

Email from Graeme Harrower (common councilman for Bassishaw ward) to the Court of Common Council on 30 May

The residents reply....

Last Friday, on the eve of the bank holiday weekend, the Corporation distributed the Standards Chair's letter (seen by members on 21 May) to the residents of the Barbican and Golden Lane by posting it online and on noticeboards.

The residents have already replied, rejecting the attempt in the letter to dismiss the petition on the ground that the 1,100 + residents who signed it were in a state of "confusion". Here is the joint response made by the Chairs of the Barbican Association and Golden Lane Estate Residents' Association: [Response to chair of standards committee](#) . It's worth reading.

This joint response has been posted on those associations' websites, and is being further distributed through residents' online forums.

May I please ask those members who assisted with collecting signatures for the petition in wards other than Aldersgate and Cripplegate to distribute the petition, the Standards Chair's letter and the joint response to residents in their wards by whatever means they consider appropriate.

The essence of the joint response has already been distributed to all City residents through a short article that appeared in yesterday's edition of City Matters: <https://st1.ning.com/topology/rest/1.0/file/get/2736438077?profile=original> . More detailed press coverage is likely to follow.

The Standards Chair yesterday sent a short reply to the joint response, in which she maintained her position that the Standards Committee would wait until its next meeting (on 4 October) to consider an officers' report. She did not address the points made in the joint response. Rather, she claimed that:

- the "new policy and guidance has been in operation for less than three months and is, therefore, untested" (incorrect: it was tested at the time it was introduced, and produced the absurd result that a councillor couldn't vote on a matter concerning a tree owned by a local authority);
- "deciding our new policy and guidance had been preceded by extensive consultation" (not with the residents - the Barbican Association's attempt to engage with the Standards Committee last year was terminated by the Committee just before its special meeting on 15 November 2018, at which residents were not allowed to speak, and consultation in the "workshops" with councillors was restricted to points of process); and
- by the next meeting "we will be in a position to include the results from monitoring the first six months of the new policy and guidance" (but why wait six months to find out that the policy is manifestly over restrictive? What about the issue raised in the petition concerning standards proceedings? etc).

....and what next?

The scythe of public opinion will ensure that the petition is not lost in the long grass. In fact, the ball has already been put firmly back into the court of the Standards Committee.

That committee could convene a special meeting within the next month to address the issues raised in the petition with a view to resolving them.

Alternatively, it could continue with its denials and deflections, in the hope that the storm will blow over. But my forecast is that the storm won't blow over. The debate is already widening. The joint response makes a telling comparison between resident councillors and members on the planning committee with property industry connections. The quote in the City Matters article refers to the Corporation's unique business voting system. The question about the democratic legitimacy of the business vote isn't new. And there is no obvious answer to it: a significant part of the financial City is located outside the Corporation's boundaries - large banks in Canary Wharf, fund managers in Mayfair - where there is no business vote, yet these businesses flourish. What is new is that the question is now being raised in a context in which a large number of City residents are actively engaged.

Graeme Harrower