

# NEWS FROM THE BOARD – DECEMBER 2022

## Open Forum

Thank you to all who attended the Open Forum on November 22<sup>nd</sup>. This was well received with many positive comments and a fair bit of feedback on what were considered areas for priority. This is being collated into a more comprehensive survey to be sent out to all leaseholders in January.

## Service charge costs

We apologise that the service charge budget and January invoices are a little late in reaching you. This has been as a result of the level of work undertaken by Blue and the Directors to review figures year to date, likely continued inflation and priority areas for 2023. You should receive the budget for 2023 and the January payment invoice in the next few days from Blue.

Next year is really going to be quite challenging with a continuation of recent increases in electricity costs, more statutory health and safety checks and further contributions to the sinking funds for essential maintenance. We have spent considerable time trying to avoid large increases in the annual charge, but the reality is we can only do so much – given most costs are fixed and the buildings continue to get older. Unfortunately we will all face an increase in service charge next year.

We already know that 2022 will be a more expensive year than was initially budgeted. We caught up with a significant amount of maintenance and health and safety work and electricity costs rose significantly from July. As far as we can, we will use sinking funds in the most effective manner, as previously advised. However, these funds will need topping up in future.

## Electricity

As you can imagine, one of the biggest cost increases will be our communal electricity bill. Much work has been done over the years to reduce the energy we use on site and in the last 10 years usage at City Point has been reduced by 50% and at Royal Standard House by 40%. Blue are regularly reviewing the market for best prices, and we are actively looking for savings in usage.

In Royal Standard House corridor lighting was replaced by LED movement sensor lights in 2019 and this year the communal vent system fans were replaced.

In City Point we replaced the garage lighting this year to limit the time they are switched on and we are planning to replace corridor lighting with similar movement sensors very shortly.

We have also not switched on the heaters in the gym this year and hope we can avoid doing so.

However, despite much work, current high pricing means that 2022 electricity costs will be £10,000-£15,000 higher per building than prior year and budget – and is expected to continue at or around this level for much of 2023.

## Safety Checks

We estimate that safety checks will constitute at least £2,000 per annum going forwards per building.

All lighting, alarms and safety 'systems' such as dry risers, fall arrests, smoke vents, emergency phone lines and now apartment front doors will require regular statutory checks every year. Some of this is now included in the anticipated maintenance costs.

## Building Maintenance contract with Whittles/Hankinsons

A 10 year contract was put in place in 2018 to cover the external maintenance of painted surfaces of both buildings and the Estate railings. It provides some maintenance in between main 'works' years, but it is not consistent. We are re-evaluating our future needs, the value we get from this contract and what is in the best interests of our site and leaseholders going forward. At this stage we must budget for the agreed cost in the contract for next year.

## Sinking Funds

Both RSH and CP are now well over 20 years old. As such there is an ever increasing need for maintenance of the structure and the equipment such as gates, lighting and entry phones. Technology and building materials have also moved on in 20 years. This need is reflected in the service charge budget for 2023 and the proposed payments onto the sinking funds.

As per last year, we plan to switch some money from the lift sinking funds to general funds (£10,000 for RSH and £20,000 for CP) whilst still maintaining adequate funds for lift refurbishment as and when necessary. Several essential major projects can thus be covered by the projected levels of sinking funds, reducing the top up required via the 2023 service charge.

But the sinking funds are not infinite. When spent, they need topping up by charges to the annual service charge. Accordingly, a charge of £10,000 from the service charge account to sinking funds is also being made for each of RSH and CP, as well as for shared expenditure.

## **Major Maintenance Work Outstanding**

### City Point

Dawid is chasing up quotes to resolve water ingress into the top floor areas at City Point and repairs to the penthouse coping stones. We may have to look at a variety of options for the long term future of the high level coping stones.

### Gates

We have quotations for work to improve the reliability of the gates. The most economical option is to introduce a new mechanism on the gate itself. This should also help in windy weather. Bearing in mind recent problems, Blue will now progress this as soon as possible.

The pedestrian gates will also require some minor repairs to ensure they close properly, and quotes are being sought.

### Valley House Boundary Wall

The surveyor has inspected the wall and we await his report; but work is expected to be required in 2023, for safety reasons.

### Defibrillator (south side wall of City Point)

This has now finally been installed and a training session will be organised shortly for those interested. In an emergency you can dial 999 and follow instructions.

### Fire Procedures and Fire Risk Assessments

We will be organising a more thorough review of our procedures and fire risks for both buildings in the new year. This will also include further investigation of what we need to do regarding apartment front doors.

### Car Parking

We've noticed an increase in 'visitors' cars where it's clear the occupants are not actually visiting anyone. Please don't encourage friends and family to use the site for free parking when they go into the city centre. Although the site looks quite empty of cars at times, there are often busier times, and we believe that residents appreciate the fact that their 'real' visitors are always able to park without hassle. If we allow a free for all this will eventually not be the case (this has happened in the past).

Visitors must display a RSH & CP Parking permit (and not simply a written note) and adhere to the parking code. If you do not currently have one, they may be obtained from Blue. The Board has consistently applied a "light touch" in applying the parking code and continues to do so, but this will only work if all leaseholders and residents play their part.

### Damp and Mould

There have been several recent press articles about the problems of damp and mould in dwellings. Most problems can be resolved by improving ventilation (opening windows for short periods/using a de-humidifier) or having low level heating on for longer. City Point window frames have built in trickle vents in the frames which you can leave open.

If you think there is a problem with damp coming through the external walls, please contact Blue as per the CONTACTS page.

**Finally, we would like to wish everyone a very Happy Christmas and New Year.**

**We understand some of the residents are organising Christmas carols and mince pies and that invitations will shortly be posted through letterboxes.**

## CONTACTS

### To Report a Problem – Contact the Managing Agents (Blue)

Please note revised instructions, which will aid the capture and monitoring of issues.

Email Dawid:

[dawid@bluepropertymanagementuk.com](mailto:dawid@bluepropertymanagementuk.com) and cc in [info@bluepropertymanagementuk.com](mailto:info@bluepropertymanagementuk.com)

*You should receive a response within 48 hours, even if this is to acknowledge your email.*

or call

**0330 0538770**

### Service Charge Queries

You can sign up to the Blue Portal which will give you access to your service charge account and history.

To sign up to the portal: email [info@bluepropertymanagementuk.com](mailto:info@bluepropertymanagementuk.com) for log in information

To visit the Portal: [www.myblockonline.co.uk](http://www.myblockonline.co.uk).

## Website

A reminder that our website has lots of useful information about the site, your lease and how things work in your apartment.

[www.standardhill.co.uk](http://www.standardhill.co.uk)