

Richard Watts and the City of Rochester Almshouse Charities

2016 - REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES

Mrs Hilary Moore retired in February 2016 after 14 years as a Trustee. She was replaced by Mrs Linda Reay in April 2016. In addition to the Chairman, Mr Michael Bailey and Vice Chairman, Mrs Hilary Harwood, 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 Colin McCarthy
Finance & Investment - Chairman - Mr Martin Cook and Vice Chairman - Mr Anthony Clayton
Internal Auditors - Mr Peter Smith

In the summer, the Trustees agreed a change to the entry criteria for new almshouse residents. The age criteria for entry was increased to 65 years. This change reflects the fact that people are working longer and that the state pension is being paid out later in life to new pensioners. Separately, the Charity Commission was approached regarding a change in the charities' catchment area from Rochester and urban Strood to all of ME1 and ME2 and this was agreed. This change serves to increase the number of people the Charities can help and makes the boundaries much easier to relate to.

During the year, the Charities provided almshouse accommodation and associated support to needy people within the new boundaries and working in pairs, Trustees undertook visits to interview applicants requesting almshouse accommodation. Five new residents moved into the almshouses. Through the work of the House & Grants Committee together with the support of the staff there was an occupancy rate of 98.6% of the accommodation during the year. The Weekly Maintenance Contribution from residents was increased by a further 15% in January 2016 to help fund the extensive maintenance works programme.

In the year, support grants were made amounting to £49,176 (2015: £50,424) to 8 individuals for training and educational support, 10 local organisations and 10 schools, school uniform awards for 14 children, 62 university grants to A' level students, two apprenticeship grants, 15 awards for domestic items and support for families and 5 awards for specialist equipment. 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 2016, the amount awarded was slightly less than originally budgeted - 98%.

For older members of the community, the Charities provided outpension support to an average of 66 individuals (2015: 63) with 8 Outpensions discontinuing and 6 new Outpensioners being added during 2016; provided a gardening service to support two people living at home and paid for the Medway Helpline for 5 people. A subsidised Home Help service was provided for 31 people, 13 of whom have the service provided free of charge.

The financial statements for 2016 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 2016 were £750,542 and overall the arrears level has been kept low with 98.7% of 2016 rents paid. Occupancy levels were good too with commercial properties achieving 95% occupancy and residential 97.3%. A quinquennial survey was carried out at Bell Buildings and works involving redecoration and building repairs were completed during the year costing about £97,628.79. Quinquennial surveys were carried out at Hayward House and The Six Poor Travellers' House resulting in works involving redecoration and building repairs being completed, costing £24,800 and £34,280 respectively. Work continued with the bathroom and kitchen refurbishments at the almshouses with a total of 5 new bathrooms and 4 new kitchens giving residents easier access to their facilities. In December, on the instructions of the Trustees, Orchard Cottage, a detached Victorian Cottage located at Fant Farm near Maidstone was

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successfully offered for sale by Clive Emson, Land and Property Auctioneers. Unfortunately the cottage is situated too far from the rest of the Charities' property portfolio and had been proving difficult to manage, thus the decision to sell. There are plans to purchase a replacement residential property in Rochester.

Work of a strategic nature continued 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 three members of staff resigned and were replaced. The temporary part-time warden recruited for three months to cover staff sickness in 2015 continued to be employed in that role until the end of June 2016. In November 2016, Trustees decided to remain ahead of the official deadline for the annual increase in the National Living Wage i.e. January 2017 rather than April 2017. Other staff received an inflationary increase of 1%.

During 2016 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 its second Summer Fete in June and the second Art competition "Lesser Known Rochester" came to a close in April 2016 with the overall winner being Sue Maddock with "Medway Queen" a collaged piece. In 2nd place, Marlene Corke with "Baker Street" her incredibly detailed Victorian house and 3rd place went to Rosie James with her stitched textile. One of the Judges Heather Haythornthwaite, who had been a previous winner of the competition, said "The competition succeeded in raising the profile of Watts as a local beneficent organisation."

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. The openings attracted over two hundred visitors across the weekend. Visitors had the opportunity to read the latest information researched about the founder Richard Watts on display in the Board Room, tour the site, visit some almshouses and buy refreshments. Key to the success of the weekend was the involvement of residents in all aspects of the event.

In December, residents and staff enjoyed their annual Christmas Lunch with Trustees at a new venue; Medway Yacht Club at lower Upnor.

Overview

The results for the year show a surplus on unrestricted funds before transfers of £133,368 and on endowment funds of £10,231 meaning that net income before investment gains amounted to £143,599 (2015: £63,429).

Incoming resources moved from £1,246,594 in 2015 to £1,267,767 in 2016. Investment Income increased slightly to £1,100,955 whilst income from charitable activities increased by 12% to £165,171.

Total resources expended decreased by 5%, from £1,183,165 in 2015 to £1,124,168.

At year end the charities' investments comprised investment properties of £13,530,500 and listed investments of £7,773,647.

Movement in the above investments together with the surplus for the year, resulted in a positive net movement in funds of £4,412,776 to be added to total funds brought forward, meaning the total assets at 31 December 2016 were £25,454,418. Endowment funds totalled £23,878,283 (2015 - £19,693,032), designated funds totalled £446,182 (2015 - £428,786) and general funds totalled £1,129,953 (2015 - £919,824).