

<b>Committee:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
Housing Management & Almshouses Sub Committee	14 July 2015
<b>Subject:</b> City of London Almshouses Update	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Director of Community & Children's Services	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Summary</b>	
<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><b>Recommendation</b></p> <p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approve the recommendation at paragraph 16, to change the job title of 'Matron' to 'Scheme Manager'.</li> <li>• Note the report.</li> </ul>	

## 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 have been researching the types of exercise class they would like to engage in to include everyone who would like to participate. They have found a Tai Chi instructor who has been able to deliver classes which are inclusive for anyone with a mobility issue and include some seated exercises. The classes began on 23 June and, for the first six weeks, are being paid for by the Almshouses Social Fund, provided by the Trustees.
3. Residents have also set up two groups, a craft group and a games group, where Scrabble is played and enjoyed by all. We are in the process of purchasing a sewing machine and a crafts table, in consultation with the craft group.
4. Matron held a quiz night which all attendees thoroughly enjoyed. She plans to do another in a few weeks.

5. A summer outing has been arranged by Matron in July. Residents were given a list of possible choices and chose a trip to the seaside. A trip to an airshow is also being planned. The majority of costs will be met from the Almshouses Social Fund.

### **Furniture for the Communal Rooms**

6. A selection of furniture has been ordered for both the communal rooms. This includes armchairs, a sofa and coffee table for the smaller room; tables and chairs for the main room. The tables and chairs are stackable to enable the room to be used for exercise classes. A set of built in bookshelves has been commissioned for the smaller community room to enable the residents to develop a library. The kitchen is now fully equipped. We are now purchasing a flat screen TV, organising wifi connectivity and subscribing to a films package so that residents can have a film club.

### **Update on essential road works and lighting installation**

7. Contracts for the commencement of this work are currently going through the Gateway process for major works. We are anxious to have this work completed before the winter and are working with colleagues in property Services to expedite it.

### **Estate Meeting**

8. Jackie Campbell, Elizabeth Donnelly and estate staff attended an Open Evening for residents in June. The meeting was held in the early evening to give the opportunity for residents who are unable to attend a day meeting to attend. There was very good attendance and a lively and constructive discussion about a number of topics.
9. Residents were particularly concerned about the quality of responsive repairs and also the need for planned maintenance to address issues such as damp. In order to respond to this, we have arranged for a Property Services Team Manager to visit the Almshouses on a monthly basis to carry out post-repair inspections and to visit residents and look at things they are concerned about in their homes.

### **Asset Management Plan**

10. Property Services colleagues have been asked to organise a comprehensive survey of the City of London Almshouses and Gresham properties to identify works required over the next five years and to programme these in. It is our expectation that this survey will recommend a full refurbishment programme to address longstanding issues such as damp, crumbling brickwork and roof repairs, as well as rewiring, window replacement, new kitchens and bathrooms and other improvements. As soon as we have an indication of the likely costs of this programme we will bring it to Trustees for consideration and for inclusion in budgets.

## **City of London Almshouses Audit & Governance Review**

11. In January of this year the City's Internal Audit Section carried out a review of the management of the City of London Almshouses. The review covered a number of matters:

- rental income procedures;
- purchasing arrangements;
- performance monitoring;
- safeguarding of staff.

At the request of the Chairman of the Sub-Committee, it also looked at the governance arrangements since the merging of the Board of Trustees with the Housing Management Sub-Committee, to check that Members were still receiving all appropriate information.

12. We are delighted to say that the review was extremely positive and resulted in an Assurance Level of "Substantial". Procedures and arrangements were found to be adequate and there were no causes for major concern.

13. There were nine recommendations in total. Seven of these were green and therefore 'desirable'. These have all now been addressed. Two were amber, suggesting that management action was required. Both recommendations related to rent arrears management. They were as follows:

- Arrears management arrangements should be formalised to ensure continuity in the event of staff turnover/absence.
- The Matron should have full access to rent account records for the purpose of arrears management, including the facility to record key action taken/key correspondence.

Both recommendations have now been addressed.

14. The review found that the nature, frequency and timing of reporting to Members since the merging of the Board of Trustees is adequate. A number of minor improvements were suggested. These were:

- The reporting of more detailed information on rent increases, giving the actual amount of the increase each year. This will now be included in the update report following the annual rent increase;
- The reporting of high level financial performance information during the course of the year, to facilitate oversight by the Trustees. The Chamberlain will now be providing this;
- The submission of the Trust's audited accounts to the Sub-Committee. The Chamberlain will now provide these.

### **Matron**

15. Members will be aware that the officer responsible for managing the Almshouses has, for some time, had the job title of 'Matron'. As time has gone by, this title

has become more outdated. We are now finding that it leads some residents and visitors to assume that the postholder has medical training, which is not the case, and it also often causes confusion with other agencies such as the London Borough of Lambeth Social Care Dept.

16. For these reasons, and to give consistency with other similar posts, officers recommend that the job title of Matron now be changed to Scheme Manager in line with officers managing the other sheltered housing facilities provided by the City Of London Corporation.

### **Vacancies and applications**

17. There is currently one vacant property. Officers have assessed four prospective applicants for approval and there are currently 3 approved applicants on the waiting list.

### **Complaints**

18. No formal complaints were received during the period. However, a significant number of informal complaints were received verbally and in writing from residents who were concerned about a 'Residents Action Group' which appears to have been set up by a small number of residents and one non-resident and claimed to represent the whole estate. Other residents were most concerned that this was not the case and also by the way in which the group operated. Because of the anxiety this was creating, the Chairman of the Sub-Committee and the Assistant Director of Housing & Neighbourhoods wrote to all residents to reassure them and to make it clear that the way in which the group appeared to be operating was not appropriate. The matter was discussed at the Open Meeting in June and residents expressed approval of the action taken. Officers have now offered to work with residents and an independent third party to explore whether they would like a residents' group and how this might be established as a positive and representative body.

**Jacqueline Whitmore**

**Sheltered Housing Manager**

T: 020 7332 3782

E: [Jacqueline.whitmore@cityoflondon.gov.uk](mailto:Jacqueline.whitmore@cityoflondon.gov.uk)