action: Further information about proposed rents and their financial impact to be brought to a future meeting.

9. Any Other Business

9.1 Fly-tipping

Gaynor raised concerns about rubbish that had been dumped near the crescent and had remained there for some time.

Concerns were also raised about the risk posed to children.

Action: Caroline to follow up the removal of the rubbish.

9.2 Community litter picking

Gaynor said local children would like to continue litter-picking activities in their neighbourhood with support from their parents.

Members discussed providing equipment such as:

- Litter pickers
- Gloves
- Rubbish bags

Members also suggested contacting local litter-picking groups to explore opportunities to work together.

Action: Officers to arrange the purchase of equipment and make contact with local litter-picking groups

9.3 Grounds maintenance

Members discussed concerns about weeds and grounds maintenance on housing estates.

Some estates were identified as needing environmental improvements and tidy-up work.

Bex explained that work is underway to better understand responsibility for different areas of land and to explore ways residents can become involved in caring for their neighbourhoods.

Mobile caretakers are carrying out targeted work, including:

- Removing weeds
- Cutting back overgrown hedges and vegetation
- Removing fly-tipping

Officers are also looking at ways to increase capacity for estate improvement work in the future.

Members heard about wider council work to encourage community involvement in litter-picking and keeping local areas clean and tidy.

10. Date of Next Meeting

Wednesday, 2 December 2026 at 2pm in the Law Library and online via Microsoft Teams