

Richard Watts and the City of Rochester Almshouse Charities

2019 - REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES

In addition to the newly appointed Chair, Mrs Alex Clarabut and Vice Chairman, Martin Cook, a number of Trustees held key positions during the year:-

Estates - Chairman - Mr Michael Bailey, Vice Chairman - Mr Martin Cook
House & Grants - Chairman - Mrs Catherine Gore, Vice Chairman - Mrs Liz Janz
Remuneration & Staffing - Chairman - Mr Terry Burton, Vice Chairman - Mr Colin McCarthy
Finance & Investment - Chairman - Mr Peter Smith and Vice Chairman - Mrs Kam Tesse
Internal Auditor - Mrs Kam Tesse

During the year both the Chairman and the Vice Chairman of Estates, Mr Donald Troup and Mr Brian Cox retired. New Trustees, Mr Barrie Fewtrell and Ms Elizabeth Whitlam were appointed.

During the latter part of the year, Trustees employed Good Governance Institute (GGI) to conduct a Governance Review. Overall, the review's findings were positive. The Board was commended for commissioning this independent review, which demonstrated a genuine and proactive commitment to improvement. The dedication to the aims of the charity were clear from everyone with whom GGI has engaged in the review process, which is a real asset to the organisation. The Trustees appear to be appropriately skilled and are unequivocally committed to the charities. They are aware of their heavy burden of stewardship, which drives a largely risk-averse approach but is important for the Charities' legacy. The recommended actions are being considered during 2020.

During 2019, 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. Four 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% of the accommodation during the year. The Weekly Maintenance Contribution from residents was increased by a further 15% in January 2019 to £56.22 for single occupancy and £79.15 for couples to help fund the running costs and maintenance works programme.

In the year, support grants were made amounting to £72,951 (2018: £61,379) to 10 local organisations and 5 schools, 38 children for school uniform, 10 awards for domestic items for families, 4 awards to adults who were in difficulty, support for three people regarding training or apprenticeships. 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. In addition, £16,000 was awarded for the counselling initiative managed by North Kent Mind which continued the work they started in 2017 by working in four schools serving children who live within the catchment; Rochester Grammar, Sir Joseph Williamson Maths School, Strood Academy and Thomas Aveling. One to one counselling continued to be provided by Breathing Space, located in Rochester.

For older members of the community, the Charities provided outpension support to an average of 50.5 individuals (2018: 55) with 7 Outpensions discontinuing and 3 new Outpensioners being added during 2019; provided a gardening service to support 5 people living at home and paid for the Medway Helpline for 4 people. A subsidised Home Help service was provided for 55 people, 15 people of whom had the service provided free of charge.

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The financial statements for 2019 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 2019 were £358,350 and overall the arrears level has been kept low with all but 4.98% of 2019 rents paid. Occupancy levels were good too with commercial properties achieving 98.5% occupancy and residential 94.9%. A quinquennial survey was carried out at Watts Almshouses resulting in works involving redecoration and building repairs being completed during the year costing £137,109. Work continued with the bathroom and kitchen refurbishments at the almshouses with two new bathrooms and three new kitchens being completed.

This year, altogether three new staff members were recruited. Two replaced staff members who had left, the third was a part time fixed term appointment who provided cover during staff absence from sickness. In November 2019, Trustees decided once again to remain ahead of the official deadline for paying the annual increase in the National Living Wage i.e. January 2020 rather than April 2020. The pay ranges for both managers and senior admin staff were increased. Other staff received an inflationary increase of 2.5%.

During 2019 increased efforts were made to promote the services offered by the Charities and to become more involved and known in the wider community through The Poor Travellers' House and through public events.

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 300 visitors across the weekend. Visitors had the opportunity to read material on display in the Board Room, tour the site, visit some almshouses and buy refreshments. Over the weekend two walking tours were organised from The Six Poor Travellers' House to Watts. Yet again, key to the success of the weekend was the involvement of residents in all aspects of the event. On the Sunday of the weekend, Richard Watts Day was celebrated for the first time.

In December, residents and staff once again enjoyed their annual Christmas Lunch with Trustees at the Friary at Aylesford.

Overview

The results for the year show a surplus on unrestricted funds before transfers of £16,734 and on endowment funds a surplus of £6,125 meaning that net income before investment gains amounted to £22,859 (2018 - £72,568).

Income increased from £1,384,966 in 2018 to £1,411,319 in 2019. Investment income decreased slightly to £1,125,557 whilst income from charitable activities increased by 8% to £233,958.

Total expenditure increased by 6%, from £1,312,398 in 2018 to £1,388,460 in 2019.

At year end the Charity's investments comprised investment properties of £13,812,005 and listed investments of £8,296,542.

Movements in the above investments, together with the surplus for the year, resulted in a positive net movement in funds of £784,623 to be added to the total funds brought forward, meaning the total assets at 31 December 2019 were £26,103,149. Endowment funds totalled £24,245,179 (2018 - £23,628,684), designated funds totalled £565,727 (2018 - £471,883) and general funds totalled £1,292,243 (2018 - £1,217,959).