

September 2009

## ■ Speirs House update

You will have seen the article in the pull-out newsletter inside February's E&T magazine regarding Speirs House, IET Connect's care home in New Malden, Surrey. The article explained that, for a variety of reasons, IET Connect (the IET Benevolent Fund) Trustees had decided that it was necessary to review the way in which Speirs House operated.

Running a single care home with no immediate sources of "in house" management back-up has been a constant concern of the Trustees. The increasing demands of care home legislation, health and safety regulations and other statutory requirements are other pressures. The IET Connect Trustee Board and Speirs House Directors are comprised entirely of engineers, so they have increasingly needed to use specialist consultants. Partnership with a larger scale specialist care home provider would address the evident challenges facing the Speirs House management on all of these fronts.

Despite the efforts of IET Connect and the Speirs House Directors, the home, which is able to provide long term care and respite care for up to 35 people, has had a consistently low number of IET members making use of the facility, with never more than 50% of residents being members or relatives. This is not really surprising, given that care home specialists say that



*Speirs House*

most people choose to go into care homes located within 10km or a 20 minute drive from their home.

Since January 2009, the IET Connect Board of Trustees has consulted widely on the future of Speirs House. Having carefully considered the views expressed, the Trustee Board decided to invite specialist care home organisations to bid for the purchase of Speirs House. The Trustee Board set up an Evaluation Panel to carry out a detailed evaluation of the suitability of a potential purchaser.

Following a review of the recommendations by the Evaluation Panel, the IET Connect Board of Trustees is pleased to announce that it has agreed to accept an offer for the purchase of Speirs House. The Board is now entering a phase of contract negotiation and hopes to be able to announce the details very soon.

The partnership will not only increase the number of care home places available to IET members and their relatives across a wider geographic area, it will also ensure the required high level of care and legislative compliance in the long term.

There is also the secondary benefit that funds currently tied up in bricks and mortar will be released and made available to help more IET members and relatives in need, whether or not they live in the Surrey area. This ties in well with the intention of Mr Speirs himself, who suggested back in 1963 that the property be sold off to "do the maximum amount of good ... The result of this might be that a much greater number could be benefited". He also felt members would far rather be in homes "nearer their own friends and homes".

## What does this mean for Speirs House residents and relatives?

As mentioned in the last newsletter, the IET Connect Board of Trustees' primary concern has been, and still is, to ensure the continuity and quality of care for present and future residents of Speirs House. To clarify the situation for existing residents we have answered the following key questions:

### **"Will I be able to remain as a resident?"**

Existing residents' basis of occupation will be unaffected by any change of ownership.

### **"How will this affect the fees that I pay?"**

There will be no fee increase for existing residents until April 2010 providing their individual care needs do not increase. With effect from 1 April 2010 fees will be reviewed annually and all existing Speirs House residents' fees will increase by no more than either RPI (Retail Price Index) plus 1%, or 3%, whichever is the greater. As is currently the case a review of fees



may be requested if an individual's care needs change or if new legislation is introduced.

### **"What will happen to the staff who look after me?"**

Staff and management employed at Speirs House at the date of completion will be transferred to the new organisation.

### **More Help Available**

Help with accommodation and a wide range of care needs will be available from a special new fund (The Speirs Fund) to be set up specifically for IET members and their direct dependants.

Help with care home fees will be available for individuals in financial need, including those resident at Speirs House.

The IET Connect Board of Trustees is also keen to make more help available to carers who are all too often forgotten. A national poll published to coincide with "Carer's week" in June highlighted the pressures on those providing care for others, whether they be children or adults; the poll found that three quarters of carers felt that they were at breaking point. Respite is vital to help all concerned and paying for respite care, either at home through a sitting service, or in a residential home setting, will be another area of focus of the new fund.

Other care options will also be made possible through additional funds, including live-in care and home care which will help disabled or elderly vulnerable people stay in their own homes for as long as possible.

Of course, IET Connect will also continue to make one-off grants for specific items such as disability equipment, home adaptations, special needs and mobility, along with other support, as part of its wider-ranging grant schemes for members and their families on low incomes.

## The Future

As far as IET members are concerned there is one other important fact to note. The Charity Commission will no longer permit a discount for individuals who are not financially necessitous, regardless of whether or not they have IET connections. Therefore, from a date yet to be determined, new residents at Speirs House will no longer receive a discount

because of their IET connections. This will be the case whether the contract goes through or not.

Whilst there is still much work to do on the details of the contract, it is anticipated that IET members and their dependants will still have preferential access to Speirs House and possibly other homes that are owned by the incoming provider.