

Committee	Dated:
Housing Management & Almshouses Sub-Committee	25 04 2016
Subject: City of London Almshouses Update	Public
Report of: Director of Community & Children's Services	For Information
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 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.

Current Position

2. Social activities

Residents enjoyed their Christmas hampers purchased from Marks & Spencer for the first time. There were several social activities over the holiday period which was enjoyed by many. Over the Easter break, residents enjoyed watching DVD films in the communal hall. Officers will be discussing options for summer events with residents. As this year is the Queen's 90th birthday, to celebrate the event officers have decided to have a joint event for all sheltered housing residents to be held at the new community hall at Avondale Square which will be open mid-summer. Details and invitations will be issued once dates have been finalised. Officers would be pleased if Members of the Sub-Committee were able to attend.

3. Estate meetings

Officers continue to work with Southwark Mediation Centre and the residents to explore and agree new ways of communication and working together.

At a recent meeting, residents agreed that, when working together with officers, for instance on repairs and maintenance issues, they had found that consultation and collaborative working resulted in an improved service, as well a sense of involvement for residents.

The view of the Manager of Southwark Mediation Centre is that this approach has worked extremely well. He feels that residents have appreciated involvement in resolving their repairs issues and that there is greater satisfaction with repairs.

At our next meeting officers and residents will be reviewing the Estate Handbook using the same approach. The handbook has not been updated since 2012 and some sections are out of date. As the HRA Tenant's Handbook has been recently updated, officers will use this as the starting point for consultation with Almshouses residents to review and update their own handbook.

4. Letter of Appointment

The Almshouses Association has recently updated their Standards of Management which includes a new Letter of Appointment. Officers consider this would be an appropriate time to review the Letter of Appointment in current use and update this for all residents accordingly. This would tie in well with the review of the Estate Handbook. Officers will bring a draft new Letter of Appointment to the Housing Management & Almshouses Sub-Committee once this has been developed in liaison with the Comptroller and City Solicitors.

5. Tree pruning

In February, London Borough of Islington and their contractors undertook long-awaited tree maintenance with advice and permission granted by the Tree Preservation Officer from London Borough of Lambeth. There is a small amount of work to finish, however there are nesting birds in these areas so this will have to be undertaken later in the year.

6. Repairs

The Property Services Team Manager continues to visit the estate on a monthly basis to ensure all work undertaken is to a high standard. Residents have agreed this has worked well in maintaining an improved standard. There would appear to be higher satisfaction with repairs and we are certainly hearing of fewer issues.

The estate still needs a major refurbishment programme, encompassing roof repairs, new windows, redecoration and other works. A condition survey has been carried out to establish the extent of work needed, and indicate likely costs. We hope to appoint a contractor to carry out the full programme in a two year

period. A paper asking for approval to proceed with the procurement is being presented to your Sub-Committee. If agreed, we will also be able to commence consultation with residents. A similar paper will be taken to the Gresham Committee in relation to the eight Gresham properties.

7. Complaints

There has been one formal complaint regarding the position of a new notice board. This is being managed with the help of Southwark Mediation Centre.

8. Rent Arrears

The current arrears are higher than officers anticipated; £7,490.25 at the end of the financial year. However, this higher amount relates mainly to two large debts - officers can provide details to Committee Members on these upon request. Without these two debts the outstanding sum would be only £975.09.

9. Vacancies

There are currently two vacancies. These will be offered to residents of Mais House as a priority after Community & Children's' Services Committee agreed redevelopment of Mais House in January this year.

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