

Chairman's Report, June 2019

Whilst this report provides an update on what has happened since the Board meeting in March, I am also taking the opportunity to look back over the last year and reflect on what has taken place and on our achievements.

Personnel:

Sadly Sharon Clifford, our Deputy Scheme Manager, left our employ on Friday 14th June, to enable her to work more fully in the family business. She has been a very valuable member of the team for several years and she will be sorely missed by the residents and the trustees.

Advertisements for her replacement were placed in the local press and on the Almshouse Association website and elicited 14 interested parties – closing date for applications is 18th June. The HR sub-committee meets on Friday 21st June to draw up a short list of candidates. Interviews will be held on Wednesday 26th June. Jess Daly is continuing to do sterling work in Sharon's absence, but we obviously hope to recruit somebody into the role as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, our Clerk, John Loscombe and Grants Administrator, Doug Evans, stepped up to their increased responsibilities, and hours, when our treasurer left us in September and have done an excellent job for us.

Since the beginning of June, they have (again) adopted new work patterns, with John decreasing his hours to 25, and Doug increasing his to 25. Between them, they continue to provide invaluable support and I would like to express my sincere thanks to them both. They have made what can at times be a challenging role much easier.

Trustees:

We have said goodbye and thanks to Mayor Cllr John Bicknell at the end of his mayoral term but we welcome Mayor Cllr Kate Rolfe who spent a short time with us a few years ago so I am sure will have a valuable contribution to make.

Sadly, Sheila Price has suffered poor health this year but somehow managed to attend almost all the meetings that were in her diary. With her treatments finally over, I have every confidence that she will be playing a full role once again and will be as vociferous as ever!

Peter Rowland's term of office has been renewed as from the beginning of June, so he will continue as a Trustee until 2024. Tessa Bates's term of office finishes in August and our thanks to her for her hard work on the Charity's behalf over her term of office. We wait to hear who her replacement from the Town Council will be.

The post of Deputy Chairman remains unfilled. As my term of office expires in 2020, we need a trustee to step forward asap.

Training:

John and I attended the Almshouse Association Conference in London last week and felt that it was a very useful day. The workshops were highly instructive, and it was interesting to hear how other Almshouses around the country operate and approach various “opportunities”. We are all very different but have a lot to learn from each other.

Meanwhile, I am delighted that Municipal Charities has another training day planned for Tuesday 25th June. We have invited a speaker to talk to us about safeguarding, and Sarah O’Grady will brief us on the Charity Governance Code. I do hope as many of you as possible will be able to attend. It is incumbent on us all as trustees of Municipal Charities to develop our skills and increase our level of professionalism. Whilst we are a small, local charity, we need to be mindful of our responsibilities. At the same time, as a small, local charity, I hope that we can remain mindful of our local ethos.

Achievements:

Since June 2018, I believe we have achieved a number of things that we can congratulate ourselves on:

- We have converted Nos 1 and 2 bedsits at Guild Cottages into one flat and have overseen a major upgrade and modernisation to two flats at St Josephs.
- We have implemented a new policy for the appointment of residents to our properties in order to ensure that our selection process is as objective as possible.
- We now have Terms of Reference for three of our committees, RINC, Properties and Finance. The Advisory Committee is reviewing its function to better reflect its *raison d’être*. Terms of Reference for it will be drawn up in due course.
- We have revised and updated many of our Policies to ensure that they comply with the latest legislation and that we operate in a manner appropriate to a responsible charity.
- Our new website went live earlier in the year and it is now much more modern and easier to navigate. Although a lot of the text was taken from the old site, much of it was re-written using up to date terminology to accurately reflect the current position of the Charity and its properties. Potential RINC applicants can now see relevant guidance and can use a form to contact Doug. In the same manner, John can be contacted for other matters using a similar form. Trustees can also access a secure area of the site to view meeting papers and other Charity documents.

Work in Progress:

Whilst St Joseph’s Homestead comes under the Municipal Charities umbrella, we believe that it should become incorporated into the MCSonA uniting direction. We are currently investigating how we can achieve this and are cautiously optimistic that the process might not be too arduous.

On a less positive note, we seem to have been talking about Swan House in Guild Street for many months. As you are aware, we own the freehold to Nos 9, 10 and 11 Guild Street, the leases of which expire on all 3 properties in 2032. The lessee of Nos 9 and 10 wishes to extend his lease and the lessee of No 11 wishes to relinquish his lease prematurely. The opportunities afforded to us are potentially very exciting but equally very complex.

Document 8, which is for discussion under Agenda Item 11, explains the situation succinctly and will illustrate just how much work has been going on behind the scenes.

I ask for your patience on this matter. We are seeking your initial thoughts this evening based on the information we have but are well aware that we have much work to do before we can develop a firm proposal as to the way forward and bring it to the Board for your consideration.

It remains for me to thank you all for your continued hard work and support. I look forward to working with you all in the coming year.