

Committee:	Date:
Housing Management & Almshouses Sub Committee	12 January 2015
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.

Office & Community Facility

2. We are delighted to say that the new office and community facility, converted from the former Assistant Matron's flat, was completed in early December, in time for the presentation of the Christmas hampers. The office has provided an appropriate place for the Matron and other staff to work and see residents. The Communal Hall was much needed, and has provided residents with a lovely, bright, spacious place to hold social gatherings, as well as an area with a more cosy, lounge-like feel.
3. Rather than rushing into buying furniture, we brought some chairs and tables from Isleden House to begin with, so that residents could get the feel of the new space and decide what would be the best type of furniture. They have now chosen a mixture of armchairs, tables and upright chairs.

4. Residents are now busy organising new social activities to make the most of their new Communal Hall. Activities planned so far include coffee mornings, a book club, a chair exercise class, a gardening club and a craft club. Residents are very much enjoying their new facility.

Christmas hampers

5. Residents enjoyed their hampers and would like to thank the Trustees for their generosity. As always there are a few items in the hampers not to individual residents taste, however Matron placed a "swap box" in the Hall for residents to bring their goods and swap them for items they preferred. There were a few items left which Matron took to the local food bank.
6. Due to the unexpected death of a resident there was a spare hamper which officers decided to raffle for residents in other sheltered housing managed by the City (Isleden House, Mais House and Harman Close). The tickets were £1 each and proceeds were given to The Royal British Legion as housing staff have adopted this charity in the centenary year of World War 1.

Garden work

7. The only small area of Japanese knotweed has responded to treatment and the remaining garden is still clear.
8. A recent review of Health & Safety issues on all estates identified a need for training on the proper use of garden equipment. Our gardener undertook this training in December, so we can now be confident that all equipment used at the Almshouses is done so in accordance with manufacturers' instructions and H&S regulations.

Essential works to Rogers properties

9. Following our previous update regarding the damp and water ingress issues at the 'Rogers Cottages', work has progressed well with four properties completed prior to Christmas.
10. Flat 25 was refurbished to make a comfortable temporary home for the duration of the work, and each resident has moved in there whilst the work on their own home was carried out. Each resident has received a "Disruption" payment of £250 as a good will gesture.
11. The remaining two properties will be complete by February 2015. Both the remaining residents have difficult health issues and need extra support from Matron during their temporary move. Although officers had hoped the work to be complete by Christmas it was considered more supportive to allow residents to remain in their homes over the festive period; the remaining two residents and their families expressed their gratitude for this temporary halt in the work.

12. Matron has worked extremely hard to support residents throughout this work and officers were able to draft in cleaning staff from another estate to support the turnover of the temporary accommodation. Once the work is complete, Flat 25 will be available to the next person on the waiting list. At the end of the work, the furnishings will be used to support future residents who may have to rely on charitable sources for household items when they are allocated a home at the Almshouses (for example if they had previously been homeless).

Road repairs and lighting

13. 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.

14. Due to the remedial work at the Rogers Cottages and the communal hall project, the survey was delayed. However, quotes have now been received for the installation of lighting around the inner path of the garden. The lighting quote is to provide a power source from the office building, across the internal road, with ducting buried in the garden encasing power cables for 22 low level lights over 320 metres at a cost of £24,000.

15. In discussions with several residents, concerns were expressed regarding the height of the lights and how brightly they might shine in resident's homes. After a review of options with the contractors, officers decided that low level lighting would be the most effective and appropriate and we will proceed on this basis.

16. Our Property Services Manager, has investigated the possibility of providing some temporary lighting until the work can be commenced. Unfortunately the only type of temporary lighting available involves daily removal and charging of the light units from a mains source. As the only source currently available is through the garage where the garden equipment is stored, this option was not possible. Officers are still investigating other temporary options until the lighting can be undertaken with the road repairs.

17. The cost of the road repairs work will be approximately £30,000. This work will involve removing the current road surface, regulating lower areas and repairing potholes, adjusting any ironworks in the roadway and then laying a new surface.

18. It is considered prudent to undertake both lighting and road repairs at the same time which will minimise disruption to the estate. Extra care will be taken to seek advice regarding any issues over the tree roots which are part of the cause of the degradation to the current road surface.

19. The total cost of improving lighting and repairing the roads, then, will be £54k. This will be incorporated into the budget for 2015/16.

Networking Group

20. The Sheltered Housing Manager has joined the East London Almshouses Group and attended their last meeting in October. Staff from The Mercers Company provide the administration function for the Group, arranging meetings at different Almshouses and inviting external speakers each quarter.
21. The meeting was held at Edward Edward's House, one of Southwark Charities properties. These flats were remodelled and refurbished from bedsits into one bed properties several years ago and have since been maintained to a high standard. Residents were very happy to show us round their homes which were spacious and light. There were about 20 other Almshouses officers present and all participated in lively discussions regarding common issues, such as managing residents with deteriorating health, and maintenance of buildings. There were also two outside speakers at the meeting from the Alzheimer's Society and a company detailing how to manage building maintenance for Legionella issues.

Performance Information

22. Rent arrears at the almshouses at 7 December 2014 stood at £8,322.49. 14 tenants were in arrears. However, much of this sum will be offset by housing benefits which are due to the individuals and which are not received until four weeks after rent is payable. One tenant is paying of substantial arrears at a rate of £10 per week.
23. Former tenants' arrears stood at £1,475.58.
24. Repairs and maintenance work in recent months has focused on the Rogers properties and the creation of the new office and community hall. We will provide data on repairs done in 2014/15 in the next report.
25. No formal complaints have been received since this was last reported.
26. A review of reports to the Housing Management & Almshouses Sub-Committee is being carried out to ensure that Members continue to receive all information which was previously presented to the City of London Almshouses Trustees Sub-Committee, except where Members have decided that they no longer need to receive it. The outcome of this review will be reported in the next Almshouses Update paper.

Vacancies and application

27. There are currently two vacant properties. There has been one vacant Gresham property which was advertised in the City at the request of the Gresham Trustees. Unfortunately officers did not receive any applications which fitted the eligibility criteria and the property has been offered to an Almshouse resident who has previously expressed an interest in moving into a Gresham bungalow. Remedial and repair work took longer than expected due

to the dry rot issues found in the property however this has been treated and a new kitchen and wet room have been installed, as well as full decoration throughout the bungalow. The second property has been offered and accepted and a moving date to be agreed shortly. When work on the Rogers properties is complete, there will be another flat available.

28. There are currently 5 approved applicants on the waiting list.

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