

Committee:	Date:
Housing Management & Almshouses Sub Committee	25 September 2014
Subject: City of London Almshouses Update	Public
Report of: Director of Community & Children's Services	For Decision
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>Members of the Sub-Committee have asked officers to investigate alternative options for the traditional giving of Christmas hampers to residents. Options are set out in paragraph 3, below.</p> <p>Recommendation</p> <p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the report. • Decide on their preferred option for Christmas hampers (paragraph 3) and instruct officers to proceed accordingly. 	

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 coach trip to Margate on 19 June. The weather was good and a relaxing seaside visit was enjoyed by all who attended.

Christmas hampers

3. At the request of the Trustees after the last meeting, officers have been investigating different options for the provision of hampers this year. Officers have investigated three choices for Trustees to consider as detailed below:

A) Continue with the traditional hampers purchased via a specialist hamper supplier. This cost is approximately £2250 for 50 hampers, (including the Gresham residents) although we are able to negotiate a reduction in cost with the hamper company if we order this month.

B) Purchase gift vouchers to the value of £40 each, at a cost of £2000. There is a disadvantage to this option; residents who are still in employment or have private pension income will have to declare the gift as taxable income, which means for them the value of the gift will be less than those residents who do not pay income tax. Officers also have a concern that residents who have problems with alcohol abuse will use the voucher to buy alcohol. Christmas can be one of the most difficult times of the year for people with abuse issues and a voucher may enable them to purchase more alcohol, possibly to their detriment.

C) Officers could compile a list of goods, and ask the residents to choose the contents of their "personal hamper". Officers would then order what each resident requested via a supermarket, internet shopping site. This would allow residents to use the gift to purchase the special treats they enjoy over the festive season. Alcohol would not be on the list.

Garden work

4. The only small area of Japanese knotweed appears to be responding to treatment and the garden remains clear.
5. The increased gardener's hours have shown an improvement in the regular maintenance of the lawns and rose beds on which the residents have commented favourably.

Community Facility & Office

6. The work to create a new hall and office commenced on 11 August. In order to maintain the support structure of the building, when internal walls were removed extra support beams have been installed. The residents living directly above the hall vacated their homes whilst the work was underway for health and safety reasons. One resident had a holiday booked, whilst the other was moved to an empty property on the estate temporarily. The office will be the last area in the development to be complete; in the meantime Matron is working from her home at East Lodge. It is anticipated the hall and office will be complete by the end of October. Officers are planning a celebratory opening event in November which Trustees will be invited to attend.

Essential works to Rogers properties

7. Following our previous update regarding the damp and water ingress issues at the 'Rogers Cottages', the pilot work on one property, went well. The resident enjoyed a short stay away from her home for a two week period while the work

was undertaken. This allowed the builders to remedy the problems, fully investigate any underlying issues and calculate the duration of work for the remaining properties.

8. The pilot property indicated the work would take two weeks per dwelling during which residents have to vacate their homes for safety reasons. Officers considered the difficulty presented for some residents in leaving their homes. Thus, when flat 25 became unexpectedly vacant, officers decided not to offer this property to the next person on the waiting list but to utilise it as a temporary home for the Rogers' residents during their home repairs. The cost of providing external, temporary, suitable accommodation for the duration of the repair in each property was approximately £1200 for 2 weeks, so utilising a vacant property on the estate has greatly reduced the cost of providing alternative accommodation. Flat 25 has been furnished to provide a comfortable alternative home for the duration of the remedial work.
9. Officers have arranged the same support to residents as the 'pilot' cottage regarding storage of their belongings. These have been professionally packed and kept in secure storage for the duration of the work. The company also return the items exactly as they were placed prior to the work and residents have been very pleased with this level of support. To recognise the disruption to their home, residents have been offered an ex gratia payment of £250.

Road repairs and lighting

10. Officers previously reported deterioration in the roadway on the estate, as well as a proposal to improve the lighting for residents' safety and security at the same time as repairs could be effected. Due to the remedial work at the Rogers Cottages and the communal hall project, the survey has not yet been undertaken, however it will be commissioned shortly and officers will present the findings when the report is available.

Networking Group

11. The Sheltered Housing Manager, Jacqueline Whitmore, has been invited to join the East London Almshouses Group; the next meeting is in October 2014. This is a quarterly meeting of Almshouse managers where topics of interest to Almshouse providers and good practices are shared. Other attendees include representatives of City Livery Companies who provide Almshouse accommodation and other benevolent associations. Jacqueline will provide an update on the activities of the Group for the next Committee meeting.

Vacancies and application

12. There is currently one vacant property which is in use for the Rogers' residents while the remedial work is underway. This will be offered to the next person on the waiting list as soon as the remedial work is finished. There is one vacant Gresham property which will be offered to any Almshouse resident who has expressed an interest in moving to the Gresham bungalows. Remedial and

repair work is underway in this property prior to offer to a new resident. Officers have noted an increase in new enquiries with regard to availability of properties at the Almshouses due to rising rents in the private sector. There are currently four approved applicants on the waiting list.

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