

Richard Watts and the City of Rochester Almshouse Charities

2014- REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES

2014 began with 15 Trustees in post, though Mrs Sharon Howell was appointed as a Trustee in May bringing the number back up to 16. Mrs Juliet Wright retired in November 2014 after 24 years as a Trustee. In addition to the Chairman, Mr Anthony Clayton and Vice Chairman, Mr Michael Bailey, a number of Trustees held key positions during the year:-

Estates - Chairman - Mr Donald Troup, Vice Chairman - Mr Brian Cox
House & Grants - Chairman - Mrs Hilary Harwood, Vice Chairman - Mrs Catherine Gore
Remuneration & Staffing - Chairman - Mr Terry Burton, Vice Chairman - Mr Roger Hill
Finance & Investment - Chairman - Mr Roger Hill, Vice Chairman - Mr Martin Cook
Internal Auditors - Mr Martin Cook and Mr Peter Smith
Health & Safety Group - Mr Michael Bailey, Mrs Hilary Moore and Ms Alex Booth

During the year, the Charities continued to provide almshouse accommodation and associated support to needy people in Rochester and Urban Strood and working in pairs, Trustees undertook visits to interview applicants requesting almshouse accommodation. Five new residents (one couple and three individuals) were accepted into the almshouses. Through the work of the House & Grants Committee together with the support of the staff there was an occupancy rate of 98.5% of the accommodation during the year. The Weekly Maintenance Contribution from residents was increased by 10% in January 2014 to help fund the extensive maintenance works programme.

In the year, support grants were made amounting to £55,666 (2013: £38,225) to 8 individuals for training and general support, 6 local organisations and 7 schools, 12 awards for school uniform, 73 university grants to A' level students, three apprenticeship grants to school leavers and 10 awards for domestic items for families. In most cases, a Trustee together with the Senior Administrator (House & Grants) visited applicants to assess the level of need to ensure that grant aid was given to those in greatest need. During 2014, following increased efforts to publicise the work of the Charities, the amount awarded was more than originally budgeted - 111%. Savings in other aspects of grant awards made this possible.

For older members of the community, the Charities provided outpension support to an average of 73 individuals (2013: 78) with 9 Outpensions discontinuing and two new Outpensioners being added during 2014; provided a gardening service to support two people living at home and paid for the Medway Helpline for 8 people. A subsidised Home Help service was provided for 39 people, 10 of whom have the service provided free of charge. 50% of Home Help clients received visits from the Co-ordinator to ensure all was well with the service provided.

The financial statements for 2014 continue to reflect the effectiveness of the management and administration of the Charities that is supported by a strong and proactive Board of Trustees through the work of its five Committees.

Rental income from investment properties continued to provide the majority of the Charities' income. Rents invoiced for 2014 were £771,062 and overall the arrears level has been kept low with 99.6% of 2014 rents paid. Occupancy levels were good too with commercial properties achieving 97.6% occupancy and residential 96.7%. Competitive quotes were sought for Insurance with Chesham proving that they were a good choice from a cost point of view resulting in considerable savings over 2013. Richard Tucker of J A Warner Ltd took over as the Surveyor and Professional Adviser when Mr Paddy Miller retired at the end of March 2014. Under Richard's control, a quinquennial survey was

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carried out at the Watts Almshouses including the Bungalows and Donald Troup House. Using the results of this survey, repair work and redecoration has been in hand in the latter part of the year with a projected completion of April 2015. This work is being funded from the Extraordinary Repair Fund and will ultimately cost over £100,000. In September, due to demand for residential accommodation, Flat 13 at Donald Troup House had a change of use, from visitor's to resident's flat. In addition, Capital work in the form of a major refurbishment took place at one of the flats at St Catherine's Hospital. Work continued with the bathroom and kitchen refurbishments at the almshouses with a total of six new bathrooms and seven new kitchens giving residents easier access to their facilities.

During the year two new members of staff joined the Charities in new roles, a part-time Archive Cataloguer and a part-time Site Maintenance Assistant. During the year one member of staff left and was replaced. At the end of 2014 all staff were in work and no long term health issues affected attendance at work. In November 2014, Trustees made the decision to set a minimum wage above the National Minimum Wage of £7.00 an hour commencing in 2015. Other staff received an inflationary increase of 2%. In January 2014, a new digital telephone system with all new handsets was purchased from BT.

During 2014 increased efforts were made to promote the services offered by the Charities and to become more involved and known in the wider community. The Charities ran a successful Art competition with a focus on Chatham Intra and Lesser Known Chatham which was judged and the works displayed at Nucleus Arts in Chatham. There were 106 entries and the winners were: 1st place - Flying Isaac by Heather Haythornthwaite - £1,000, 2nd place - Ship Lane circa 1900 by Andy Hudson - £500 and 3rd place - Brick and Bone by Debbie Randall - £250. In addition Richard Watts Charities purchased three of the short-listed works together with a number of the other entries to enhance the common areas of their flats in Chatham.

Once again in September the Charities took part in the National Heritage Open Days by opening the Boardroom and putting on view material from the archives; over 200 people attended. The Six Poor Travellers' House museum continued to be opened between March and October - Wednesdays to Sundays for 5 hours a day under the watchful eyes of curators and residents Mr & Mrs Nimmo. There were at least 16,000 visitors to the museum and its enclosed herb garden over the year.

Also in September, acknowledgement and thanks were given for the generosity of Richard Watts in a Quinquennial Thanksgiving service at Rochester Cathedral during Evensong on Sunday 7 September. The Service included an address by Revd Canon Philip Hesketh and was followed by a tea at the Watts Almshouses which was attended by The Mayor and Mayoress of Medway, Russell Race JP DL, Councillors Trevor Clark and Sylvia Griffin, Chairman of the Almshouse Association Blair Gulland, together with residents and their friends and family, other beneficiaries of the Charities, Trustees and staff. Chairman of Richard Watts Charities, Anthony Clayton said "It was a very special occasion for Trustees and residents together with family and friends alike. We all appreciated the time and effort that went into the preparation of the service and the opportunity to enjoy such a special service for the Richard Watts Charities given the fact that Richard himself had very close ties with the Cathedral all those years ago."

The annual Lessons & Carols attended by Trustees, residents and other beneficiaries of the Charities. It was hosted by the Reverend Jacky Henry at St Margaret's Church with a choir and members of the orchestra from The Rochester Grammar School under the tutelage of their Head of Music Mr Andy Millest. It was a success. In addition, residents enjoyed their annual Christmas Lunch with Trustees at the Manor Hotel, Singlewell.

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Overview

The results for the year show a surplus on unrestricted funds before transfers of £102,980 (2013: £204,236).

Incoming resources moved from £1,149,725 in 2013 to £1,203,144 in 2014. Interest and dividends receivable increased by 4.6% to £285,741.

Total resources expended increased by 16.4%, from £945,489 in 2013 to £1,100,164 in 2014.

At year end the charities' investment portfolio stood at £7,163,543, and showed unrealised gains of £170,323.

The above investment movements together with the surplus for the year give a positive net movement in funds of £268,074 to be added to total funds brought forward, meaning that total assets at 31 December 2014 were £20,761,113.