

RESIDENTS CONSULTATION COMMITTEE (RCC) 2 SEPTEMBER 2013 – PRE COMMITTEE QUESTIONS RAISED BY RCC MEMBERS

June BRC - Question relating to Residential Rent Review

Q. Clarification of the rationale behind the CoL rent increases, an explanation of why on this occasion the increase seems so large and the anticipated intervals between rent review increases - whether every year, every two years etc.

A. The City of London assesses rental levels each year, but residents are given three year rental agreements with the option to renew for a further three years.

Therefore any resident renewing their lease from July 2013 would have been subject to increases that occurred in 2011, 2012 and 2013.

These were 6.8 %, 8.2% and 6.3 % respectively (a compound increase of 22.8%).

Please note that the Barbican Estate is not within the Housing Revenue Account. The City has sought legal opinion as to the appropriate rental level to charge. The response has been that the City must charge market rental levels. Therefore our consultants assess the market rental levels for our flats on the basis that they are let unfurnished, un modernised for a three year period with the option to renew for a further three years.

Page 41 of papers – Background Underfloor Heating

Q. How much is our electric background heating bill likely to rise if we stick with the current regime?

A. Too early to say.

Q. What alternatives do we consider viable, and how far progressed are they?

A. The Working Party will look at this.

Q. How much do we anticipate bills changing for each alternative?

A. The Working Party will look at this.

Q. p41 para 6 : The paragraph refers to "potential for increased tariffs and/or reduced operating time". The balance between these two

possibilities isn't mentioned again in the paper. How is it proposed that the balance will be determined?

A. This will be determined as part of the tender process.

Q. p43 para 19 & 21 : If the new supply contract is assumed to begin in January 2014, working back from this date and allowing for everything that needs to happen before the chosen supplier signs a finalised contract and begins supply, on what date does the request for tender that will be sent out need to be finalised? (Related to this: What work has been done so far on this? What will the working party's involvement be?)

A. Negotiations are taking place and it is likely the existing contract will be extended to April/May 2014. This being the end of the underfloor heating season, a new contract will need to be in place by the start of the new heating season in October 2014.

Q. p43 para 18 & 24 : We need an indication of the increase in costs that para 18 would imply.

A. Too early to say.

Q. We understand that this can only be illustrative, but it is important to understand the likely cost impact and it also has implications for decision-making (decisions such as how much priority should be given to speed when assessing alternative solutions to the long-term issue, or what consideration to give to reduced operating times per para 6). For example, an estimate of the increase in costs likely to result from a new supplier might begin as follows: (a) what percentage higher are day unit rates typically, compared to off peak rates, for large consumers?; (b) if we kept the same total number of hours across charging periods, is the report saying that we would be likely to get 7 hours at off peak rates and the remaining 6 hours at day rates?; (c) from the answers to a and b, and an average current annual cost per flat of £850, an illustrative increase in cost can be calculated.

A. The Working Party will look at this.

Q. p43 para 21-23 : Projects such as this to "look at the ... long-term issues" can sometimes take a while. Is a target completion date going to be specified? Also, which RCC/BRC meeting is targeted to receive the report detailing the proposed scope and indicative costs for the consultants?

A. For the Working Party to determine but the aim is to get to November committee.

Q. p41 para 4 / p43 para 15 : The Cyclo-Control system is described as a 'control and switching system'. For those of us who don't know what this is, please could you explain (a) how important it is or isn't (and why), (b) how much risk there is of UKPN not being prepared to extend their maintenance end date again beyond March 2015 if we needed them to do so, and (c) how likely it seems so far that the alternative described in para 16 would work as an alternative (I appreciate that this is still being evaluated. The para seems to imply that there are likely to be only minor issues to resolve: is this a reasonable interpretation of the para?) Would switching to the alternative in para 16 be likely to have any significant cost implications for service charges that we should be concerned about?

*A. a) The cyclo control is an integral part of the control of the underfloor heating.
b) The risk is manageable at this stage and until March 2015.
c) Yes for the shorter term and whilst we evaluate more modern/appropriate controls for the future*

Page 67 of papers – Relationship of BRC Outturn Report to Service Charge Schedules

Q. Estate cleaners: Costs are up 17% (£113k) from last year (and are 11% above estimate). It is explained that costs are up due to more of cleaners' time being allocated to block cleaning and for cover for staff sickness.

Please could you explain these reasons in more detail. (Costs for demand led optional services are also mentioned, but this doesn't appear to be a factor in the increase, based on comparing costs allocated to Speed House against those a year ago, where there have been no optional services requested, and where the increase is also 17%.)

A. 54% of the increase in costs is due to staff long term sickness (more than 20 days). The remainder of the costs are due to cover for short term sickness and more of the cleaners' time being allocated to block cleaning.

Q. Resident engineers: Costs are down 11% from last year and it is explained that this is due to staff vacancy. But the estimate was even lower than this: why are costs 22% (£55k) above the estimate?

A. In the estimate for the year an allowance was made for time spent on other duties e.g. lifts or other estates. This was not the case.

Q. Technical supervision & management is a long way above estimate (57% i.e. £46k). It is explained that it is above last year's cost (14% above) because timesheet information showed that more time had been spent on general repairs and maintenance issues on the Barbican. I know it must be hard to break this down, but given how much higher the cost is than the estimate, are you able to name one or two key issues that they found they had to spend a lot more time on than had been expected?

A. It is difficult to break down the issues on which time was spent. R&M covers a vast array of duties. A high proportion of the technical recharge is based on the volume of orders for both Housing and Barbican. If the proportion of orders on the Barbican is higher, then the recharge will be higher. It is very much a demand led service but officers are looking into the way in which estimates are calculated. Should the RCC wish, we can also look into breaking down time spent into various areas relating to repairs.

Q. For costs that are allocated or recharged and so there are effectively some allocations between the service charge account and other accounts: Have any of these allocations between the service charge account and other accounts changed significantly? This could arise either from a change in methodology or from no change in methodology but just a change in percentage allocation where the percentage is based on timesheets or similar measures. Of course some allocations are bound to change, where they are based on timesheets or similar, but please could you highlight to us which changes in allocations (between service charge and not) are the most material to residents.

A. Most items are directly coded to the Service Charge Account or to other accounts. Within the service charge account the costs are coded either to the relevant blocks or estate wide. Generally the apportionments have not changed, e.g. it is still a third of the car park attendants costs that are charged to the Service Charge account. Also a lot of costs are directly charged to the block or estate wide e.g. repairs and maintenance costs.

Supervision and Management is still allocated on the basis of the cost of services to the block in comparison to the cost of services to the estate as a whole.

The allocation of Supervision and Management between the Service Charge Account and other accounts is broadly the same – in 2010/11 it was 40.17%, 2011/12 - 40.56% and 2012/13 - 42.04%.

What has changed following restructures in departments is the total S&M cost which has reduced by over £100k since 2010/11 and also the staff completing time sheets has changed. E.g. the accounts staff are now part of the Chamberlain's department and so are a recharge to the department rather than a direct cost.

Page 101 of papers – SLA Quarterly Review – April – June 2013

Q. Is it possible to ask the UBS building on Golden Lane to have its rubbish removed during office hours. At present it is taken away (very noisily) any time between 8.15pm and 10.15pm.

A. The Barbican Estate Office has previously spoken with UBS about their collection timings but we will speak with them again. They are within timings allowed by Environmental Health so we are relying on their goodwill.

Q. For the sake of the small birds, can we get rid of the hawk and find a way of removing the pigeons, who are not at all deterred by it - Ken Livingstone managed to rid Trafalgar Square of pigeons, surely we can.

A. The BEO currently takes the following actions:-

- Harris hawk is flown weekly*
- Netting and proofing to prevent nesting on roofs as required.*
- Every issue of Barbicanews has a request to not feed the wildlife.*

Unfortunately neighbouring properties do not all take similar measures. We have asked our contractor if there is anything further we can do.

Q. Would it be possible for messages be put in house lifts with the name and photograph of any agency CPAs or concierges who are being employed on a day basis so we, at least know them, even if they do not know us.

A. Agency/temporary staff are all provided with Barbican Estate name badges (which includes a photo). Temporary staff that are here for long periods will have their photos up on the noticeboards introducing them in the future.

Q. Can we please have plastic message displays in Breton House lifts. It was agreed that these would be in place six months ago.

A. There was a delay with the ordering and delivery of these. These have subsequently been delivered and installed.

Q. Can subtenants be made aware of the minimum standards of living in the Barbican when they take up short term lets? At present, for example,

sublet tenants are hanging out washing on their balconies, banging doors before 6 in the morning and leaving out rubbish at weekends.

A. Subtenants do not contract with the City. Rather the Long Lessee, so effectively their Landlord (the long lessee) should make them aware of Barbican standards. When sub tenants are registered they receive a Welcome Pack from the Barbican Estate Office. That being said, we put out regular reminders to register sub tenants and standards/etiquette expected from residents.

Page 109 of papers – Update Report

Q. When will tiling work on the podium begin again? It seems to have stalled over the summer. Is this a matter of the tiles being the wrong size? Or the result of the very hot summer breaking old tiles. An update would be useful.

A. JB Rineys, the City of London contractor have been working on a large area on Lauderdale Place this summer. This is coming to an end and they will be back working across the estate shortly. Areas are in the process of being prioritised. In the high temperatures, we have notices area “popping up” due to expansion. A tile size has been agreed as outlined in the “You said, we did” update.

Q. City of London Barbican Seating Questionnaire July 2013 sent out under the name of the Transportation and Public Realm Director. Residents ask if we might know the results of the above postal Questionnaire sent to our Barbican Estate apartments during June/ July 2013 and, if permissible, the data collected face to face, by interviewers, from members of the public on St Giles Terrace and Ben Jonson Highwalk during the summer months.

A. Streetscene Officers from the Department of Built Environment are still evaluating the responses – this will be reported to the October Street & Walkways Committee.

Q. Frobisher Crescent. Can we please have an update on the performance of the water/heating system including details of any outages which have occurred during the summer months? Can the City advise us on the arrangements for the on-going maintenance of our 'commercial' water/heating installation once the system has been formally handed over to the City which will only happen after a 'failure free' winter period?

A. Health checks have been taking place with 14 properties remaining due to non replying of the letters. These have been booked in for the check to be

carried out 9/10 September. There are some minor works to be carried out in some properties and this will take place 11/12 September. There have been no outages in the last two months.