

2017- REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES

In addition to the Chairman, Mr Michael Bailey and Vice Chairman, Mrs Alex Clarabut, 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 Peter Smith
Internal Auditor - Mr Peter Smith

During the year, the Charities provided almshouse accommodation and associated support to needy people within ME1 & ME2 and working in pairs, Trustees undertook visits to interview applicants requesting almshouse accommodation. 6 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 98.3% of the accommodation during the year. The Weekly Maintenance Contribution from residents was increased by a further 15% in January 2017 to help fund the extensive maintenance works programme.

In the year, support grants were made amounting to £63,346 (2016: £49,175) to 6 individuals for training and educational support, 8 local organisations and 4 schools, 31 children for school uniform, 5 awards for domestic items for families, 9 awards to adults who were in difficulty, 2 awards for specialist equipment and one apprenticeship grant. 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. The support grants also include £22,260 that was awarded for a new counselling initiative managed by North Kent Mind working in four schools serving children who live within the catchment: Fort Pitt Grammar School, Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical School, Strood Academy and Thomas Aveling School, where the Chairman is a Governor. One to one counselling was provided by Breathing Space, located in Rochester.

For older members of the community, the Charities provided outpension support to an average of 62 individuals (2016: 66) with 12 Outpensions discontinuing and 5 new Outpensioners being added during 2017; provided a gardening service to support 4 people living at home and paid for the Medway Helpline for 5 people. A subsidised Home Help service was provided for 43 people plus an additional 13 who have the service provided free of charge.

The Charity Commission was approached with a view to extending the entry criteria for almshouse applicants to include people returning to Rochester to be close to friends and family in their old age. Agreement to this request was received early in 2018.

The financial statements for 2017 continue to reflect the effectiveness of the management and administration of the Charities that is supported by a strong and

pro-active Board of Trustees through the work of its five Committees. Indeed Trustees met for a strategic planning meeting in February which resulted in the introduction of the Counselling Project and increased emphasis on apprenticeship grants.

Rental income from investment properties continued to provide the majority of the Charities' income. Rents invoiced for 2017 were £737,584 and overall the arrears level has been kept low with all but 3.1% of 2017 rents paid. Occupancy levels were good too with commercial properties achieving 94.3% occupancy and residential 95.2%. A quinquennial survey was carried out at John Clay House, Gordon Terrace, Love Lane and at Reeves House resulting in works involving redecoration and building repairs being completed during the year costing just under £160,000. Work continued with the bathroom and kitchen refurbishments at the almshouses with 2 new bathrooms and 4 new kitchens being completed. A house at 31 Ridley Road, Rochester was purchased with the proceeds of the sale of Orchard Cottage (sold in 2016) together with land adjoining it (sold in 2017) and it achieved one of the highest rental values of any of the residential rental properties in the portfolio.

During the year two members of staff retired and one sadly died suddenly while still in service. The part-time warden took up the residential warden role and altogether five new staff members were recruited. In November 2017, Trustees decided once again to remain ahead of the official deadline for paying the annual increase in the National Living Wage i.e. January 2018 rather than April 2018. Other staff received an inflationary increase of 3%.

During 2017 increased efforts were made to promote the services offered by the Charities and to become more involved and known in the wider community. The Symond Potyn 700th Anniversary afternoon event took place on Sunday 30 April at St Catherine's when Reverend Love unveiled a plaque. It was well attended by both current and past residents of St Catherine's who enjoyed afternoon tea after the unveiling. 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 280 visitors across the weekend. Visitors had the opportunity to read the latest material on display, tour the site, visit some almshouses and buy refreshments. Yet again 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 the Medway Yacht Club at Lower Upnor.

Overview

The results for the year show a surplus on unrestricted funds before transfers of £122,265 and on endowment funds of £7,715 meaning that net income before investment gains amounted to £129,980 (2016: £143,599). Income increased from £1,267,767 in 2016 to £1,306,934 in 2017. Investment income increased slightly to £1,115,791 whilst income from charitable activities increased by 15% to £190,493. Total expenditure increased by 5%, from £1,124,168 in 2016 to £1,176,954 in 2017. At year end the Charities' investments comprised investment properties of £13,812,005 and listed investments of £8,377,625.

Richard Watts and the City of Rochester Almshouse Charities

Movements in the above investments, together with the surplus for the year, resulted in a positive net movement in funds of £556,151 to be added to total funds brought forward, meaning the total assets at 31December 2017 were £26,010,569. Endowment funds totalled £24,251,332 (2016 - £23,878,283), designated funds totalled £477,452 (2016 - £446,182) and general funds totalled £1,281,785 (2016 - £1,129,953).