

BARBICAN ESTATE RESIDENTS CONSULTATION COMMITTEE

Monday, 10 September 2018

Minutes of the meeting of the Barbican Estate Residents Consultation Committee held at the Guildhall EC2 at 6.30 pm

Present

Members:

Christopher Makin – Chairman	David Lawrence - Lauderdale Tower
Graham Wallace – Deputy Chairman	Mark Bostock - Frobisher Crescent
Jim Davies – Deputy Chairman	Vivian Fowle - Gilbert House
Robert Barker - Barbican Association	Heather Hawker - Speed House
Janet Wells - John Trundle House	Adam Hogg - Andrewes House
John Tomlinson - Cromwell Tower	Jane Samsworth - Defoe House
Fred Rodgers - Breton House	Fiona Lean – Ben Jonson House
David Graves - Seddon House	
Sandy Wilson – Shakespeare Tower	

Officers:

Michael Bennett	- Community & Children's Services Department
Anne Mason	- Community and Children's Services
Julie Mayer	- Town Clerk's
Mark Jarvis	- Chamberlain's Department
Paul Murtagh	- Community & Children's Services Department

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Gordon Griffiths (Bunyan Court), Averil Baldwin (Thomas More House), Prof. Michael Swash (Willoughby House), Heather Hawker (Speed House), Jane Smith (Barbican Association – represented by Robert Barker) and John Taysum (Bryer Court).

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

There were no declarations.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 21st May and the EGM on 25th June 2018 were approved.

Matters arising

Members noted that whilst there wasn't an allocated budget for an all-resident reception, a Member advised of a venue likely to be offered gratis and offered to explore this with the Chairman.

4. **'YOU SAID; WE DID' - OUTSTANDING ACTIONS LIST**

Members received the RCC's Outstanding Actions list. In respect of the Ambulance/emergency points, Members noted they would receive an update on the review via the estate bulletin. The representative for Frobisher Crescent reported a productive meeting with the Arts Centre and were keen to hear the outcome of the review.

RESOLVED, that – the Report be noted.

5. **SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS (SLA) REVIEW**

Members received a report of the Director of Community and Children's Services on the review of the estate-wide implementations of Service Level Agreements (SLAs) and Key Performance Measures (KPIs) for the quarter April to June 2018. The Frobisher Crescent representative advised that they were in discussion with the Arts Centre in respect of Sculpture Court and hoping to conclude the matter in the autumn.

Members noted that, although feedback in respect of the new service charges letter had been low, responses had been positive and the template was in use. There was no data as yet on a cost benefit analysis. The Chairman thanked Anne Mason and the Service Charges Working Party for their work on the enhanced letter template.

RESOLVED, that – the report be noted.

6. **PROGRESS OF SALES AND LETTINGS**

Members received a report of the Director of Community and Children's Services in respect of sales and lettings which had been approved by officers since the last meeting.

RESOLVED, that – the report be noted.

7. **WORKING PARTY UPDATES**

Members received a report of the Leaseholder Service Charges Working Party. The Chairman reminded Members that, whilst this was the only working party update report under this agenda item, the work of the various working parties was referred to in various reports on this agenda; i.e. SLA, Finance and the Update report.

8. **FIRE SAFETY UPDATE**

Members received a report of the Director of Community and Children's Services which advised Members on the progress made in relation to fire safety matters since the last update report in March 2018.

During the discussion and questions the following points were noted:

- The Fire Brigade has asked for extinguishers to be removed as the majority of residents/members of the public in general, were not trained in their use and it could detract from their advice to either stay put or evacuate.

- The fire risk assessments had been published; officers accepted there might be one or two minor errors and they would be checked and remedied.
- There was some discussion as to what would have been an acceptable safety standard in the 1970s, compared to now, and particularly post Grenfell. Therefore, the fire risk assessments had responded to a new set of liabilities, applicable to buildings of the Barbican's age.
- Members were reminded of Counsel's opinion and the implications for both the City Corporation and Service Charge payers; i.e. repairs will be charged for, improvements will not be charged for, subject to advice from the Comptroller and City Solicitor.
- Members noted that the Barbican Estate Office employed a Fire Safety Advisor, who was a former experienced Fire Brigade Officer. The Assistant Director advised that if improvements were carried out, then residents' contents insurance premiums would not be affected.
- The Fire Doors tested had passed the 36 minute fire test and, whilst there would be more research, the Assistant Director was confident that they could be regraded. The Fire Management Survey would address the ventilation gaps on communal doors. Members noted that, due to pressures on the industry post Grenfell, the full results from the fire door tests, carried out on 2nd June 2018, were not available as yet, and more doors/door surrounds will be tested.
- Some residents had installed their own mechanical ventilation and officers would need to be satisfied that fire safety would not be compromised.

In concluding, the Chairman and Members thanked the Assistant Director and his team for a comprehensive piece of work which had been undertaken in the best interests of resident safety.

RESOLVED, that – the report be noted.

9. **2017/18 REVENUE OUTTURN (EXCLUDING THE RESIDENTIAL SERVICE CHARGE ACCOUNT)**

Members received a joint report of the Chamberlain and the Director of Community and Children's Services in respect of the 2017/18 Revenue Outturn (excluding the Residential Service Charge Account).

In respect of a question about reallocation of resources in respect of fire safety works, the Officer advised that the house officer charge had reduced to compensate for the additional charge on supervision and management.

RESOLVED, that – the Revenue Outturn report for 2017/18 and the budgets carried forward to 2018/19 be noted.

10. **2017/18 REVENUE OUTTURN FOR THE DWELLINGS SERVICE CHARGE ACCOUNT INCLUDING RECONCILIATION BETWEEN THE CLOSED ACCOUNTS AND THE FINAL SERVICE CHARGE**

Members received a joint report of the Chamberlain and the Director of Community and Children's Services in respect of the 2017/18 Revenue Outturn for the Dwellings Service Charge Account (including the reconciliation between the closed accounts and the final service charge).

RESOLVED, that – the revenue report for 2017/18 and the service charge reconciliation be noted.

11. **RELATIONSHIP OF THE BARBICAN RESIDENTIAL COMMITTEE OUTTURN REPORT TO SERVICE CHARGE SCHEDULES**

Members received a report of the Director of Community and Children's Services in respect of the relationship of the Barbican Residential Committee Outturn reports to Service Charge Schedules. The Chairman and Members commended the helpful format of this report.

RESOLVED, that – the report be noted.

12. **BARBICAN ESTATE 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS 2019**

Members received a report of the Director of Community and Children's Services in respect of a number of options to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Barbican Estate. The Chairman had emailed all Members of the RCC prior to the meeting and asked them to co-ordinate feedback.

Officers explained that funding had been available, as a one off, for the 40th Celebrations in 2009. The event had also been resourced by the former Barbican Directorate. However, it was not possible to sustain these arrangements for the 50th Celebrations in 2019.

Each House Group representative was invited to respond, as follows:

Speed House – low feedback and a general low enthusiasm.

Mountjoy House – content with the event being service chargeable.

Gilbert House – suggested Barbican Association involvement but had not had enough time to ballot house group members.

Ben Jonson House – support for an event manager and for it to be service chargeable. A query as to whether further costs were likely.

John Trundle House – general low enthusiasm.

Frobisher Crescent – some mixed views, with some resistance to this being service chargeable. Given the architectural significance of the Barbican Estate, could such a celebration be captured by the Culture Mile, as was the case with the recent events at Beech Street and Smithfield?

Shakespeare Tower - general low enthusiasm, a resistance to the event being service chargeable and poor feedback in respect of the 40th Anniversary commemorations. There was, however, support for celebrating the architectural and urban planning aspects of the Barbican Estate, possibly with an event/conference covering the architectural history and recent/future initiatives in respect of green living and electronic vehicles. The group also felt that the City Corporation should pay, as the benefits would flow mainly to them in terms of PR and image building.

Seddon House – general resistance to the event being service chargeable. A query as to the cost of Option 2 in the report.

Breton House – in favour of an event but not for it being service chargeable. Suggested a concert.

Andrewes House – low response and general lack of enthusiasm.

Cromwell Tower – strong resistance from the House Group to the event being service chargeable and for the City Corporation to fund the event.

Lauderdale Tower – resistance to being service chargeable and the drinks reception should be ticketed. Similar views to Shakespeare Tower supporting an architectural event or conference.

Barbican Association – the event should be different to the 40th commemorations and celebrate the architecture; possibly with a conference at the Arts Centre and a drinks reception.

Deputy Chairman of the RCC (Graham Wallace) – supported the Barbican Association's view and asked for the BRC to take the RCCs views into consideration when they take a decision on 17th September 2018.

In concluding the discussion, the Chairman confirmed that, whilst Option 1 lacked enthusiasm, there was an appetite to celebrate the Estate's anniversary but there was strong resistance to the event being service chargeable.

There had been concerns expressed about a lack of consultation with residents and officers advised that, due to current resourcing, they would not be able to conduct a ballot.

RESOLVED, that – the report be noted.

13. **RESIDENTS SURVEY**

Members received a report of the Director of Community and Children's services which informed the Committee of the results of the Residents' Satisfaction Survey undertaken in June 2018.

Members noted that the survey had not been undertaken last year, due to resource implications following Grenfell and the fire safety works. Despite the

incentive of a £100 prize voucher for participating, numbers were down this year, probably due to GDPR leading to a reduction in the number of email addresses that the Estate Office now holds.

RESOLVED, That – the report be noted.

14. UPDATE REPORT

Members received the Director of Community and Children's services' Update Report and noted the following outstanding items:

Brandon Mews roof had not yet been reviewed, a meeting with Langley's is scheduled. Members noted that the flat roofs were coming to the end of their natural lifespan, of 25 years, but they were in a better condition than expected.

The Assistant Director advised that a forward plan was being worked on, based on the work of the Working Party, and would prioritise what needed to be done. The production of an Asset Maintenance Strategy for the next 6-12 months would also help residents to plan and budget.

A Member noted that previous works with significant costs had been phased to spread the cost for each block over more than one year. The same approach would be appreciated going forward..

In concluding, the Chairman and Members were pleased to note the new '*What's Gone Well*' section in the report and thanked those involved in this case for their hard work on behalf of residents.

RESOLVED, that the report be noted.

15. QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

There were no further questions in addition to the 'questions in advance' submitted ahead of the meeting. A Member of the Gardens Advisory Group was in attendance and thank officers for a comprehensive response to their question.

16. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

The Chairman agreed to the admission of an item of urgent business in respect of the City Corporation's Review of Housing Governance, which was due to be discussed at the Barbican Residential Committee on 17th September.

Review of Housing Governance

Members received a report of the Town Clerk in respect of the City Corporation's Housing Governance. Members noted that the Policy and Resources Committee had considered an initial report at its July 2018 meeting, which had opened the discussion. This report sought the view of the Barbican Residents' Consultation Committee as to the future of the Barbican Residential Committee and any potential amendments that might be made.

Members were invited to give their views and, whilst some of these were representative of their House Groups, some felt that they had not been given long enough to consult as the paper had been circulated after the main RCC pack.

A Member from Aldersgate was in attendance and, with the permission of the Chairman, addressed the Committee and encouraged Members to share their views on all the options in the report; i.e. the five potential options in relation to future arrangements, which was reported to the Policy & Resources Committee in the Summer, and their views on the options which had emerged from the Chairman's discussions with interested parties.

The Deputy Chairman of the Barbican Residential Committee was in attendance and set the context by explaining the background and circumstances which had led to this report; i.e. the BRC was carrying a number of non-resident vacancies which were proving difficult to fill, and meetings were at risk of being inquorate. The recent debate on Car Park Charges and the rigid adherence to dispensations had highlighted the issues currently faced by the BRC.

During the discussion, the following points were noted:

- Could proxy voting at Committee meetings be introduced in order to avoid the risk of being inquorate?
- The difficulty in recruiting to the Committee might arise from a lack of interest in residents' issues, as the Community and Children's Services Committee also carried vacancies. This gave rise to implications for succession planning and finding individuals willing to stand as Chairman or Deputy Chairman.
- There was a strong reluctance to disbanding the BRC as the current arrangements work well for residents, although Members do not act unfairly. Instead, Members detailed knowledge of the Estate is often of great assistance in taking the best decision.
- There was, however, strong support for the status quo (option i), with a possible tweaking of Membership numbers to reduce the risk of being inquorate. Of the five options set out in the report, Members were not in favour of :
 - (ii) Disbanding the Barbican Residential Committee and transferring its responsibilities to the Community & Children's Services Committee as this would overload the Committee, which was heavily engaged on HRA matters.
 - (iii) Disbanding the BRC and transferring its responsibilities to the Property Investment Board was inappropriate, given this Committee's asset focus and lack of housing expertise.

Members generally felt that comments (iv) Reconfigure the Barbican Residential Committee, particularly if on a large scale and (v) Establish a new, non-Ward based Housing Committee were not desirable.

Members felt that the Code of Conduct in respect of pecuniary interests and the rigidity around dispensations inhibited the resident members. Members also felt that the Committee needed the current level of resident Members to represent constituents and take forward lobbying. There was a further view in that, if the number of resident Members were to reduce, then the non-residents should do likewise, reducing the quorum to 3 (i.e. a third of the non-resident Members).

However, given the clear agreement that the BRC should be retained. If the price was some reduction in resident members that was preferable to the other suggestions.

Further, it was suggested that the advantage of reducing the number of non-resident Members was that it would address the long-standing vacancies on this committee that are highlighted above. However, a concern was expressed that, in the event of a number of apologies for a meeting, decision making powers would then lie with a very small group of non-residents.

It was noted that the continued existence of the BRC, with an RCC to garner residents' views, was a fundamental part of the vote that took place some years ago regarding the management of the Barbican estate. As such, residents expected the City to continue to honour the commitments made at that time.

Finally, the Town Clerk advised Members of the arrangements for the BRC meeting next Monday whereby the formal BRC would start at 2.30pm but Members would hold an informal discussion in public, on the Housing Governance Review, at 1.45pm.

The meeting closed at 8.30 pm

Chairman

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