

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee(s): Barbican Centre Board	Dated: 22 October 2025
Subject: CEO Report	Public report: For Information
This proposal: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes	Diverse Engaged Communities Dynamic Economic Growth Leading Sustainable Environment Vibrant Thriving Destination Providing Excellent Services Flourishing Public Spaces
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	-
What is the source of Funding?	-
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	-
Report of:	David Farnsworth, Interim CEO
Report author:	David Farnsworth, Interim CEO

Summary

Below reports on July, August, September 2025, in line with our six Shared Goals.

Recommendation

Members are asked to Note the report

Main Report

Current Position

EXCITE AND ENGAGE OUR AUDIENCES AND COMMUNITIES

Audience Engagement

Autumn Season Marketing

Our Marketing efforts can be viewed across three tiers of campaigns:

- Barbican Brand Campaigns
- Themed Campaigns, based on audience needs / motivations or seasons
- Event specific Campaigns

At the Seasonal tier, throughout the Autumn period we are supporting three themes:

- The natural world/environment
- Fashion, sustainability and ethics
- Dystopia is not our Future

The aim of the Seasonal tier is to offer audiences a window into real-world topics, and encourage exploration into a range of content across art forms, as articulated in the Artistic Vision. Audiences can create their own journey and explore at their own pace, ranging from light touch to deep dive exploration. We are meeting people where they are at.

Audience Diversification

In August we welcomed visiting Australian Academics from Deakin University (Melbourne) on their research into how [arts orgs can lead change in diversifying their audiences](#).

Many of the Barbican team, members from the Corporation's Culture Strategy team, London Symphony Orchestra and Shakespeare's Globe joined us.

The workshop explored the 8 steps of change identified in the research and what leading or avoiding change behavior looks like.

The following were identified as key focus areas in order to implement our audience strategy:

- Researching audiences and their barriers to participation
- Programming being responsive to target audiences
- Undertaking evaluation and reflective practice
- Changing the organisations usual way of operating.

Barbican Residents Summer Party

The Director for Audiences alongside members of the Comms Team attended the Barbican Residents' Summer Party. The Centre had a stall where residents could find out more about our offer, and it was wonderful for us to continue growing our relationships and visibility within the local community. The response from residents was very positive and we enjoyed an opportunity to network and connect more deeply with those living closest to us.

Retail Highlights

July (Period 4) was a great month of trading in the Barbican Shop. We exceeded the period target by 14%. Average Transaction Values (ATV) were consistently higher than our target average over the period by 15%.

August (Period 5) was another strong month, achieving 97% of budget and again our ATV over the period was 10% higher than our target average.

Both our updated Kids collection and our Feel the Sound inspired offer performed very well over the summer. A selection of the Feel the Sound music inspired range will remain over the seasonal gifting period.

The team prepared for the re-opening of the Gallery, with a new range of products sourced and developed for Dirty Looks and seasonal gift deliveries are arriving thick and fast in advance of our biggest trading period over Q3. Please pop in and check them out!

And finally, we held our first retail Press Event on 4 September. Supported by the Comms Team, we invited selected press to come and preview products launching in both the Gallery Shop and Foyer Shop this A/W 2025. This should secure some press, with the goal of a feature in a Christmas Gift Guide.

Audience Feedback and Experience Insights

Feedback is critical to the success of our organisation, and we continue to welcome audience feedback through various channels.

During this reporting period, we received an average Welcome Score of 8/10 and a Net Promoter Score (NPS) of 45.5, indicating strong customer satisfaction. Themes impacting NPS are related to the condition of building amenities and public spaces, as well as service recovery when expectations are not met.

Of particular note are our Barbican Architecture Tours. Attendees scored the Barbican, on average, 9.2/10 for our Welcome and a very pleasing NPS score of 89.

During the previous reporting period (April–June), we recorded a Net Promoter Score (NPS) of 46.6 and an average welcome score of 8.1. These metrics have remained consistent in the subsequent period, with an NPS of 48.6 and the welcome score holding steady at 8.1.

FUEL CREATIVE AMBITION

Theatre

Throughout August *Goodnight, Oscar* continued to play to full houses and standing ovations and closed on 21 September. Following this is our own Autumn programming - *Lacrima* and *Rohtko* (Mainhouse), and in the Pit, an array of innovative small scale work - Dance Umbrella's double bill featuring work by

Australian and Spanish choreographers (plus dance programmes in the Hall and Cinema) Transpose Pit Party returns with an evening of music, performance and poetry by transgender artists; Prayers for a Hungry Ghost is a play that started life through our Open Lab artist development programme; and the year rounds off with a festive show for babies and their adults from Spain. Creative Collaborations will also be presenting a range of events in the Pit for two weeks in October.

2025 will end with the RSC's much-loved productions of *Wendy & Peter Pan* and *Twelfth Night*.

Working closely with the Renewal team, we are making preparations for the essential repair work and theatre closure period of mid-January 2026 until the end of April 2026.

Music

July was an exceptionally active month for Music with Serious Summer Jazz, a collaborative endeavour with Barbican, including 3x Herbie Hancock shows, a full classical season, including a knock-out *Salome* from the LSO (5x 5-star reviews) and culminating in a sell-out CBSO/Orchestral Qawaali with Abi Sampa show, shared by the Mayor of London on his instagram account.

The hall was closed in August for thorough-going maintenance while our artistic associates performed at the Proms and other major summer festivals, and opened again for Ganavya, the fast-rising Indian vocalist and a string of high-profile guests, who attracted a notably broad audience in age, gender and ethnicity.

A vibrant contemporary programme ranged widely over September from the indigenous Australian Hand to Earth collective with Shabaka Hutchins to Balimaya Project's new collaboration with the Columbian group Discos Pacifico All Stars: Balimaya Project is a great example of artists who we have nurtured over several years of their creative development, and this is their first international collaboration.

The Classical programme hosts the Kanneh-Mason family for a talk and concert in support of Music Masters, the charity dedicated to helping children from a global majority background into instrumental training. Our Fragile Earth season kicked off with Anna Meredith's dazzling VA show, ANNO, with the Scottish Ensemble.

Creative Collaboration

Through the summer Creative Collaboration engaged with school students, communities and new audiences to the Barbican collaborating with an eclectic range of artists, facilitators and colleagues.

Schools

We welcomed City of London Academy Highbury Grove secondary school students for a week-long creative careers work experience programme. Students had the opportunity to work as Arts Gallery Invigilators and as Theatre Front of House

alongside learning about various roles across the centre. 70% of students agreed with the statement “I am more interested in pursuing a career in the creative industries,” We also welcomed students from the Sydney Russell School who took part in Backstage Tour sessions, led by the Barbican Theatre production team.

Young Creatives

Barbican Young Poets, had the opportunity to record selected poems of the upcoming Barbican Young Poets anthology, working in partnership with Audible sound engineers, producers and voice directors in the second year of this partnership.

Communities

Play Make Do - Family Intergenerational Festival

July and August delivered ‘*Play, Make, Do* families Festival, building on our exhibition and public program in summer ‘24 *Our Street*. This year activities took place across the centre for three weeks including Father and Daughters ‘Fiddler on the Roof’ Drama Workshop to Animation Film and Drama Camps for young people, Tai Chi on the Lakeside to Assemble Play Works: Colour Forest, Queer Folk: Family Ceilidh Dance Party to Circus Flavours Aerial performances and workshops in the conservatory with Upswing.

Public Program

In July we also kicked off our monthly Young Barbican members offer with Pick & Mix: Beginnings curated by 3 Barbican Young Film Programmers and attended by 140 audience members followed by social /networking event. In August we hosted Shai Space Listening Session with Kojay & Jianbo in the Rebel Radio Listening Hub. And in September we hosted Master Classes with Hand to Earth collaborating with our colleagues in Music.

The Rebel Radio Hub engaged audiences throughout the summer in listening to our podcasts series Gaps in the Dial, recordings of the Rerezent radio broadcasts, talks series and selective archive material while sharing their precious memories of pirate radio good times with us.

Barbican Immersive

Feel The Sound closed over the last weekend in August with a live activation hosted in the car parks with dancers and DJs as part of the Temporary Pleasure *Joyride* installation. Use of the car parks has been praised for opening up new spaces and

possibilities at the centre. This is something that we will be looking to continue with the future programming in 2026.

In Pursuit of Repetitive Beats, the Virtual Reality experience hosted in the Pit has been a critical success and sold out from the second week in July. This was the premiere of the multi-player version of this work that will then go on to tour.

The Immersive touring programme continues to engage significant international audiences. *AI: More than Human*, which has just closed in Miami at the Frost Science Centre, where it has been seen by more than 170,000 visitors. *Asian Comics: Evolution of an Art Form* continues to delight audiences at the Museum of Pop Culture in Seattle where the current running total of visitors is 70,000 and it will be on until January 2026. *Game On* is confirmed to travel to Tampere Hall in Finland for summer 2026.

Visual Arts

On 3 September 'Encounters: Giacometti x Mona Hatoum' opened in our Level 2 space to critical acclaim. The second in a series of three exhibitions from three women artists responding to the sculptures of the Swiss master Alberto Giacometti, it continued to receive notable coverage in the lead up to and following opening day. In a review by The Guardian's Jonathan Jones it received 5* and was described as "a meeting of marvellously macabre minds". The first stage of Barbican Renewal has now been completed in the Art Gallery, where the Autumn exhibition 'Dirty Looks: Desire and Decay in Fashion' opened to the public on 25 September.

The Curve will open 'Lucy Raven: Rounds' on 9 October. In Los Angeles, the 'Noah Davis' exhibition has closed at the Hammer Museum where it has been seen by 37,000 visitors. It will now be stored securely before being installed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in January 2026. 'Beatriz Gonzalez' which has been co-produced with the Pinacoteca in Sao Paulo opened there on 30 August ahead of opening at the Barbican in February 2026.

Cinema

Barbican Outdoor Cinema, reached 98% of the capacity. Mastercard returned as the sponsor and Barbican Bars team delivered an expanded offer, driving further income generation and enhanced experience for the audience. The Cinema Restored series sold well and highlighted the importance of preservation and showcased rarely seen works, with several screenings accompanied by expert introductions that were well received.

The special screening of *Penda's Fen* in September was a standout event, drawing a full house. The post-screening ScreenTalk with actor Spencer Banks and writer Ian Greaves generated thoughtful discussion and positive audience feedback,

demonstrating the value of one-off events focused on landmark British film and television.

We hosted a sold-out preview screening of *Steve* followed by a ScreenTalk in Cinema 1 in partnership with Netflix. The ScreenTalk with Tim Mielants, Cillian Murphy, Max Porter and stars Tracey Ullman and Jay Lycurgo was a wide-ranging conversation about collaboration, improvisation and creating work dedicated to the teachers and public workers that inspire us.

From June-July we travelled back to the Queer 70s, when, in the decade following the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York, LGBTQ+ lives were shown on screen with an unapologetic gusto unthinkable a decade before.

The season embraced a variety of genres, from comedy, melodrama and experimental, to a Roman epic with rarely screened movies from Australia, Belgium, India, Japan, the Netherlands, UK and the USA. Many of the screenings sold out, including our opening night Barbara Hammer extravaganza, sponsored by Queer Brewing, and an stage post-screening Q&A with 85-year-old Nouchka van Brakel, the director of *A Woman Like Eve*, who travelled from Amsterdam, with support from the Dutch Embassy.

Our regular strand celebrating brilliant filmmakers who deserve to far better known by UK audiences, Hidden Figures, continued with one of our most successful yet, a selection of films by exploitation filmmaker Stephanie Rothman, who brought a feminist eye to grindhouse cinema. This included new restorations of her films, showing in the UK for the first time.

The programme saw multiple sold out screenings, including two Q&A events with Rothman, now 88, herself. The season received substantial press attention, including articles and interviews in *The Guardian*, *Sight & Sound*, *aNother* magazine and BBC Radio London.

Gabriela Yiaxis, costume designer of *The Ballad of Wallis Island*, joined us for a ScreenTalk with Rógan Graham for our jam-packed free Senior Community Screening. Gabriela brought in her sketches and entertained with stories of shrinking cardigans and trying to dry many wet suits. The event introduced many new members of the community to Barbican cinema.

As part of the wider cross-arts programme of Barbican events exploring humanity's relationship with the natural world, we kicked off a season of Japanese monster movies with two sold out screenings of Godzilla films in our largest cinema for *All Kaiju Attack: Earth SOS!* The audiences included many families, keen to take advantage of the rare opportunity to see these films on the big screening, in their original Japanese with English subtitles. The season continues throughout the rest of 2026, with introductions by kaiju experts, artists and film historians.

BUILD AN ENTERPRISING BUSINESS

Business Events

Since July 2025, the business events sales team have handled enquiries worth over £10.5m, of that £6.6m of this was in room hire. Included in the £10.5m are enquiries for 25/26, 26/27 and 27/28, however, due to lack of availability or Barbican Renewal, we had to refuse £875k. Where possible, we referred this business to other City of London venues.

Over recent months, we have seen an increase in the number of enquiries for filming and photography: from July, we have received £125k worth of enquiries for filming and photography, for projects with the BBC, ITV and British Vogue. In August and September, we hosted photoshoots with String Furniture, ASOS and New Balance.

The sales team have also converted over £953k since July for events taking place in July 2025 through to July 2027, including repeat bookers such as Product Con, Overbury, talks with Fane Production and graduations. Our pipeline for the remainder of 25/26 looks strong. We have a healthy Q4 in 2025, with October being one of our busiest months of the year and the team will now focus on driving business into the months of January, February and March 2026. In addition to our inbound enquiries, the sales team attended M&I Forum in August: a forum where we meet buyers from UK and European event agencies. The team met with American Express, BCD Meetings & Events and Strata Group (to name a few).

We delivered 37 Business Events delivered during July, a record number.

15 of these events took place in the Barbican Hall, including 13 graduation events, welcoming over 26000 visitors to the Barbican,. We welcomed Overbury (the UK's leading office fit out specialists) for the first time in the Barbican Hall, successfully delivering their event and securing a rebooking for next year.

We also hosted the European Premiere of Disney+ 'Alien Earth'. This event commenced on the Sculpture Court, with Episode 1 screening in Cinema 1 and an after-show party in the Garden Room and Conservatory. These spaces were transformed into a futuristic, Dystopian world for the audience of 280 people and it was featured on Instagram, ahead of its release.

September saw us hosting the World Design Congress, and this month sees the return of Opticon and Playgrounds: In Motion Festival to name but a couple of highlights.

Commercial Development (Restaurants/Bars/Car Parks)

Catering

Our restaurants ended summer, with commission income 7% above budget year to date as of the end of August, Both the Barbican Kitchen and Bar and Grill had record sales in July.

This October, Benugo is teaming up with Darbar and award-winning Indian fusion restaurant Jikoni and chef, Ravinder Bhogal, for a festival takeover of the Barbican Kitchen. Together, we are crafting a bespoke menu to complement the week-long celebration of music and culture. It is the first time the Barbican has partnered so

closely with a music festival to create a tailored food experience, designed with the audience in mind.

Bars

July was steady overall, with *Fiddler on the Roof* in the Theatre bringing an interval but not a strong drinking crowd. On the other hand, the hot summer weather drove excellent results in our destination bars, with guests flocking to the Lakeside for cold beers and cocktails.

Good Night, Oscar did not generate much secondary spend at the bars, as it had no interval and guests tended not to stay for drinks afterwards. However, Outdoor Cinema generated £40k in revenue with a 51% contribution. The food offer proved very popular, and we are already planning to widen the range for next year. A decision was also made to open the Conservatory bar exclusively for Outdoor Cinema daytime service (12–5pm), with both the bar and coffee point performing very well. Alongside this, we ran a successful trial of a new POS (Point of Sale) system during Outdoor Cinema. Negotiations are now underway to secure terms that will deliver a reliable offline-ready POS, as well as integration opportunities for scanning, loyalty, and improved performance tracking for both Marketing and Membership.

As we enter the busier autumn season, Hall events have begun to lift activity across performance bars and destination bars are again proving popular, particularly the Martini bar. The cinemas are also expected to see stronger performance in the coming months, driving additional secondary spend.

Car Parks

Car Park 5 reopened to customers on 15th September, following our *Feel The Sound* installation. The extended closure has had a noticeable financial impact, particularly on hourly drive-up income. During peak periods, such as graduation ceremonies and combined Hall & Theatre performances, some customers were turned away due to capacity constraints. A detailed analysis of the financial and operational implications of closing the car park for such a prolonged period is currently underway.

The EV chargers in Car Park 3 will be permanently decommissioned imminently due to fire safety concerns. The installation of replacement income-generating EV chargers will be delayed until fire safety infrastructure improvements are completed. These upgrades are now expected to be incorporated into the Barbican Renewal programme.

Development

In August, we successfully delivered the second year of our *Outdoor Cinema Partnerships* with Mastercard and Culture Mile BID. We are grateful for their ongoing commitment to enriching arts and culture in the Square Mile.

Bank of America, Macfarlanes, and Standard Chartered have renewed their Corporate Memberships. We look forward to engaging their teams in the rich and diverse Barbican programme over the coming year.

Audible has renewed its support for *Barbican Young Poets* for a second year. This continued partnership will enable more emerging writers to develop their craft and build sustainable creative careers.

Over the summer we welcomed new members to the Beatriz González Exhibition Circle and further donations in support of Encounters x Giacometti. SHM Foundation have continued their generous support of the Barbican, including a dedicated grant towards our commissioning strand for work by Global Majority composers. We were also thrilled to receive renewed support from the CHK Foundation with a 3-year pledge towards our backstage programme for schools.

Organisational Efficiency, Data and Knowledge

There are several updates to actions within this programme, including:

Embed digital ways of working

Since completing a SharePoint migration project earlier this year, ensuring appropriate comms and conducting barbican-wide training sessions,

we are evaluating the full Microsoft Copilot AI product. Staff have the opportunity to attend City AI-week presentations and training sessions, understanding that the use of Generative AI tools can deliver significant administrative operational efficiencies to businesses.

IT alignment with the City of London

We continue to align our systems, policies and processes where appropriate, examples being the imminent implementation of the 24/7 Security operations Centre cyber monitoring service. We are also in conversations with the City Enterprise architecture team and are included in their ‘Future network’ project discussions, assessing how we can align our network topologies moving forward.

We’ve also just completed our laptop rollout to the business, distributing nearly 500 new laptops to staff, deploying the HP devices the entire corporation agreed upon, allowing for significant cost efficiencies due to purchasing at scale. This allowed all City departments and institutions to provide high performance, feature-rich and future-proof devices to all of our colleagues.

REVITALISE OUR PLACE

Barbican Renewal

The Planning application for the first phase of Barbican Renewal capital works was submitted on programme in July 2025. This was validated by the City of London Planning Department in August, with public consultation taking place from 1-28 September. We are expecting the application to be determined in October 2025. Supportive letters have been received from Historic England and the 20th Century Society, who are statutory consultees for the application.

RIBA Stage 4 (Technical Design) has begun on the major projects due for delivery up to 2030 (Conservatory, Foyers, Lakeside, Catering Block, infrastructure) and this design stage remains on programme for completion in May 2026.

Project Management consultants Gardiner & Theobald continue to develop the master programme for the delivery of Renewal works up to 2030. This programme development work has involved consultation with Barbican Centre internal departments and key stakeholders, with the master programme on track to be finalised by December 2025.

The Barbican Centre has recently been classified as a Higher Risk Building (HRB) under the Building Safety Act. This is currently our biggest risk, currently being mitigated and projected to be manageable within existing budgets and programme.

The soft market testing exercise exploring potential future uses of the Exhibition Halls closed on 1 September, with 20 expressions of interest questionnaire submissions received. These submissions are currently being reviewed by the Barbican, City Surveyor and Chamberlain's departments to assess the social, commercial and environmental impact of different options, within the strategic contexts of the Barbican, the City Corporation and the cultural quarter, before a recommendation on next steps is made to Members.

WORKING IN LINE WITH OUR VALUES

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

The six-monthly EDI strategy update was submitted as part of the People, Culture and Inclusion Subcommittee of the Barbican Board in July. For more information and updates on this, please see previous PCI committee papers, or visit our website for headlines EDI Updates | Barbican.

In the last period, as part of our action plan, we have:

- completed our first pay gap reports for gender, ethnicity and disability (applicable to the last available data snapshot - 31 March 2024).. The headlines of the report will be published alongside an action plan to all staff in the next month
- completed the final in-person sessions for our anti-racism training programme, having trained just under 500 staff including leadership and Board members.

We are currently piloting the final stage which is an online learning module that will run for the coming year or so

- finalised and are about to launch reasonable adjustments guidance for staff and line managers
- managed an increase in active users of our Headspace (meditation) app membership offer to 250. The top courses used by staff here are prioritisation, letting go of stress, and managing financial stress
- worked alongside the Renewal team to support the public consultation and associated access advisory group
- worked with the City of London Corporation EEDI team in the development of the new EEDI strategic framework.

Staff Culture Engagement and Wellbeing

On 31 July, we launched 'The Barbican Way: Values and Behaviours' as part of the inaugural Barbican Awards. This marks a significant milestone in our cultural transformation journey. Colleagues nominated peers across the organisation that exemplify our Values and Behaviours. An impressive 106 nominations were received, reflecting the dedication, creativity, and collaborative spirit of our teams. Awards were presented in alignment with our five values, showcasing the real impact of our people and the culture we are building together.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Financial implications – within report

Resource implications – within report

Legal implications – within report

Risk implications – within report

Equalities implications – within report

Climate implications – none

Security implications – within report

Appendices

None

David Farnsworth, Interim CEO, Barbican Centre