

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee(s): Barbican Centre Board - For Information	Dated: 28 January 2026
Subject: Public 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?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of:	David Farnsworth, Interim CEO
Report author:	David Farnsworth, Interim CEO

Summary

Below is a summary of activity across our Strategic Framework and Shared Goals for Q3 2025/6.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to note the report.

Main Report

EXCITE AND ENGAGE OUR AUDIENCES AND COMMUNITIES

Audience Experience

Customer Conversations - Best Practice Guide

We've introduced a new Best Practice guide to help our teams manage challenging customer interactions with confidence and care. This ensures a more consistent, understanding-led approach across our organisation.

At its heart is our new, tiered "Calm First, Call In, Call Out" model, which clarifies how our Zero Tolerance framework applies in practice and provides transparency on the process of dealing with incidents on the ground. This work responds to feedback from front facing teams and from our audiences and is now active.

Retail: Seasonal gifting - Q3 to date

Seasonal trade in the Foyer Shop during the third quarter is hugely important, delivering approximately 30% of total sales for the year. We are currently ahead of budget both for the quarter and year to date.

This is the busiest period for our shop as sales increase with seasonal gift purchases. A successful discount campaign over the Black Friday period helped to drive sales and increased this period's income year on year. Digital footfall to the online shop trebled month on month in November.

The Barbican Book (working title)

Our retail book buyer has been working on an in-house publishing project to revamp and update a bestselling but very out of date Barbican book; Barbican: Life, History Architecture.

The brand-new book will focus not only on the Architecture but also on the spaces within the Centre, all the creative experiences we host, and the perspective of both the people who make it happen, and those who visit. There will also be a section that focuses on Renewal, and this section will be updated in future print runs of the book. We hope it will become the definitive guide for all visitors to the Centre.

The commissioned Writers are currently working on first drafts, and the designer and editor are researching archival images from each Barbican department, art form and venue. The current timeline for publication is October 2026.

Audience Engagement

Winter/Festive Campaign

Our Winter/Festive campaign drove over 600 new members and over £40K in membership fees.

Winter programme highlights included our big 'always-on' events (*Dirty Looks, Encounters: Giacometti*) ongoing thematic programming (*Fragile Earth* concert series) and seasonal programme for a broad audience (*Twelfth Night, Wicked for Good*).

FUEL CREATIVE AMBITION

Music

The Barbican Music programme presented a raft of premieres in this period, that signalled the new direction of the Classical music programme away from traditional programming and towards wider representation, staged presentations and contemporary relevance.

These included including Bushra El-Turk's new opera *Oum* Les Arts Florissants/Compagnie Amala Dianor's *Gesualdo Passion* and the new *Liminal* series, featuring commissioned new work by Catherine Lamb, Blasio Kavuma and Jasmine Morris.

The most extensive and well-attended Darbar Festival yet celebrated 20 years, and featured tributes to Zakhar Hussein and a new collaboration with Jikoni restaurant.

EFG London Jazz Festival 2025 at the Barbican had a focus on talent development, with a 20th anniversary celebration of the Take Five scheme, featuring Shabaka and Camila George, and legendary artists from the Japanese jazz scene, including singer Akiko Yano and extraordinary 80-year-old drummer Takeo Moriyama. The young US performance poet Aja Monet was artist in residence, and Serious's Jazz Social beside Milton Court made the Barbican a natural hub for the whole festival. Both weekends featured hugely popular free stage events in the foyer.

The Fragile Earth concert series included two iterations of the live installation (due to popular demand) by Louis VI *Nature ain't a luxury* in the Conservatory.

A highlight of the season was Sir Simon Rattle's Bavarian RSO, who offered a highly revealing rehearsal to our Music patrons in the afternoon.

In December, we partnered with non-classical for a night honouring the pioneering female electronics artist Daphne Oram with a line-up of outstanding contemporary experimental artists and brought in Ute Lemper for a brilliant memoir show.

Renewal works in the Hall and Back Stage are now a priority, and we are liaising closely with the LSO on all aspects of instrument storage, fire safety and improvements to the backstage area, planned for the closure period.

There have been three visits to different audio providers this season (Meier, D&B and L-Acoustics) from technical and programme staff for research and pilot projects as we move towards a new PA for the Hall.

Theatre

We welcomed two new leading, European directors to our main stage this autumn; Caroline Guiela Nguyen and Lukas Twarkowski, with their productions, *Lacrima* and *Rothko*. Another highlight was *Univers* from Spain, for tiny babies and their adults. The RSC began their winter residency with *Wendy and Peter Pan* and their second show this year is a festive *Twelfth Night*, plays until mid-January.

Our spring season of immersive shows *Scene Change* lands, in and around the Barbican, from January to April 2026.

Creative Collaboration

Schools

Our Conservatory Workshop program engaged six state schools - Turnham Academy, Invicta Primary School, Kings Cross Academy, Underhill Primary, City of London Highbury Grove, and SEND school Christ the King and the Courtyard. With an offer of 'Conservation Creatures' and 'Eco-Poetry' workshops.

During the October half term, we offered drama and film holiday camps for young people aged 11–16. We closed the year with backstage tours in collaboration with our technical colleagues in the music team.

Young Creatives

In addition to our Young Poets and Young Film programmers we have offered events and activities for the wider Young Barbican membership as pilots for a future wider offer. This has included *Wicked: For Good* Cabaret and spoken word masterclass session with poet, lyricist and activist Aja Monet as part of the EFG London Jazz Festival curated by Serious.

Public Program

During autumn we have delivered three programs programmed for key underserved audiences.

Voiced: Festival for Endangered Languages, co-curated with artist Sam Winston and poet Chris McCabe, featured a beautiful exhibition in Level G Hub; community workshops with leading poets and artists; a three-day spoken word and music performance programme in the Pit and listening trail by sound artist Jamie Perera which was heard 6,630 times over the month.

Black British Book Festival returned for a second year. The festival platforms a wide spectrum of voices, from leading Black intellectuals to popular cultural figures and emerging artists. 3000 visitors attended. Headline sessions tackled urgent themes such as reparations, identity, and resistance, featuring thought leaders like Kehinde Andrews, Dr Shola Mos-Shogbamimu, and Dawn Butler MP. These were complemented by conversations with household names including Sir Lenny Henry, June Sarpong OBE, Tabitha Brown, Jordan Stephens, and Oti Mabuse, bridging academic discourse with mainstream appeal.

Dirty Weekend takeover explored ideas of sex, sweat, protest, and pleasure through performances, talks, screenings, live art, and late-night club energy inspired by Dirty Looks. Events presented in collaboration with fashion designers Sinead O'Dwyer and Di Petsa, Club Stamina and Howl. The weekend attracted 5000 visitors.

Cinema

Highlights have included our sold-out *Experiments in Film* screening of *The Cinema of Peter Hutton*, introduced by filmmaker Daniel Owusu, and sell outs of all fifteen screenings during our annual *Family Film Week* (filling the Centre with Parents, Caregivers and Young People over half term).

Highlights of this engaging seven days of films, games, and activities included a screening of the big screen adaptation of Julia Donaldson's beloved book *Zog*, accompanied by a nursery rhyme and storybook session led by Barbican Children's Librarian, Adenike Johnson; a screening of the nostalgia classic *E.T. The Extra Terrestrial*, with a lively introduction by our own Families curator Susie Evans to an attentive audience that demonstrated the interest from our audiences for more programming for those 5+; and a screening of *Son of Godzilla* - a crossover event with our *All Kaiju Attack - Earth SOS!* series - followed by an origami making session in the foyer.

Prestige season began in earnest in Autumn, and continues steadily, with awards-contenders bringing increased audiences. We exceeded our October revenue goal by 38% and November goal by 12% - boosted in part by our 35mm run of Yorgos Lanthimos' *Bugonia*, the Barbican being one of three locations in London presenting the film on celluloid.

Guests for our ScreenTalks series have included George Clooney, Adam Sandler and Noah Baumbach (*Jay Kelly*); Laura Dern and Will Arnett (*Is This Thing On?*); Kathryn Bigelow and Rebecca Ferguson (*A House of Dynamite*); Lucile Hadjihalilović (*The Ice Tower*); Ira Sachs and Ben Wishaw (*Peter Hujar's Day*), to name a few.

We also celebrated alongside valued partners who call the Barbican home, welcoming the *London Palestine Film Festival* for their 36th year, *Doc'n Roll* hosted five marquee events during their 12th annual festival, the EFG Jazz Festival hosted three films in the cinema alongside presentations of music and talks across the Centre, and the *London International Animation Festival* returned to the Barbican to celebrate their 22nd year.

Barbican Immersive

Barbican Immersive announced *In Other Worlds*, the first UK solo exhibition by artist, director and BAFTA-nominated producer Liam Young, opening May 2026.

Following the 3-month run at the Barbican, the exhibition will tour internationally and discussions with partner venues are underway.

The inaugural Shift Salon conference, created by the BI Barbican team, took place in the Centre in October. The event convened 50 international cultural leaders from major institutions including the V&A, Serpentine Galleries, Southbank Centre, Royal Shakespeare Company, Qatar Museums, the New Museum, ACMI and Google Arts & Culture. The Shift Salon provided a focused space for private discussion between cultural leaders responsible for commissioning and programming art and legacy venues. A report capturing the key themes will be published in early 2026.

Across touring, *Asian Comics: Evolution of an Artform* is finishing its run at the Museum of Pop Culture (MoPOP) in Seattle in January 2026, having welcomed over 120,500 visitors as of November 2025. The Exhibition was featured in Forbes, describing it as “a deep dive into a rich visual culture” and highlighting how the show “reveals the depth and diversity of Asian graphic storytelling traditions often overlooked in the West.” We are finalising the next North American venue for September 2026.

Visual Arts

On 28 November, Mona Hatoum delivered an artist talk to a sold-out audience in Frobisher Auditorium 2. The talk was an overview of her practice, and she also spoke especially about works in the *Encounters: Giacometti x Mona Hatoum* exhibition and new pieces that were made in response to Giacometti.

As part of the public programme for *Lucy Raven: Rounds*, two film screenings were organised in collaboration with Cinema: *Figures in a Landscape* (8 December) and Lucy Raven's *China Town* + Jean Luc Godard's *Opération Béton* (5 December).

On the 10th December we held a panel discussion expanding on the themes of Dirty Looks, with fashion historian Caroline Evans, artist and archivist Alice Gomme, writer Eilidh Duffy, researcher and photographer Ellen Sampson and stylist and writer Max Pearmain.

On 11th December, Tim Ronalds joined as a speaker as part of our Architecture on Stage series. Ronalds founded Tim Ronalds Architecture, the studio that completed the restoration of the Hackney Empire in 2004 and recently completed Bradford Live.

Exhibition openings 2026

The Visual Arts team are pleased to be opening three exhibitions across January and February 2026.

Starting with our Curve commission, Julia Phillips: *Inside, Before They Speak*, opening on 30 January. Following this will be our final iteration of the *Encounters* series with artist Lynda Benglis, running 12 February - 31 May 2026. Our retrospective of Beatriz González opens on 25 February 2026.

Touring

Noah Davis will run at Philadelphia Museum of Art, its fourth and final venue, between January and April 2026.

BUILD AN ENTERPRISING BUSINESS

Business Events - Strike rate, Events, Pipeline

During Q3, 16 events were delivered in the Barbican Hall - graduation ceremonies (6), the ITV Palooza 2025, the broadcasters annual media event during their 70th year showcasing upcoming shows and new ad tech, attended by many ITV celebrities. In conversation talks with Fane (7), which included Annie Leibovitz and David Olosoga. A further 76 events were delivered - including eleven Christmas parties and repeat client events. New clients included Jimmy Choo (spring and summer photoshoot) and the launch event for the Download Festival.

The business events sales team have handled enquiries worth over £16.5m worth of enquiries, including £7.5m of room hire. Enquiries extend to 30/31. Of the £16.5m, we had to refuse £2.7m due to lack of availability or due to the size of the event.

The sales team have converted over £1.7m since September for events taking place in November 2025 through to December 2026. As we get closer to the end of the

financial year, our pipeline is focussed on Q1 of 2026 and with good availability in January, February and March, we are on track to reach the stretched target of £5M.

The sales team attended the Buyers Networking Club (national trade fair focussing on UK agencies and corporate event bookers) and with London & Partners attended IMEX in Las Vegas and IBTM in Barcelona. These shows combined generated £2.6m worth of enquiries, with most of these for 2027 onwards.

Commercial Development (Restaurants/Bars/Car Parks)

Catering

A key highlight was the October collaboration between Benugo, Darbar, and award-winning Indian fusion restaurant Jikoni, led by chef Ravinder Bhogal. This partnership introduced a bespoke menu designed to complement the week-long festival. The initiative generated very positive feedback from visitors and partners, and reinforcing our ability to innovate and align food offerings with cultural programming, providing a potential model for future collaborations.

Development

We are delighted to share that Slaughter and May will be renewing their Corporate Membership, marking an extraordinary 25 years of continuous support. This represents a remarkable long-term commitment to the Barbican and a dedication to championing the arts within the Square Mile. We look forward to celebrating this anniversary with the Slaughter and May team throughout the coming year.

We are also pleased to confirm the renewal of Corporate Memberships from Bolt Burdon Kemp and AIG. Their continued partnership is greatly valued, and we look forward to engaging their colleagues with our ambitious and inspiring 2026 artistic programme.

These renewals reflect strong confidence in our work and the enduring value of our corporate partnerships.

This year has also seen a record level of support from individual philanthropists, with the visual arts programme, and particularly the commissioning of new work, proving especially appealing to donors. The team has delivered some memorable events for Patrons over the autumn/winter months, helping to strengthen relationships and deepen engagement.

Events have included a special Family Day (with a backstage tour, food & goodie bags) for *Wendy & Peter Pan*, several private curator tours of *Encounters: Giacometti x*

Mona Hatoum and *Dirty Looks*, and an Open Rehearsal with Sir Simon Rattle and the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra which inspired an additional gift from one Patron.

REVITALISE OUR PLACE

Barbican Renewal moves ahead at pace, with RIBA stage 4 design progressing well, an initial Wayfinding strategy submitted, and a procurement strategy drafted for delivering the major capital works.

Critically, in December the City of London Corporation approved a delivery programme for phase 1 (2025-30) which will see the majority of major, disruptive infrastructure and fabric works consolidated into a twelve month period (June 2028-June 2029), during which activity will be paused across much of the Centre, excluding Cinemas 2 and 3.

Work to prepare all the necessary documentation for the Building Safety Regulator continues, following our classification as a Higher Risk Building.

A Health and Safety Report was submitted to the Finance and Risk Committee in November outlining our current status and progress in this area. This report highlighted several positive steps that have been taken to improve our operations and management of the building. However, there is still much work to be done to ensure we achieve best practice, and investment will be required to provide the resource needed to implement these changes.

Our Q3 Sustainability report showed an enormous increase in activity in driving towards our net zero targets and supporting the ambitions of the Corporation to reach net zero by 2040. A number of initiatives have been proposed or implemented, including better management of waste to ensure recycling targets are improved, and investment in LED lighting in areas that have yet to make the switch. Funds were secured to undertake a study of our risk around climate change, and we continue to attend and present at key events, sharing knowledge and learning from peers facing similar challenges.

INVEST IN OUR PEOPLE AND CULTURE

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI)

The People, Culture & Inclusion (PCI) Committee received the full EDI Strategy Progress report in December 2025. The report highlights the considerable progress made in under three years and the fact that EDI risk levels have now decreased.

26 competencies of 35 have been achieved with all 35 likely to be met by the end of 2027, providing relevant process and projects have been implemented. We continue to work closely with the Corporation to collaborate on these key interdependencies.

The full report, which provides the annual update on the Barbican's EDI Strategy and its associated action plans, is available on the Corporation of London website.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications – within report

Financial implications - none

Resource implications – none

Legal implications – none

Risk implications - none

Equalities implications – none

Climate implications – within report

Security implications – within report

Appendices

None

David Farnsworth

Interim CEO, Barbican Centre