

# TENANTS' FORUM

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 5 March 2024 at 1pm  
in Committee Room 4, Town Hall

## TENANT REPS PRESENT:

**Chair & SV for Raglan & Corporation Terrace**  
Mandy Anderson

**Street Voice for Roosegate**  
Nicola Bull

**Street Voice for Broughton Road, Dalton**  
Danny Green

**Street Voice for Newton Road Area, Dalton**  
David Pearson

## Westmorland and Furness Council:

Rebecca (Bex) Halton, Interim Senior Manager – Housing  
Landlord & Homelessness Services

Caroline Kendall, Safe & Strong Communities Manager  
Cllr Judith Derbyshire, Cabinet Member for Housing &  
Homelessness

Cathy Kirk, Projects Officer (minute taker)

Everyone around the table introduced themselves to Cllr Judith Derbyshire, the Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness.

		ACTION
1.	<p><b>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Caroline Wagstaff, Assistant Director of Housing and Jim Christie (SV Grange &amp; Cartmel Crescent).</p>	
2.	<p><b>MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 14 FEBRUARY 2023</b></p> <p>The minutes were agreed as a true and correct record.</p>	
3.	<p><b>MATTERS ARISING</b></p> <p>None.</p>	
4.	<p><b>TENANT PARTICIPATION COMPACT BUDGET <i>update</i></b></p> <p>The current Tenants' Compact budget was circulated.</p>	
4.1	<p><b>Cost of Living Assistance</b></p> <p>So far this year, just under £5,000 has been spent from the Cost of Living Assistance budget, which leaves a balance of £3,714. Items purchased include bed frames, mattresses, bedding and kitchen appliances. Bex advised, rather than through self-referral, officers will continue to identify tenants they are working with who are struggling and unable to purchase such items.</p> <p>If any tenant reps identify anyone they think need such assistance, they should contact Caroline Kendall tel. 01229 876462/email <a href="mailto:caroline.kendall@westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk">caroline.kendall@westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk</a></p>	
4.2	<p><b>Community Events budget</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>£100 to Ormsgill Stronger Together (Christmas party)</li> <li>£54 – refreshments purchased for Mandy Anderson's children's trip to Blackpool</li> </ul>	

<p><b>5.</b></p> <p><b>5.1</b></p> <p><b>5.2</b></p>	<p><b>ENVIRONMENT ENHANCEMENT BUDGET <i>update</i></b></p> <p><b>Environmental Enhancement £5k Budget 2023/2024</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of two communal picnic benches for Grange &amp; Cartmel communal areas: £400</li> <li>• Gardening and cleaning services in the same specific area: £395</li> <li>• Cleaning of all paving within boundary walls of Grange &amp; Cartmel Crescent residential area to include pressure washing weeds from road edges, kerbs and bottom of walls, including joint filling of block paving and biocide treatment: £3,350</li> </ul> <p><b>Balance: £855</b></p> <p><b>Area Improvement £10k Budget 2023/24 (officers' budget)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Since July, 2023, officers have organised skip days and clearance on various estates throughout the borough at a total cost of £4,274.</li> </ul> <p><b>Balance: £5,726</b></p>	
<p><b>6.</b></p>	<p><b>UNIVERSAL CREDIT UPDATE</b></p> <p>Bex advised the current figures are:</p> <p><b>Universal credit claimants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total no of UC claimants – 1019</li> <li>• Total no of APAs (Alternative Pay Arrangements) – 534</li> <li>• Average arrears - £487</li> </ul> <p>Bex said the number of tenants on APAs (where we receive the money direct from DWP) can be seen as quite positive as at one time APAs were difficult to get in place. Caroline added the figures reflect the fact that nearly 50% of tenants are struggling to manage their finances.</p> <p>The average arrears figure of £487 will include those accounts that are awaiting the DWP payment to go through. UC claims are typically made in arrears. Bex said that members of the Rents Team advise that the cost of living is massively impacting on tenants, with a significant number of accounts needing careful management which is made even more difficult with the restrictions on accessing benefit information.</p>	
<p><b>7.</b></p>	<p><b>STOCK CONDITION SURVEY</b></p> <p>Bex advised in advance of the full results being presented to the Furness Locality Board members later this month, she can provide a brief overview.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey was completed in January 2024.</li> <li>• Surveyors from Rand Associates gained access to just under 70% of all houses, flats and bungalows.</li> <li>• 100% of garages, shops and communities centres were surveyed.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The survey identified general building components to be in a reasonable condition, however it identified some building components that are approaching or have exceeded their anticipated life cycle – this is the point of the survey to identify such cases.</li> <li>• The surveyors initially identified 13 properties as ‘Decent Homes Failures’, however these failures were actioned by the Council whilst the survey was in progress and, as a result, 100% of the Council’s housing stock complies with the requirements of the Decent Homes Standards.</li> </ul> <p>Judith wondered if the properties the surveyors were unable to gain access into were likely to have more problems. Bex said some of them were tenants who point blank refused entry and these tenancies are probably already on our radar and the final report will provide a more detailed breakdown. Caroline concurred and added her team are aware of the two-man visits, the hoarders and tenants who are struggling and don’t know where to start when it comes to cleaning their home – in such cases we can pay for their home to be deep cleaned.</p> <p><b>It was agreed the Forum would meet again once the full results of the survey have been published.</b></p>	
<p><b>8.</b></p>	<p><b>2023/24 RENTS</b></p> <p>Bex advised the policy that governs the way we set rents would have allowed us to increase rents by up to 7.7% but this would have been too much of an increase for our tenants; with our non-benefit dependant households struggling to cover the additional cost and those in receipt of UC not necessarily passing the increase they receive on to us.</p> <p>We need to increase our rents in order to be able to continue to invest in our stock and balance our budget but at the same time recognise we deal with the most vulnerable of tenants so therefore an increase of 3.5% was approved.</p> <p>Letters have been sent to all tenants advising them of the increase and highlighting the fact it’s a 53 week year this year, so will be collecting rent over 49 weeks rather 48 weeks.</p> <p>Amanda Morris and Jo Hughes from our Rents Team will chase and assist those tenants who will need assistance in updating their journals.</p>	
<p><b>9.</b></p> <p><b>9.1</b></p>	<p><b>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</b></p> <p><b>Tenant Perception Survey</b></p> <p>Bex advised the new annual Tenant Perception Survey for 2023/24 is ongoing. This survey forms part of new Tenant Satisfaction Measures which the Regulator of Social Housing has created to monitor how all social housing providers in England are performing to ensure social housing is of a decent standard across the country. Results will be published annually. We will be inspected on the back of this survey.</p> <p>The survey has been sent to all our tenants and it can be completed either using a paper copy, using a QR code or over the telephone by calling Cathy (tel. 07929 850 262). Bex asked tenant reps to pass the word around as we need as many responses back as possible so that we can identify areas where we need to improve.</p>	

<p><b>9.2</b></p>	<p><b>Fly-tipping</b></p> <p>Mandy reported the ongoing problem of fly-tipping on Raglan Court – it can be removed in the morning, and by the afternoon more stuff is dumped. Danny reported the same issue on Broughton Road.</p> <p>Caroline acknowledged it is a real problem on estates and with very limited staff resource it is impossible to continually monitor every area and, with many tenants unable to afford the cost of a bulky waste collection and without any means of transporting items to the tip, it's a growing problem.</p>	
<p><b>9.3</b></p>	<p><b>Request for planter/bench</b></p> <p>Danny wondered if it would be possible for planters/tub to be provided for the communal area at Broughton Road, to be funded from the Environmental Enhancement Budget. It was agreed this would be looked into.</p> <p><b>Post meeting note:</b></p> <p>Following the meeting it was established that the communal area in question forms part of a designated car parking area for residents so siting of planters tubs would not be possible. However, arrangements were made for the grounds maintenance contractor, Continental Landscapes, to clear existing bricked raised beds of weeds and fill them with fresh compost.</p>	
<p><b>10.</b></p>	<p><b>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</b></p> <p>The date of the next meeting is to be confirmed.</p>	