

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Housing Management & Almshouses Sub Committee	27 November 2013
Subject: City of London Almshouses Update	Public
Report of: Director of Community & Children's Services	For Information
Summary	
<p>This report gives Members an information update on the City of London Almshouses, in Lambeth. Some of the information in the report also relates to the eight Gresham Almshouses on the estate.</p> <p>Recommendation</p> <p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the report. 	

Main Report

Background

1. In February 2013 the City of London Almshouses Trustees Committee was merged with the Housing Management Sub Committee to form the Housing Management & Almshouses Sub Committee. This report is presented to alternate meetings of the Sub Committee. It updates Members on operational matters relating to the Almshouses and their residents, and highlights any issues of concern, particularly where funding is required for which is not included in the current year's budget.

Social events

2. Residents enjoyed a trip to Sissinghurst Castle in the summer. One of the trips requested earlier in the year was for a shopping trip and this will take place in November in time for some Christmas shopping. Following last year's successful Christmas lunch, residents are in the process of picking which restaurant they would like to visit this year.
3. Unfortunately Lambeth Community Transport is no longer available (due to funding cuts the transport is only now available for school trips) Using the Community Transport allowed us to keep costs low, however residents were very happy with the alternative transport the Matron booked for their trip to Sissinghurst. This transport company is used by other sheltered housing estates so the Matron was confident the residents would have safe and comfortable trips.

4. Residents expressed thanks to the Trustees for the Social Fund which continues to support building a community spirit.

Christmas hampers

5. The order for Christmas hampers will be placed before the end of October to enable an "Early Order" discount to be claimed. The date for delivering hampers will be agreed with the Chairman of the Housing Management & Almshouses Sub Committee, and all Members of the Sub Committee will be invited to attend.

Garden work

6. The Trustees agreed an additional budget of £25,000 to carry out landscaping to the gardens. Residents have had three meetings and a ballot to discuss what shape the landscaping should take. There are a few residents who would like to keep the grounds untouched, although several are keen to have seating areas as well as vegetable patches and possibly a greenhouse. During the summer due to such excellent weather there has been an increase in the number of trespassers on the grounds. This has caused many residents to become anxious about their security and although the local Safer Neighbourhood Team have been informed and have increased their presence in the area as a deterrent, the presence of trespassers continues to cause distress to the most vulnerable residents. The residents have requested that we defer the improving garden facilities until we are able to investigate options for improving site security with electronic opening gates and possibly CCTV installation. Proposals and options are being sought to bring to Members for consideration shortly.
7. The last visit from the company treating the Japanese Knotweed problem has taken place. We are hoping for clearance from the company to enable maintenance to be undertaken on the affected areas.
8. A large number of bulbs have been purchased and are ready for planting over the next few weeks. This will bring some welcome spring colour into the garden in the New Year.

Community Facility & Office

9. A planning application has been submitted to the London Borough of Lambeth, to change the former Deputy Matron's flat to an office and community meeting place. This was agreed by Trustees at the last meeting of the Housing Management & Almshouses Sub Committee. Work will commence as soon as we have permission, but, in the meantime, we are consulting with residents about what they would like to have in the new facility.

Supporting People funding

10. Officers have had several meetings with officers of the London Borough of Lambeth regarding the withdrawal of the Supporting People grant in 2014. Much work has been undertaken on assessing costs currently covered by the Supporting People grant and transferring these costs to Housing Benefit funding.

This will cover some of the shortfall from the loss of the grant. A template form has been developed for testing the process to ensure the computer system will calculate the costs which residents will be able to claim. A further report will be brought to the Housing Management & Almshouses Sub Committee if the testing shows a significant adverse impact on residents.

Essential works to Rogers properties

11. Following extensive work to identify the source of damp problems and water ingress to a block of two-storied cottages known as the 'Rogers Cottages', our Property Services Team have received a surveyor's report specifying works required to address the problems. Most of the proposed works are not urgent and will be included in the capital programme for future years. However, there are some essential works which must take place as quickly as possible and which will make a considerable difference to the residents.
12. The overall programme of work needed is estimated to cost in the region of £125k over 5 years. The urgent phase of work is currently out to tender, and estimates suggest that it will cost a maximum of £30k. However, there will be considerable disruption to residents. In order to minimise this, we will need to bring in a removal company to pack, remove and store belongings, and to return these to their original positions following the work. We will need to insure belongings, and to bring in professional cleaners when the work is complete.
13. The work will be done to one property at a time, and the work is expected to last a week in each property. Some of the residents are particularly vulnerable, and we may need to provide additional care and support, either within their homes if they prefer to remain there whilst the work is carried out, or in an appropriate location such as a respite centre if they need to be moved out.
14. Taking into account the additional support needs, the total package of work required in the next year will cost in the region of £50k. This sum has been included in budget estimates for 2013/14, which will be presented to the Housing Management & Almshouses Sub Committee at the same meeting as this report.

Staffing

15. The Sheltered Housing Officer post previously notified to Members has been advertised and an appointment made. Elise Cassar, one of our Apprentices, is the successful candidate. Elise has spent the last year working on our sheltered estates and is looking forward to working at the Almshouses. We are now reviewing gardening arrangements to increase the gardening support on the estate.

Vacancies and applications

16. There are currently no vacancies. There are 4 applicants on the Waiting List, all of whom have been approved, and two other applicants in the assessment process.

Financial implications

17. The work required to the Rogers cottages as outlined in paragraphs 10-13 above will be included in the budget for 2013/14.

Consultees

The Chamberlain, Comptroller and Town Clerk have been consulted in the development of this report.

Appendices

None

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