

BARBICAN ESTATE RESIDENTS CONSULTATION COMMITTEE
Wednesday, 17 January 2024

Minutes of the meeting held at Guildhall at 6pm

Present

Members

Sandra Jenner - Defoe House (Chair)	Andrew Tong - Brandon Mews
Jim Durcan - Andrewes House (Deputy Chair)	Helen Hudson - Defoe House
Christopher Makin (Alderman) (Deputy Chair)	Andy Hope - Breton House
Liz Simpson - Seddon House	Dave Taylor - Gilbert House
Sandy Wilson - Shakespeare Tower	Monique Long - Mountjoy House
David Lawrence - Lauderdale Tower	Petre Reid - Willoughby House
Adam Hogg - Chair, Barbican Association	Lucy Sisman - Cromwell Tower
Fiona Lean - Ben Jonson House	Claire Hersey – Lambert Mews
Sally Spensley – Frobisher Crescent	Gordon Griffiths – Bunyan Court
Fritz van Kempen – Speed House	

In Attendance

Helen Fentimen – Deputy Chair of Community and Children’s Services and Member of the Barbican Residential Committee
Mary Durcan – Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board
Deputy Anne Corbett – Deputy Chair of the Barbican Residential Committee
Steve Goodman – Member of the Barbican Residential Committee
Jacqui Webster – Cripplegate Ward Member

Officers:

Judith Finlay	- Executive Director, Community and Children’s Services
Mark Jarvis	- Chamberlains
Polly Dunn	- Assistant Town Clerk
Pam Wharfe	- Interim Assistant Director, Housing and Barbican
Jason Hayes	- Community and Children's Services
Anne Mason	- Community and Children's Services
Michael Gwyther-Jones	- Community and Children’s Services
Julie Mayer	- Town Clerk's Department

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Jane Smith (Seddon House) who was represented by Liz Simpson and Mark Wheatley, Chair of the BRC.

2. MEMBERS DECLARATIONS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

There were no declarations

3. **REVENUE & CAPITAL BUDGETS - ORIGINAL BUDGET 2023/24 AND ORIGINAL 2024/25 - EXCLUDING DWELLINGS SERVICE CHARGE INCOME & EXPENDITURE**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Community and Children's Services, which sought approval of the provisional revenue budget for 2024/25, for subsequent submission to the Finance Committee. The report noted that the proposed budget for 2024/25 had been prepared within the resource envelope allocated to the Executive Director, by the City Corporation's Resource Allocation Sub Committee, including a 3% allowance for inflation.

During the discussion on this item the following points were noted:

1. Members noted an error in respect of the allocation of staff costs to car parking but this would not affect the bottom line.
2. Take up of car parking spaces had declined over recent years.
3. Over one third of car park expenditure had been on fire equipment and servicing, sprinklers in the car park, drainage, petrol interceptors and repairs and ventilation fans.
4. The officer agreed to circulate the breakdown on income for parking and storage recurrent.
5. Two resident engineer flats had been surrendered, contributing to a reduction in income in the Landlord Account and a reduction in expenditure in the service charge account.
6. Salaries for permanent staff are down, as a few vacancies are being carried. However, salaries for agency staff have increased.

RESOLVED, that:

The Barbican Residential Committee (BRC) is recommended to :

1. Review the provisional 2024/25 revenue budget to ensure that it reflects the Committee's objectives and, if so, approve the budget for submission to the Finance Committee.
2. Review and approve the draft capital budget.
3. Authorise the Chamberlain to revise these budgets to allow for further implications arising from departmental reorganisations and other reviews including corporate projects.

4. **SERVICE CHARGE EXPENDITURE & INCOME ACCOUNT - ORIGINAL BUDGET 2023/24 & ORIGINAL BUDGET 2024/25**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Community and Children's Services, which set out the original budget for 2023/24 and 2024/25 for revenue expenditure included within the service charge in respect of dwellings. The report noted that the actual amount charged to lessees would depend on the actual amount spent and the percentage set out in the individual leases.

The Chair presented the views of residents, noting their dissatisfaction in that the report had not been seen by the Service Charge Working Party and set out their concerns in that it appeared to show some discrepancies and lacked a commentary detailing assumption, justification and variance explanations. They felt, therefore, that the BRC could not accept it in its current format, without a proper analysis, and given the complexity of the budgets.

During the discussion, the following points were noted:

1. This is an annual report in the standard City of London Corporation format, showing budgets approved last year and charges to residents in June. The variations are not far off the approved budget. 'Latest Approved Budget' is the terminology used by the Chamberlain in the budget setting process.
2. Rents are down this year because some flats are empty.
3. Chief Officers are responsible for budgetary control and approve virement within the nil balance. The Executive Director gave assurance of Chief Officers' obligations in terms of maintaining close on spend.
4. The most recent high level appointments had not been reflected, noting that 2 of the 3 are replacement of interims. One of the appointments arose from an Altair recommendation in terms of contract management. There was a significant number of agency staff this year, who are included, but they are expected to be replaced by fully employed staff in the future. Residents asked to see a breakdown of permanent and agency costs, as the pay rise seems higher than expected and asked if interims are driving the increase.
5. The staff salary review in July 2024 is not known at present and will factor in inflation but it was agreed that the assumptions in the budget would be provided to residents.
6. The commentary on general repairs, particularly windows and water penetration, could align better.
7. In terms of fire safety, the consultant will be looking at a gap analysis in terms of floor plans, structural history etc., as this information needs to go the Government Regulator by 1st April 2024. Fire doors are landlord costs as they are an improvement and not rechargeable. The Executive Director agreed to check the consultant fees and their allocation.

8. The Service Charge forecast for capital figures will be available at the next meeting of the Working Party. There had been some challenges with engaging contractors but there had been support from residents in terms of leeway in working hours, which should help.
9. There are two procurement streams for the windows; i.e. – urgent and longer term, which are still to be factored in, with repair being the preferred option to full replacement. Concern was expressed in that the ad-hoc replacement of windows is very expensive and follows detrimental to residents in terms of water penetration. Surveys on windows are currently underway and an Interim Contract Manager is now in place to pick up these issues. The necessity for further surveys was questioned when some had been undertaken and reported in early 2023.
10. A breakdown by block in respect of the Repairs and Maintenance contract and windows can be provided to the Service Charges Working Party.
11. If works are pushed back this will be unfair on the next generation of leaseholders, noting that the AMWP first suggested a survey in 2021. The Executive Director explained that the Asset Management Strategy, considered later on this agenda, will provide a stronger tool for future programming.
12. The Executive Director agreed to chase progress on the window cleaning contract and ensure a robust plan is in place for future procurement.
13. The Executive Director explained that recommendations arising from the Altair Review are in hand and a more detailed report will be presented to the next meetings of the RCC/BRC. This work will flow into the repairs and maintenance contract and the Department will then be able to drive a more cost-effective model. Members will be presented with options that will be balanced with needs of the service, residents' views and views of staff.
14. There was some delay to the finalisation of capital costs towards the end of 2023, which affected the budget reporting timetable for December. The Executive Director also recommended a session with the Service Charge Working Party to cover the issues set out above and accepted that the Working Party should be provided with the report earlier in the budget setting process in future in sufficient time for analysis and discussion.
15. In concluding the debate, Members felt that the standard terminology in terms of 'Authorising the Chamberlain' should be replaced by an agreement to delegate authority to the Chairs and Deputy Chairs of the BRC and the RCC, which will also facilitate leaseholder consultation, including the Service Charge Working Party.

RESOLVED, that –

The BRC is recommended to:

1. Consider whether the budget is sufficiently explained and justified prior to reviewing the provisional 2024/25 net £Nil revenue budget to ensure that it reflects the Committee's objectives and, if so, approve the budget for submission to the Finance Committee.
2. Delegate Authority to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chamberlain and the Chairs and Deputy Chairs of the BRC and RCC (thereby allowing leaseholder engagement) to revise these budgets to allow for further implications arising from departmental reorganisations and other reviews, and corporate projects.

5. HOUSING GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Community and Children's Services in respect of the current governance arrangements and recommended how they might be provided in the future.

Members noted the following amendment, submitted by the Chairs of the RCC and the Barbican Association, and circulated ahead of the meeting:

The terms of reference for the Barbican Residential Committee should be reviewed to reflect its responsibility for oversight and scrutiny of the management of services and costs of the Barbican residential estate, and that draft terms of reference should be considered at the next meeting of the RCC and BRC. It is recommended that the BRC Members approve the continuation of the current governance structure but with strengthened terms of reference and annual workplans of committees to enable the dedicated focus on performance and cost to embed and improve the resident experience.

The BRC be recommended to :

1. Agree that there should be no immediate change to the current governance arrangements because of the dedicated focus on improving operational performance with new management arrangements for the Barbican Residential Estate and the HRA.
2. Delegate authority to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair and the Chair and Deputy Chairs of the RCC to consider any changes to the Terms of Reference arising from the discussion, noting the comments set out above
3. Agree that consideration should be given to options for the establishment of a separate forum for HRA residents, including proposals for a body comparable to the Barbican Residential Consultative Committee.
4. Note that Terms of Reference are routinely reviewed on an annual basis, and that there should be a further, more comprehensive review of housing governance arrangements in two years' time, on the understanding that the dedicated focus on both the Barbican Residential Estate and HRA should have delivered significant improvements to performance and the customer experience.

6. VERBAL UPDATES

6.1 Asset Management Strategy

The Interim Assistant Director reinforced the importance of an Asset Management Strategy and the involvement of residents in terms of choices in shaping future works. The Asset Maintenance Working Party asked to be fully involved in the process. The Assistant Director advised that the Strategy would bring together the Savills Condition Survey, work undertaken on window repairs, and other repair and maintenance pressures, to ensure they are managed strategically. The Assistant Director further explained that the Department has the relevant data and that an external analyst should be able to undertake the work without considerable expense.

The Executive Director advised that, on 11th January 2024, the Court of Common Council had agreed to a variation to extend the Metwin contract for a further year. Members noted that a session planned for 30th January 2024 would clash with an 'all resident' meeting. Concerns were expressed as to the value of further backward looking consultation, given that the problems with the repair and maintenance service had already been gathered, the cost implications of further interventions and the possibility of delaying the process.

The Executive Director accepted these comments and gave assurance in that it would not impact on the timeline. Furthermore, a procurement of this value and complexity would greatly benefit from feedback from residents in terms of how it might look in the future. The Executive Director also agreed to look at the current version of the survey, to ensure it is more relevant and doesn't repeat previous ones. Members also noted that the same process is being undertaken for the HRA properties (Wates Contract) as they are subject to the same procurement exercise. However, this doesn't necessarily mean that there will eventually be two different contracts.

6.2 Asbestos Management and Remedial Works

Members noted that, in the week before the Christmas holidays, the Corporate Health and Safety Officer had found that follow-up work on the recent asbestos survey had not been done, affecting 46 properties on the Barbican Estate. However, the Interim Assistant Director had actioned this immediately; working with Metwin and the resident engineer to seal the cupboards affected. All affected residents were informed immediately and work is now underway to remedy the issue. The Chair thanked the Assistant Director and her team for a very rapid response and the Executive Director thanked residents for their forbearance in a difficult situation.

6.3 Barbican Estate Office Transformation update

Members noted that the new Assistant Director for the Barbican Estate would be starting on 11 March 2023 and Rosalind Ugwu was thanked for her hard work as Interim Head of the Barbican Estate Office.

The Committee thanked Anne Mason for her sterling work as Service Charge and Revenues Manager over a number of years, noting that she would be retiring in May this year. The Executive Director thanked Anne for delaying her departure to allow for a full handover with her successor. A Member raised the issue of the Energy Audit, which had been challenging and particularly valued Anne's input to this complex area of work. The Assistant Director advised of a recent development in the appointment of an auditor.

In closing the meeting, Members noted that this set of minutes would be produced at pace and circulated ahead of the BRC meeting on Monday 22nd January.

The meeting ended at 7.30 pm

Chairman

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