

Working Party Updates

Residents Consultation Committee 2 September

Gardens Advisory Group (GAG)

GAG meeting held 15 August 2019

The latest residents' survey had shown that 84% were satisfied or very satisfied with the management of the gardens, a marginally lower number than last year which might be explained by the recent work being done on the main lake. This is progressing with huge quantities of sludge having been removed and the original pumps restarted. Once the water circulation is working properly again the berms in the lake should improve. Residents' comments will be collated and circulated.

The survey also found that 72% of residents are prepared to pay a small increase in the service charge, of around £25 per flat, to fund improvements to the gardens. Such an increase would pay for an additional gardener and new plants. Residents must be assured the extra money would be applied solely to the three private gardens and not the public areas.

The resident-run garden inspection teams used the grading system proposed at the last GAG meeting for the first time. It was felt that some modification of the system was needed after a number of areas of the gardens were rated "unacceptable" and teams reported difficulty in applying the excellent/good/acceptable/unacceptable grades in a consistent and fair manner. However, the reports were helpful to the gardeners as they highlighted areas that needed attention. A meeting with members of the teams is to be held on 23rd September to discuss how the system should be applied in future.

A walk along Beech Gardens, looked at some issues raised by the inspection report. It was agreed that the grasses had become over-dominant in the beds and should be thinned more aggressively in coming months, while more of the miniature red and yellow tulips would be planted. Two silver birch trees adjacent to Ben Johnson are dying and will be removed this autumn.

In the Wildlife Garden, the new steps from the bottom gate, by the Bunyan carpark, up to the meadow had been completed by the TCV team. An official opening of the steps will be held on 18th September at 11 am, all are welcome and refreshments will be served.

Records of bug sightings in the wildlife garden had reached 130 different species and are expected to get to around 200. The resident expert on insects will run a mini-beasts hunt in the Thomas More garden during the Barbican@50 event in September.

The next GAG meeting will be on 15th November 2019.

Leaseholder Service Charge Working Party

Anne Mason - Chair (BEO), Phillip Burgess, David Lawrence, Helen Wilkinson, Helen Davinson (BEO), Dave Taylor, David Graves, Jane Northcote, Adam Hogg

Meeting 12 August 2018

Communications with Leaseholders

In June a trial was undertaken where the majority of the service charge estimate information was provided on the website. Five blocks were involved and although there was not a lot of feedback it was generally positive. Six residents asked for paper copies which were supplied. For the September actuals this format will be rolled out for all blocks.

Service Charge Actuals 2018/19

It was noted that the main areas of expenditure were employees (£2.5m), repairs and maintenance (£2.53m) and energy costs (£2.44m).

The increase in expenditure on employees reflects the annual pay rises for staff and for the cleaners the increase changes to the salary scale has also had an effect.

The expenditure on general repairs and maintenance increased by just over 6%.

Underfloor heating is the largest energy expenditure item and the increase in prices was slightly masked by comparatively lower consumption to the previous year. The City is investigating whether there would be benefits in adjusting the capacity charge to reduce excess charge. It was noted that the capacity charge is payable throughout the year.

More detail on the outturn is in the report and annexes.

Comparison with 2008/19 and 1998/99

The comparison was requested by a member of the working party and showed an increase of 45.27% in the annual service charge items over the 10-year period and 116.68 over the 20-year period.

Other activity

Discussions on procurement and service charge comparables have been held over to the next meeting.