

## Pre RCC Member QUESTIONS

For 24 November 2014 RCC

1. Q. What measures are being taken to control pigeons on the Estate? there seems to have been a huge increase in numbers recently with a flock well in excess of 80 birds (the point at which I stopped counting!) regularly flying around the church/Wallside/Mountjoy House/Barber Surgeons' Hall area  
**A. The Barbican Estate Office has a contract with a pest control company to both help control pigeon numbers throughout the year, and to discourage seagulls from nesting in the breeding season. The BEO spends over £8000 per annum on this.**
2. Q. From Frobisher Crescent House Group: We are expecting the 2014 annual heating/hot water health check to be done this autumn and the House Group has requested this be done before the CSD accepts the system. When will these health checks be done?  
**A. The BEO and Property Services are currently carrying out a tendering exercise for the Health Checks.**
3. Q. Water Penetration through a Flat Ceiling.

We are concerned about the relative slowness of attention to putting right the source of a water leak into a Gilbert flat. The time scale is below. We expect this is not a unique situation and we ask if steps can be taken to speed up the repair time if a leak is discovered but also to adopt a more regular inspection programme to prevent these predictable occurrences of water damage.

- Water penetration reported to Repairs by resident - 16th October.  
Metwin phone to arrange appointment - 17th October
- Metwin Inspector attends to view ceiling – 20th October and same day inspects possible sites of leak
- Resident receives letter dated 22nd Oct. stating that the 'the expansion joint on the roof needs to be re-sealed and also the expansion joint on the 7th floor balustrade will need replacing as well as the expansion joints on all other floors to be checked and re-sealed as necessary.'
- An undated letter from Property Services arrived shortly after this giving an order number, the name of the appointed Contractor and saying that the contractor has a target date to attend by 19th November - i.e. 4+weeks after Metwin identified the source of the water penetration.
- Monday 17th November - resident reports water is now dripping through the ceiling into a bucket.

This response time to put right the source of the damage is not considered to be satisfactory. We ask the BEO and PS what improvements can be made in

securing a contractor who can attend to repair the reported source of damage more speedily whenever water penetration is reported.

**A. We are always reviewing our processes and have already identified areas where we can work more efficiently. These reviews are driven by innovation from officers during their working week and of course customer feedback such as below. We have sat down and reviewed this case study and found that items 1, 2, and 3 were conducted in a timely manner, however item 3 through human error failed as this order should have been raised on a code 2 to be completed within 3 days. We have used this case study and turned it into a training issue which Property Services will take to the customer care centre team. We send our apologies to the resident and the House Chair and thank both parties in taking the time to send this feedback which allows us to train our staff in specifics which is more powerful than just ongoing training.**

4. Q. I would like clarification as to why, once again, Ben Jonson Estimated Final Roof Apportionment has been postponed.

**A. The issue is that there are a small number of contract instructions that do not have a cost against them. Whilst we know the original tender figure and the final account figure, we do not have full details of the difference. The issue is compounded by the fact that officers who worked on the project and the consultant who project managed are no longer with us. We are in touch with the Consultants practise to try and resolve the matter**

5. Q. I also hope Michael will be able to tell us the name of our new energy provider?

**A. For UFH – EDF Energy**

6. Q. Redecs. If procured for 3-5 years, how much flexibility will there be to allow a particular block's decoration to slip? At present, each block is assessed when it is due for redecoration. If the state of the block is good redecoration can be (and have been) deferred for one or more years. Will a 3-5 year contract preclude that? If it doesn't preclude that will we end up paying the contractor for doing less work than envisaged? Or can the BEO find something else for the contractors to maintain?

**A. The redecs contract will be flexible and will allow us to defer works subject to a condition survey**

7. Q. At first glance it looks as though procurement for 3-5 years is disproportionately expensive (Procurement for one year costs £123750. Procurement for 3-5 years costs well over five times that – i.e. up to £2.5m). This is presumably because the 3-5 year programme also includes works to address issues found by the water testing. But with no information on the likely works needed or their cost there is no way of evaluating whether this is

a better deal or not. Are there some historical costs for works needed (or estimates of works needed) by which this proposal can be assessed?

**A. Water testing and works - the report covers Housing and Barbican. We have estimated 40% of the works relate to the Barbican. The actual costs will be confirmed when we move to the next stage of the procurement process (Gateway 5)**

8. Q. Non Resident Long Leaseholder Issue.

In Gilbert House there is a flat which has been empty for at least seven years, during which time a neighbouring flat has suffered serious water penetration on two occasions. The water supply is now turned off. On both occasions the City's insurers agreed claims for major re-decoration.

The unoccupied flat has also been infested with moths and flies so badly that it had to be treated twice. And for some time the House Officer has visited regularly to pour water into the Garchey and toilet to prevent unpleasant smells penetrating to the corridor. Clearly this is an intolerable situation which creates unnecessary work and expense for the Estate as well as disrupting the lives of residents.

In these circumstances can the officers explain what sanctions can be applied by the City, under the terms of the lease, to compel owners of unoccupied flats to keep them in good repair and prevent causing nuisance to neighbours?

**A. The BEO is well aware of the flat in question. The first point would be that one of the leaks was caused by Landlords services. Any officer time spent in dealing particularly with this flat has been recharged to the Long Lessee in question and the BEO is in discussion with the Long Lessee. It has long been the policy of the BEO not to "police" our residents.**

9. Q. What are the current projected dates for completion for the hard landscaping and the soft landscaping works in Beech Gardens?

**A Feb/Mar 2015 and April/May 2015 respectively**

10. Q. I understand that there are standby electric generators for the tower block lifts in case the normal electricity supply is interrupted. The Barbican Centre also has its own generator which, apparently, failed when called into use recently. With respect to the residential generators: How many are there? How often are they serviced? How often are they tested?

**A. In total we have 10 Diesel Generators. General maintenance is carried out by our resident engineers on a bi monthly basis. This involves checking items such as belts, fuel, oil, battery levels, etc. and running the equipment up to temperature. We have also contracted a specialist company to attend once a year in order to carry out a more detailed examination of the diesel engines and generators.**

11. Q. Can you confirm that all the work that House Officers undertake outside the residential blocks, for example on matters relating to podium walkways, are not billed to the blocks Service Charge Accounts?

**A. Time is recorded and allocated accordingly. Matters not related to the service charge are not charged there.**

12. Q. I understand that under the proposed London Film School redevelopment, the Barbican Art Centre wishes to re-site plant and equipment currently in the Trade Hall into the Breton / Ben Jonson car park. Can BEO officers confirm that Planning Permission will be sought and obtained for this re-siting? Can BEO officers also confirm that they will seek independent advice to ensure that noise and vibration from the re-sited plant and equipment does not cause nuisance, disturbance or inconvenience to the residential flats above? If Planning Permission is not to be sought, what is the legal process for ensuring that appropriate Conditions are put in place?

**A. As of 19.11.14 the Barbican Centre and LFS have not approached the BEO with this proposed use of Barbican Estate car park space. Any use of the BEO car parks in this regard, would require a licence and works within the car park would require the Planners to be involved, be it for Planning Permission or Listed Building Consent. Noise and vibration limits could be set within the terms of any licence.**

13. Q. Agenda Item 9 – p. 87 “*The IT costs are recharged on number of transactions ...*”. On what basis is the BEO charged by the City’s IT or IS department? Has this system (quoted above) of recharging always been used by the BEO, if not, what was it before, why was it changed and when was it changed? What precisely is a “transaction”?

**A. System of recharge has not changed. ‘Transactions’ is volume of activity on the centralised systems such as finance and includes invoice payments, commitments etc. There is also a charge for the number of computers.**

14. Q. Agenda Item 10 – Communal repairs and redecorations – What is the evidence that a 3-5 year programme will result in lower costs to long lessees? Will this option reduce the flexibility of when a house group agrees a programme of redecoration is required? When a contractor underperforms on a 1 year programme it is easy for the City to decide not to re-use the contractor subsequently – if we are locked into a 3-5 year programme, how easy will it be to remove a contractor part way through the programme? How have costs varied across the past economic cycle and is there an optimal time to enter a 3-5 year programme?

**A. Procuring long-term contracts offers significant economies of scale for a contractor and for the City (officer time spent procuring each year). There will be the potential to vary the contract- adding or removing**

**blocks subject to condition surveys. Performance will be covered in the contract. Underperformance would result in the contract being terminated**

**There is not an optimal time to enter into a 3-5 year programme. The benefit of a 3-5 year programme is cost certainty for leaseholders. It also gives a contractor 'work' certainty (subject to performance).**

15. Q. Agenda Item 11 – Water Testing – On what basis has the suggested split Barbican Estate : HRA Estate 60% : 40% been made? May we have a third option – 3-5 Years, Barbican Estate ONLY ?

**A. The split is based on stock levels and our surveyor's initial estimation of the works that will need to be completed. We do not propose to have a Barbican only option as this would require a duplication of work and therefore additional costs**

16. Q. Residents have received Section 20 notices about a new window cleaning contract, which we understand the City intends to be a City-wide contract. Will there be further resident consultation or an RCC working party set up to ensure resident input and involvement in the tender process, as there was when the contract was last tendered?

**A. Yes – there will in fact be a cleaning services contract (for COL buildings but not the Barbican) and a window cleaning services contract for mainly residential properties including the Barbican Estate, other City of London Housing Estates/some other City properties. This acknowledges the specialised nature of the current Barbican Estate window cleaning services. The current resident Service Level Agreement for window cleaning services will apply. There will be further leaseholder consultation and there will be resident participation in the tender process.**

17. Q. Some house groups are concerned about the security implications of having a city-wide contract where their operatives cleaning the windows may vary from week to week, as opposed to the current situation where the window cleaning staff remain constant. What steps can be put in place to ensure that either the same staff are used, or that the same standard of security is maintained?

**A. See Above.**

18. Q. We are informed that the retendering is motivated by the City's desire to save money by moving to a single contractor that can offer a lower price for a larger volume of work. However, window cleaning on the Barbican estate is funded from the service charge, and residents are not seeking a reduction in cost, and desire for the existing frequency and quality standard of cleaning to be maintained. Is it possible for the Barbican Estate to opt out of the city-wide contract? If joining with the City-wide contract, is it possible to ensure that the

quality standards of the Barbican estate are applied, and not that which the City has decided for its own properties on as a cost-reduction measure?

**A. See above.**

19. Q. At what stage is the tendering process at present? When is the new contract intended to start?

**A. Tender process is due to commence in the Spring and the new contract is anticipated to start Autumn/Winter 2015.**

20. Q. What progress is being made in alleviating the flooding which occurs in the Thomas More House Garden after heavy rain, in particular on the path leading from the car park? If the flooding cannot be prevented what plans are in place to enable residents to use the gardens at such times (e.g. through raised walk ways)

**A. There is no proper drainage within Thomas More Garden. The BEO are seeking advice from The Landscape Agency as to what measures could be put in place (other than install a drainage system). Raised walkways will also be considered but may also necessitate the need for lighting.**

21. Q. What steps are being taken to ensure that lifts are not out of action over the whole of a weekend? (This was recently the case in Thomas More House). In certain types of blocks this can cause very considerable difficulties for certain groups of residents

**A. It is extremely rare for this to occur, but further robustness is required to Guideline Lift Services' working practices, and they have therefore instigated the following:**

- **If out of hours emergencies occur in the future that require specialist technical expertise, Guideline Lift Services will endeavour to contact one of their technicians, rather than just an engineer, who have the required level of knowledge, to attend.**
- **One of the existing engineers has now been upgraded with specialist training by Otis lifts and is also on the night call rota for Barbican.**
- **Communication is key, and Guideline Lift Services will ensure their helpdesk team keep the Barbican Estate Office team informed when ongoing remedial works occur.**
- **Guideline Lift Services are reviewing advanced software packages which enable the Barbican Estate Office team to receive automatic updates on callouts and repairs. It is anticipated that this enhanced service could be rolled out early next year.**

**In addition to the steps that Guideline Lift Services are taking, the Barbican Estate Office are looking to improve communications, especially during the evenings and weekends, by introducing a standard template for Lobby Porters and car park concierge to fill in and display.**

**This will ensure that all residents are aware of what steps have been taken and that the appropriate staff and contractors have been informed.**

22. Q. To everyone's surprise and consternation this week two large bike pods have been installed. They have been placed right on top of an area that is normally used for visitor parking and in particular in an area usually set aside for visitors with mobility problems. We are puzzled by the fact that it appears that the decision on the location of the pods was made without any discussion with the car park attendants or the Defoe RTA committee. Whilst we do not expect to be consulted upon every management issue, and are not against the provision of secure facilities for cyclists, what we would like to question is why place these pods in one of the busiest car parks on the estate and in a location normally used for parking for visitors with mobility issues?

**A. The bicycle cages are being provided where the BEO feel there is greatest need. We do appreciate that Defoe is a very busy and full car park but that also applies to bicycles as well. Visitor parking is still possible within Defoe Car Park and there is plenty of overflow in nearby car parks.**

23. Q. Regarding the UFH report. Which blocks/towers/dwellings have had their meters replaced with half hourly meters?

**A. Recently all underfloor heating meters throughout the estate were replaced with half hourly meters.**

24. Q. Do any blocks/towers/dwellings remain without half hourly meters? If yes, which ones?

25. Q. Do the new half hourly meters record only the Background Underfloor Heating supply? If no, what other energy uses are also included?

**A. Yes**

26. Q. Virgin Active has notices up saying they are about to embark on refurbishment work that will all be done at night while the gym is closed. What assurances has the landlord received about there being no noisy works during these night time work periods? Residents are concerned that they should not be disturbed by such works.

**A. The BEO has also spotted the notices and spoken with Virgin Active about their programme. Their Project Manager has assured us that they will be adhering to the Barbican noisy works timings and only tasks such as painting will be carried out at night. The BEO will follow this quite closely and if necessary, involve the EHO.**

27. Q. Brandon Mews Roof. What was the original estimated life-span of the temporary roof structure erected over Brandon Mews to ensure waterproofing of the roof? There is nothing in the long-term capital budget for replacement of this structure - should this be remedied, and an item inserted?

**A.This will form part of the Asset Maintenance Plan including all relevant condition surveys.**

**28.Q.** We understand that the BEO have said that it is not possible to clean this structure adequately so as to remove lichen etc. so as to maintain a presentable appearance. Is our understanding correct? When was this assessment carried out - and, if this was some years ago, has the possibility of cleaning been re-assessed recently?

**A.The BEO carried out a comprehensive survey approximately 5 years ago. The external side is prohibited because of access issues. The internal part of the plastic is no longer smooth (quite pitted) and test patches showed no improvement when cleaning was attempted. This could be re-assessed now.**

**29.Q.** Acknowledging that there are many issues to be addressed and investigations to be carried out first, and assuming that the current Beech Gardens method provides a satisfactory solution to the podium waterproofing, what is to prevent a similar solution being used instead of replacing the current plastic roof?

**A.This could be a possibility.**