

Committee Housing Management & Almshouses Sub-Committee	Dated: 12/02/2018
Subject: City of London Almshouses Update	Public
Report of: Director of Community & Children's Services	For Decision
Report author: Jacqueline Whitmore, Sheltered Housing Manager	

Summary

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.

Recommendation

Members are asked to consider which of the options in paragraph 13 they wish to adopt and to instruct officers to apply rent changes accordingly.

Main Report

Background

1. This report is presented to alternate meetings of the Housing Management and Almshouses Sub-Committee, updating Members on operational matters relating to the Almshouses and their residents, and highlights any issues of concern, particularly where funding is required, which is additional to the current year's budget.

Current Position

Waiting List

2. There are currently five vacancies due to unexpected departures from the Almshouses and having previously held properties for Mais House residents. However officers are proactively promoting the vacancies and expect them to be filled soon. The London Borough of Lambeth Lettings team have been notified of the vacancies and will nominate any suitable candidates from their waiting list. The Almshouses Manager has also informed community police officers of the vacancies, as they are often in contact with older, vulnerable people during the winter months and have previously identified a resident for referral. A referral has also been made via a physiotherapist from a local hospital.

3. By sourcing prospective residents via the local community, officers are attempting to keep within the Almshouses “ethos” of housing for local ‘poor and vulnerable’ people. If the vacancies prove hard to fill, then we will review the current age criteria. However, our experience is that things can change very quickly, and we may well suddenly find ourselves with more demand that we can meet. We will keep the situation under review.

Social activities

4. Residents have had several events since the last HMASC update which have been well attended. They enjoyed a Halloween buffet with a “Sniff and tell” competition. The Almshouses Manager organised a Murder/Mystery party game (similar to Cluedo board game), where residents had to role play throughout the evening in character and work out “who committed the dastardly deed”. As part of the event, the Manager cooked residents a three-course meal, which they all thoroughly enjoyed. “Alternative” carol singing followed the uncovering of the “murderess” and residents returned home very late, with the event being declared a resounding success. Residents held a post-Christmas event in January, where they enjoyed an afternoon matinee film with popcorn, followed by a cold buffet and music. They all agreed it was good to have something to look forward to after the bustle of the festive season was over.
5. Many residents were able to meet with Members in early December and enjoyed refreshments when the Christmas hampers were delivered. Residents have asked officers to thank Members for their hampers, which were enthusiastically received.

Refurbishment Programme

6. The pre-planning application was submitted on the 15th December and Property Services are waiting for Lambeth council to arrange a pre-planning meeting. This meeting will dictate whether a full application for the double glazing can go ahead, in which case architects will prepare more detailed drawings of the windows and prepare the full planning application. This should take approximately six weeks, owing to the various types of windows and the sizes of the blocks. If things go to plan, a full planning application will be submitted in early spring. Lambeth council will then have a statutory 13 weeks to consider the application.
7. While the planning application is being considered, the tender process can be started so works can potentially start on site in the summer immediately following the outcome of the planning application. Property Services officers had already completed the initial cost estimate, but now have fee proposals from a quantity surveyor to prepare tender documents and put together a detailed specification for all the external repairs required. This depends on Committee approval.
8. If all goes to plan, a contractor could be appointed in late summer 2018, with works expected to take four to six months.

9. Cost incurred so far include the cost of the CCTV drainage survey (£4,950), the pre-planning application (£4,400), the initial cost estimate by the Quantity Surveyor (£7,000).

Alarm Call System

10. The new call system contract has been awarded and sent to the contractor for signing on the 20th December 2017. The contractor has advised that they should be able to get started, provided there aren't any issues with ordering the equipment, within the next couple of weeks. It will take four hours to install the equipment in each flat unless the flat requires a rewire, although this is not expected, as the wiring appears to be largely in good condition.

Rent Change

11. Rents for all the City's properties will be adjusted from 1 April. The government has directed that all social rents will be decreased by 1% a year for four years, and we are in the third year of implementing this policy.
12. Sheltered housing was previously exempt from this policy and Almshouses remain so. As all sheltered housing rent reduced by the 1% last year, we made the same arrangement for the Almshouses. However, with the level of investment in the properties rising sharply this year, Members may wish to reconsider this.
13. There are three options:
- a. Include the Almshouses in the 1% rent reduction at a cost of £2410 to the City of London Almshouses Trust;
 - b. Maintain rents at their current level;
 - c. Increase rent (we would recommend no more than a 1% increase).
14. Given the small financial loss to the City of London Almshouses Trust, officers would recommend treating the Almshouses residents the same as other sheltered housing residents and applying the 1% reduction, but that this should be reviewed next year.
15. Members are asked to consider this matter and to instruct officers accordingly.

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