

CROMWELL TOWER HOUSE GROUP

Minutes for the AGM on Nov 29th 2018 at 19.00 in the Podium Room.

1. Chairman's welcome

Frances Calman, Membership Secretary, opened the meeting, as our Chairman John Tomlinson was delayed by a traffic accident. She welcomed those present including Helen Davinson, Resident Services Manager from the BEO, who was standing in for Luke Barton our BEO House Officer:

luke.barton@cityoflondon.gov.uk.

There were 32 Members present, including 6 existing and 4 potential Committee Members.

2. Apologies for Absence

The secretary received apologies for absence from Mike Bristow, Christopher Gorman-Evans, and Gordon Wise.

3. Minutes of 2017 AGM (Accuracy)

House Group Members approved the minutes of the previous meeting, November 28th 2017, which the chairman later signed.

4. Financial Statement

Laurance Jones (Treasurer) provided a financial report. The cash balance of the House Group has changed only slightly from last year. The accounts were approved by the meeting.

5. Chairman's Report

The Chairman praised the work of Committee Members and thanked them for their efforts during the year.

Fire Safety has been a particular concern this past year and is addressed later.

Committee members spoke with the Jugged Hare managers to request that their patrons stopped obstructing the pavement at the corner of Silk St.

The Jugged Hare consequently now have someone standing outside during busy nights to manage their patrons.

Four carpets in the lift lobbies were replaced last year. In the future two per year will be replaced until further notice. This programme is managed by Luke Barton.

Paul, our cleaner, has cleared up the area around the bin store. Luke reminds us that shopping trolleys are to be taken back to the supermarket and not left in the tower or near the bin store.

Our two new porters, Abdi and Kal (Kalpesh), have settled in.

There was a Culture Mile event which closed the Beech Street tunnel in March 2018. It went well and in general people enjoyed it. More events are likely in 2019, most probably at a warmer time of year.

The Chairman chairs a Barbican Residential Committee (BRC) working party on electric car provision. There are charging spaces in car parks across the estate, including in Cromwell. Please contact Luke (luke.barton@cityoflondon.gov.uk) if you would like one.



The Committee feels the need to bring the Constitution up-to-date, so that the House Group's legal status is assured. This will help us in making representations to the City, who are both our landlord and our managing agent.

Following a request for additional Committee Members, four people put their names forward and will be proposed for election to the Committee at this AGM. In the coming year, both the Chairman and Secretary will resign and pass the roles to other people on the Committee.

The Chairman has served for 15 years, and he looks forward to a newly formed Committee taking Cromwell to new heights.

6. Fire Safety and Procedure in the event of Fire

Helen Davinson (BEO) updated Members and answered questions. A Fire Risk Assessment has been carried out, and a number of its recommended actions have already been implemented. These include the following:

- Communal areas, the mezzanine, fire exits, balconies and car parks, have been cleared of items which might burn or might obstruct firefighters.
- Independent inspectors from "Checkmate Fire" have examined the compartmentation (fire isolation) of flats in this tower and their report is awaited. Where they discovered that the compartmentation has been breached, the BEO is working with leaseholders to restore the firewalls.
- The PDA (plumbing) ducts have been inspected and flammable material removed. These ducts are behind concrete doors which are normally locked shut – see pictures on next page.
- Fire Extinguishers were removed at the recommendation of the London Fire Brigade.
- The front doors and surrounding areas have been tested for fire resistance and a formal report is awaited.
- There is a new procedure for approval of building works. There will now be an inspection and approval is only given after final sign-off by building control.

- In February 2018, the London Fire Brigade did an exercise in the tower. Their feedback was that the procedures worked well.



Question: The front of our flats comprises a door and also a wooden surround. Was all of this tested, or just the door?

Answer: The whole assembly was tested, including the surround.

Question: Why were Fire Extinguishers were removed?

Answer: This was at the recommendation of both the Fire Risk Assessment, and the London Fire Brigade. The London Fire Brigade consider it unsafe for Fire Extinguishers to be used by untrained people: it can make the fire worse. This also applies to fire extinguishers in your kitchen. If there is a fire in your flat, or you see a fire in a communal area, their recommendation is to leave the area, close the doors, and phone the Fire Brigade.

Question: What is the logic of not having a Fire Alarm?

Answer: Because there is a stay-put policy. Work has been done by the City as Landlord with the objective of making the flats properly isolated, so residents are safe inside their flats.

Question: Under what conditions should we leave our flats? How do we know when to get out?

Answer: You leave your flat if that's where the fire is. You also leave your flat when told to do so by the Fire Brigade or if you are affected by fire or smoke.

Question: In my kitchen I can smell cooking from other flats, penetrating through the vents. If these smells can come in, then surely fire and smoke can travel by the same route, so the flats are not isolated?

Answer: The flats are isolated from one another. There have been three fires in the last ten years: in a mews block, in a low-rise block and in a tower. In all cases, the fire was contained within the flat in which it started.

Secretary's note: After the AGM the Chairman was informed by the BEO that within "living memory" (32 years) all fires have been contained with the flat in which the fire started.

7. Constitution

Cromwell Tower House Group is a "Recognised Tenants Association" (RTA). This is a specific type of association under the Housing Acts. An RTA has the right to represent long-leaseholders in dialogues with their Landlord. To maintain this status, the House Group must abide by certain rules set down by Parliament. One of these rules is that at least 50% of long-leaseholders must be Members. Because the City is selling its rented flats, there are an increasing number of long-leaseholders in the tower and it has become increasingly difficult for the Membership Secretary to demonstrate that the House Group fulfils this condition. The Membership Secretary currently holds no data indicating which Members are long-leaseholders. The House Group also does not know the total number of long-leaseholders in the Tower. This data is held by the City.

In order to show that 50% of long-leaseholders are House Group Members:

- We need to revise the constitution
- We need to revise the Membership process, including considering an opt-out system.

Cromwell Tower House Group currently has an opt-in system, where residents join the House Group. Many other House Groups on the Barbican have an opt-out system, where residents are deemed Members unless they have opted out.

Any proposed changes to the constitution will be formally submitted, after due notice, to a General Meeting of House Group Members.

Question: What happens to Membership fees if we move to an opt-out system?

Answer: Most other blocks in the Barbican do not have Membership fees. Our Membership fee is currently a "once-off" payment, which is difficult to administer. If we move to an opt-out system we will not have Membership fees. The current Membership fee is collected by the House Group, as reported in the Financial Report presented by Laurance. It does not go to the City of London.

Question: What happens if we don't meet the conditions? What if we fail the RTA audit?

Answer: The audit is performed by the City (our Local Authority) to check that 50% of our Members are long-leaseholders, that we have a proper constitution, and that we hold quorate, minuted, meetings in accordance with our constitution. If the House Group does not meet these conditions then we lose our Recognised Tenants Association status, and we can no longer legitimately represent our Members to the City of London (our landlord).

8. Pictures in the 01 level lobby

The next exhibition in the 01 lobby will be a local photographer. The Members at the meeting applauded Alan's efforts to provide a changing exhibition in the lift lobby. Exhibitions usually last about 6 months.

9. Beech Gardens

Helen Davinson (BEO) updated us on the renovation of the East part of Beech gardens: "Beech St Gardens Phase 2". The objective of this work is to waterproof the podium, so water does not leak through to offices underneath. Everything on the podium is to be removed during the works. The podium tiles will be removed. A waterproof layer is installed. Then the tiles and the flower beds will be replaced. The landscaping will be by Nigel Dunnett, with planting consistent with the West part of the Beech St Gardens. It is likely that the Exhibition Hall corridor, known as "The Yellow Shed", will be permanently removed as part of these works.



This work will extend under Ben Jonson, along Cromwell Highwalk, and to the steps down to Speed. It will start in February 2020 and last 2 years.

Question: What communication will there be with residents? Will residents be involved?

Answer: There will be a Project Board, including residents from Cromwell, Breton, Ben Jonson and Shakespeare.

Question: A key issue is working hours. If it's like Phase 1, there will be a phenomenal amount of drilling. The working hours were long on Phase 1. What will they be on Phase 2?

Answer: On Phase 1 they worked 9am to 5pm during the week, and in addition they worked eight Saturdays over the year. The quiet hours are 10am-12pm and 2pm-4pm. The Project Board will consult about working hours.

Question: Will there be problems with access to our podium door?

Answer: Everything on the podium has to be removed and replaced, so access will be affected. The BEO will work with residents of the concerned blocks. The aim will be to preserve access, although it may be by a winding route.

Question: So, in summary, it's got to be done and it's going to be painful. What lessons have been learned from Phase 1?

Answer: Drainage! This time the BEO will do a thorough drainage survey, and fix the drains at the same time as the podium.

10. Planters in Cromwell Place

Some residents have asked for additional planters, one in front of each pillar on Cromwell Place. The BEO have stated that there is no money from the landlord for these. So if we want them, we'll have to buy them ourselves. They cost £1200-£1500 each. For an additional 3 planters that's £3600-£4500. Shared over the flats the tower this is a one-off charge of about £40 on to the service charge for a typical flat.



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Members at the meeting asked that the Committee ballot long-leaseholders to ask if they would be willing to pay this purchase price.

Helen Davinson confirmed that if residents bought the planters, the City would pay for installation, planting and ongoing maintenance.

Question: There seems to be a budget for plants and planters under the “cleaner air” initiative. This budget paid for plants and planters on the bridge over Aldersgate, and also for the metal pots on Moor Lane. Can we use this budget to pay for planters in front of Cromwell?

Answer: Helen Davinson said this was GLA money. She will find the name of the fund.

Secretary's note: Luke subsequently provided the contact information of the Low Emission Neighbourhood - len@cityoflondon.gov.uk.

11. Security and the Lift Lobby Doors

There are two issues with the main entrance doors:

1. Security

There have been recent incidents of intruders tail-gating residents as they enter. This has occurred at both podium level and 01 level. Intruders have entered the lift lobby and attempted to access the roof. These are in general “urban explorers” who want to climb and video themselves. There has been an incident where a resident was pursued into the tower by one of the unruly “cycle gang” who have been rampaging on the podium. The police were involved in both cases.

2. Accessibility

The inner door from the main entrance to the lift lobby should be locked when a temporary porter is on duty. This heavy door is hard to manage, particularly for those in wheelchairs or with push chairs. There is a bell inside the lift lobby to call the porter to ask for help with the door, but people don't necessarily know it's there. At busy times the porter cannot always provide help. The external door is also hard to manage.



For these reasons there are suggestions that we could consider

- a) a fob-operated automatically-opening door between the porters' desk and the lift lobby,
- b) power assistance on the external door.

The cost of such new mechanisms, and their ongoing maintenance, would be borne by long-leaseholders via the service charge.

Points made during the discussion:

- On security: a sense of perspective is needed: the security generally works well. The porters are alert to intruders. When intruders are spotted, the porter brings the lifts back down to 01. There is CCTV. When properly operated, the existing procedure works.
- On security and tailgating: if the problem is tailgating, then a fob-operated system is no improvement. People can still tailgate through a fob-operated door. Security is only improved when residents themselves are more rigorous about who they let into the building.
- On security: in a recent incident, the CCTV recording was found to have the wrong date-stamp, and therefore could not be used as evidence.
- On security: The Culture Mile increases the risk to Cromwell security. As the Culture Mile develops, there will be a greater footfall outside Cromwell, and even more people will be tempted to enter our front door to ask for directions, take photographs, ask to see the view etc.
- On the porters' duties: Is it part of the porter's job to help people? Answer (BEO): yes, but they are often busy with several things at once.

- Draught-exclusion: If the doors were automatically operated, and therefore mostly closed, they would exclude draughts and the lift doors would close more reliably.

Helen Davinson took the actions to:

- Remind the porters, including temporary porters, of their duties to help residents with the doors.
- Send a notice to residents to re-inforce the message about preventing tailgating, and to draw attention to the bell in the 01 level lift lobby.
- Talk to Property Services to get their recommendation, with costs, and to understand how the system works in Shakespeare.
- Ask the Police for Crime Prevention advice.
- Ensure that the CCTV works, and that it records the correct date and time.

12. Leaseholder Service Charges Working Party (RCC Working party)

Jane Northcote described Working Party. A member of this working party, David Lawrence, wrote a paper to help decision-makers on the RCC to understand the budget from the residents' point of view. The working party continues its work to understand service charges, and to seek assurance that service-charge payers get value for money.

13. Election of Committee

The meeting approved the re-election of the existing committee. The four new Members were proposed by Susan Bristow and by Michelle Riley, and all four were elected by general assent.

Accordingly the 2018/9 committee Members are:

John Tomlinson (Chairman) (john@johnandpaula.com)
 Mike Bristow
 Alan Budgen
 Frances Calman (Membership secretary, fcalman@doctors.org.uk)
 Christopher Gorman-Evans
 Julian Hale
 Laurance Jones (Treasurer)
 Jane Northcote (Secretary, Jane@JaneNorthcote.com)
 Preneeta Mann (*elected at this AGM*)
 Tom Flanagan (*elected at this AGM*)
 Tim Cox (*elected at this AGM*)
 Iain Connor (*elected at this AGM*)

The Chairman closed the meeting at 20:35.

For minutes of previous meetings, contact information, forthcoming meetings, links to the documents mentioned above, and other information related to Cromwell Tower House Group, please see the website: www.CromwellTower.org