

DRAFT

Tenant Engagement Strategy 2025 – 2030

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Foreword

Our vision for Westmorland and Furness is for it to be a ‘great place to live, work and thrive’.

As a Council, we have clearly articulated in both the Council Plan and the Delivery Framework that providing sustainable neighbourhoods with good quality housing is an absolute priority for us.

The best way for us to achieve this is to engage positively with residents and involve them in shaping our housing services. We are committed to involving residents in the design of our services and in looking at ways we can improve them.

We recognise that an empowered community is one that enables its residents to thrive and we want to play our part in achieving this.

We want you to have opportunities to have your say, be heard and feel valued and as though your views are acted upon.

We thank our existing members of Tenants’ Forum and appreciate the time and effort they put in to being the ‘voice of their communities’ and making sure those voices are represented and taken account of when we are making changes to housing services or looking to improve them.

Together, we can make our housing communities a ‘great place to live, work and thrive’ and we are committed to achieving that with the help of our residents.

Cllr Judith Derbyshire

Cabinet Member for Housing & Homelessness

Introduction

This strategy sets out our commitment to working with residents to ensure that their voices are heard, and their views taken into consideration when making key decisions about housing services, ensuring they can be actively involved in shaping and designing the service they receive from us.

“Together we are powered by communities” and this helps us to create the conditions for communities to thrive. Westmorland and Furness have a wealth of resilient and pro-active communities from which we can all learn and grow.

Our Tenant Engagement Strategy has been developed to fulfil the current regulatory requirements of social housing providers, reflecting the requirements of the Transparency, Influence, and Accountability Standard whilst also looking ahead to ensure we are involving our residents in the decisions we make as we re-design services to meet the expectations of upcoming reform and changes to legislation.

Whilst this strategy seeks to ensure our compliance with the above, its primary purpose is to set out how we will improve the way we engage with and involve residents, empowering them to make a difference to the services we offer and the communities they are part of.

The ‘lived experience’ our residents offer is invaluable in shaping housing services and ensuring those services meet the needs of our residents, enabling Westmorland and Furness to be a ‘great place to live, work and thrive.

For the purposes of this strategy, the term residents means all those living in council owned properties or those accessing the council’s housing service and includes:

- Tenants
- Leaseholders
- Family members of tenants living in the property
- Those in temporary accommodation

Engagement to us means the two-way process of working together with residents to shape, influence and improve housing services. This involves us consulting with residents to seek their views, but also ensuring we act on these, listening to their experience and needs.

Together, we can build better housing services for everyone who accesses them.

Together we are empowered by communities.

Our commitment

Vision

Our vision is to empower residents to have their say and be involved in how we shape and design housing services. We aim to create more opportunities for residents to get involved and give their feedback and views on our services and what they would like to see as we move forward.

We want to strengthen our culture of 'You said, We did' to enable residents to see that their views have been listened to and acted upon to make a difference in their communities.

Our aims are to

Care, we will:

- be helpful, polite and treat you with respect
- provide accurate information that is easy to understand
- be open and honest with you in all our communications
- explain next steps and outcomes clearly keep your personal information safe

Listen, we will:

- aim to get things 'right first time' where possible
- be understanding of your situation and needs
- actively engage and inform you what we do and how we do it
- commit to continuous improvement based on your feedback
- acknowledge if we get something wrong and take action to put it right

Put you first, we will:

- provide services that are user-friendly, caring and accessible to all
- explain clearly the various ways you can make contact with us
- always put residents needs at the heart of our services
- provide fair and equal treatment to all our customers

Objectives

Our commitment is to improve how residents can get involved to ensure we work together, with you, to tailor our services to meet your needs and listen to your views and feedback in shaping and designing housing services.

To do this, we have agreed the following objectives:

- Embed a culture of Resident Involvement We will ensure that involving residents and engaging with them to seek their views is embedded within all of our housing roles and threaded through our policies and procedures.

- Increase opportunities for tenants to get involved in different ways We will work with existing tenant representatives and use your feedback to make it easier for people to get involved and give their feedback and maximise the opportunities for residents to do so.
- Improve our neighbourhoods and communities By embedding a culture of tenant involvement and increasing the opportunities for residents to get involved and have their say, we will work together to tackle the issues neighbourhoods and communities' face and provide the help and support they need.
- Provide opportunities for residents to influence and improve We will maximise opportunities for residents to get involved and influence and shape services, including when we are introducing significant changes or new policies.
- Provide fair and accessible treatment to all our customers, by including creating physically accessible tenants' engagement and communication methods including, BSL, Braille and plain language/picture communication.

Objective 1

Embed a culture of Resident Involvement

We will ensure that involving residents and engaging with them to seek their views is embedded within all of our housing roles and threaded through our policies and procedures.

We will do this by:

- Ensuring that all housing staff know what the expectations are around tenant engagement and involvement so that opportunities are not missed.
- We will ensure that residents know how to get involved and that we encourage them to do so and make it easy for them to get involved.
- Empowering residents to influence and improve housing services.

How we will do this:

- Ensure residents are consulted on key decisions.
- Continue to provide good quality customer service and direct access to Housing Officers within specialist teams so that the right advice can be given first time.
- Actively involving tenant representatives in decision making.
- Continue to report performance and other key changes to Tenants' Forum so that they can be the 'voice of their communities' and provide valuable insight into how this impacts residents.
- Develop a culture that listens to and values feedback and uses it to make a difference.
- Ensure we meet the expectations of the social housing consumer standards and that their underlying principles are embedded in the work we do and the roles within the service.

Objective 2

Increase opportunities for tenants to get involved in different ways

We will work with existing tenant representatives and use your feedback to make it easier for people to get involved and give their feedback and maximise the opportunities for residents to do so.

We will do this by:

- Providing more ways that residents can get involved and provide feedback on our services and the issues they face.
- Taking into consideration your preferred ways to do this, appreciating that some residents will want to be more actively involved than others but still offering opportunities for those residents to have their voices heard.

How we will do this:

- Offer consultation opportunities when making key decisions, and ensuring we provide multiple ways residents can do this.
- Improve our digital offer to residents.
- Support tenant representatives to represent their communities and be able to facilitate what residents want to see from them so that they are valued and trusted.
- Re-start our Leaseholders Forum.
- Consider other working groups that need to be developed such as a 'Tenant Compact Group' to work with the Housing Maintenance team in the designing of the repair and maintenance service moving forward and in delivering the action plans of key strategies.
- Continue to offer incentives that promote resident involvement and positive contributions to neighbourhoods.

Objective 3

Improve our neighbourhoods and communities

By embedding a culture of tenant involvement and increasing the opportunities for residents to get involved and have their say, we will work together to tackle the issues neighbourhoods and communities' face and provide the help and support they need.

We will do this by:

- Working with residents to understand what matters to them, their needs and that of the wider communities they are part of and use this to make positive changes and provide opportunities to improve neighbourhoods and communities.

- Continuing to work collaboratively with Police colleagues and other agencies to understand the issues affecting our neighbourhoods and the areas we need to focus our resource to ensure communities feel supported and issues are dealt with early.

How we will do this:

- Commit to fulfilling the action plans of key strategies that will improve neighbour- and communities.
- Ensure we improve tenants satisfaction year on year by looking at ways to improve service delivery.
- Continue to carry out estate walkabouts for all housing estates and be flexible in our approach to this so that we can hold them more often or at certain times of the year where this would promote better outcomes and address emerging issues.
- Improve the way we record and monitor anti-social behaviour so that we can more effectively manage the way we deal with reports and monitor cases. This will include gathering feedback on what we did well and what we could improve.
- Work with our colleagues across the Council to gather information and adopt a proactive, collaborative approach to helping our neighbourhoods and communities.
- Provide funding to communities to improve their neighbourhoods and develop a sense of belonging and togetherness.

Objective 4

Provide opportunities for residents to influence and improve services

We will maximise opportunities for residents to get involved and influence and shape services, including when we are introducing significant changes or new policies.

We will do this by:

- Giving residents the chance to co-design services and influence the improvements that need to be made.
- Allowing residents to hold us to account as their landlord on our decisions and performance.

How we will do this:

- Encourage residents to get involved on estate walkabouts.
- Involve residents in choosing our new repairs contractor and in planning the decarbonisation of the housing stock.
- Consult with residents regularly.
- Share our performance information.
- Form task and finish groups for key decisions being made to ensure residents views are heard and acted upon.

Measuring success

How will we measure success

- Create an action plan to ensure we achieve our commitment and objectives.
- Report our performance annually to residents.
- Ensure our staff know the expectations on them to engage with and involve residents in the work they do.

Monitoring and Reviewing the strategy

This strategy will be reviewed and updated based on new legislation, local needs, the results of the annual Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) survey data, complaints and the feedback we receive from our residents.

The Senior Manager- Housing Landlord and Homelessness Services and the portfolio holder will oversee the delivery of this strategy. An action plan will be developed and this will be reviewed and updated periodically throughout the strategy's term.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

We are committed to ensuring that all residents have equal access to engage with and influence housing services. We will promote inclusivity and celebrate diversity.

To achieve this we will:

- Remove barriers to residents getting involved - We will ensure that engagement methods are accessible to all residents, taking into consideration communication needs and limited digital access a significant number of residents have.
- Promote inclusive engagement and involvement - Provide different channels for residents, so they can get in touch and have their views heard. Face to face services continuing to be the primary method of engagement where residents face particular issues. This recognises the limitations and affordability of accessing digital channels. The vulnerabilities that some of our tenants' face will require us to think imaginatively about our communication methods. We will also offer hybrid methods to suit the needs of our tenants where this is appropriate, making use of digital channels of communication and mobile/telephone contact.
- Promote the importance of representation - We recognise the value that tenant representatives ('street voices') have in representing and engaging harder to reach groups and those who do not want to be actively involved themselves. We will continue to support those who represent residents and actively look to increase the number of diverse residents who are willing to do this.