

Richard Watts and the City of Rochester Almshouse Charities

2015- REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES

Mr Colin McCarthy replaced Mrs Wright in January 2015 therefore the year began with 16 Trustees in post. Mr Roger Hill retired in November 2015 after 19 years as a Trustee. He was replaced by Mrs Kam Tesse in December 2015. In addition to the Chairman, Mr Michael Bailey and Vice Chairman, Mr Peter Smith, 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 Martin Cook and Vice Chairman - Mr Anthony Clayton
Internal Auditors - Mr Peter Smith
Health & Safety Group - Mrs Liz Janz, Mr Michael Bailey and Mrs Hilary Moore

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 moved into the almshouses, all of the new residents were men. Through the work of the House & Grants Committee together with the support of the staff there was an occupancy rate of 99.4% of the accommodation during the year. The Weekly Maintenance Contribution from residents was increased by 15% in January 2015 to help fund the extensive maintenance works programme.

In the year, support grants were made amounting to £50,424 (2014: £55,666) to 3 individuals for training and general support, 6 local organisations and 6 schools, school uniform awards for 26 children, 91 university grants to A' level students, one apprenticeship grant to a school leaver and 6 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 2015, following increased efforts to publicise the work of the Charities, the amount awarded was more than originally budgeted - 100.8%. 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 63 individuals (2014: 73) with 11 Outpensions discontinuing and 8 new Outpensioners being added during 2015; provided a gardening service to support two people living at home and paid for the Medway Helpline for 9 people. A subsidised Home Help service was provided for 43 people, 11 of whom have the service provided free of charge.

Trustees had a strategic planning meeting during October to look at whether the charities are meeting the needs of the local people as they (the needs) are interpreted in 2015. This was part of an on-going process.

The William Mantle Trust and the Richard Watts & Sir John Hayward Educational Charity have been linked to the main Richard Watts & the City of Rochester Almshouse Charities with the agreement of the Charity Commission. Administratively, time will be saved, so too costs of producing Annual Accounts which will no longer be necessary as these two small charities will from now be included within the main Report and Annual Accounts.

The financial statements for 2015 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 2015 were £748,936 and overall the arrears level has been kept low with 98% of 2015 rents paid. Occupancy levels were good too with commercial properties achieving full occupancy and residential 98.34%. A quinquennial survey was carried out at Richard Watts Court and works involving redecoration or building repairs were completed during the year costing about £53,000. Windows were refurbished or replaced at Reeves House costing about £83,000. In addition, Capital work in the form of a total refurbishment took place at 14 Gordon Terrace at a

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cost of £78,000. Work continued with the bathroom and kitchen refurbishments at the almshouses with a total of 5 new bathrooms and 5 new kitchens giving residents easier access to their facilities.

Considerable work of a strategic nature has been undertaken in relation to Chatham Waterfront in order to protect the Charities' interests there and also in relation to the possible sale and development of part of Fant Farm.

During the year two members of staff left and were replaced. One member of staff left and was not replaced. A temporary part-time warden was recruited for three months to cover staff sickness though her contract has been extended and she is still employed at the end the year. At the end of 2015 one member of staff was still off sick but due to come back for a phased-return early in 2016. In November 2015, Trustees made the decision bring in the National Living Wage ahead of the official deadline i.e. January 2016 rather than April 2016. Other staff received an inflationary increase of 1%.

During 2015 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 held a Summer Fete in June and launched the second Art competition in September with a focus on Lesser Known Rochester. In addition, 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; 267 people attended. Sadly Mr Nimmo, curator of the Six Poor Travellers' House museum died in January 2015. His wife continues to open the museum between Easter and October - Wednesdays to Sundays for 5 hours a day with help from volunteers when the need arises.

The annual Lessons & Carols was attended by Trustees, residents and other beneficiaries of the Charities. It was hosted by the Reverend Joel Love 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. In addition, residents enjoyed their annual Christmas Lunch with Trustees at the Manor Hotel, Singlewell.

Overview

The results for the year show a surplus on unrestricted funds before transfers of £63,429 (2014: £102,980).

Incoming resources moved from £1,203,144 in 2014 to £1,246,594 in 2015. Interest and dividends receivable increased by 8% to £308,629.

Total resources expended increased by 7.5%, from £1,100,164 in 2014 to £1,183,165 in 2015.

At year end the charities' investment portfolio stood at £7,164,203.

The above investment movements together with the surplus for the year and £252,099 in respect of the introduction of assets owned by the William Mantle Trust and the Richard Watts & Sir John Hayward's Educational Charities give a positive net movement in funds of £280,529 to be added to total funds brought forward, meaning the total assets at 31 December 2015 were £21,041,642.