

## **Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum**

**Minutes of the Meeting held in the Conference Room, East Suffolk House (Suffolk Coastal District Council Offices), Riduna Park, Melton, Woodbridge, IP12 1RT, on Tuesday, 4<sup>th</sup> April, 2017, at 1pm**

**SCDC: Suffolk Coastal District Council, WDC: Waveney District Council  
SCC: Suffolk County Council**

### **Present:**

Linda Hoggarth	Disability Forum for Suffolk (Chair)
Gillian Benjamin	Active Communities Officer, Suffolk Coastal & Waveney District Councils
Moyra Bevilacqua	Resident
Richard Cotton	Resident
Paul Durrant	Ipswich JobCentre Plus
Michael Friend	Hollesley Parish Council and Carer
Paula Hitchings	Leading Lives
Leigh Horton	Disability Advice Service East Suffolk
Sylvia Izzard	Resident
Paul Kelly	Resident
Liz Mark	Resident and Bawdsey Parish Council
Kathleen May	Resident
Jen Morcom	Disability Advice Service East Suffolk
Margaret Morris	Resident (Secretary)
Kerry Overton	Community Development Officer, Healthwatch Suffolk
Cheryl Radziszewski	Department of Work & Pensions, JobCentre Plus
Graham Walker	Avenues East
Ms Whiting	Resident

### **Guests:**

Justin Hunt	Head of Housing Services, East Suffolk Councils
Richard Kerry	Councillor, Suffolk Coastal District Council
Jack O'Sullivan	Housing Enabler, Suffolk Coastal District Council
Mark Speller	Building Manager, East Suffolk House

### **Apologies:**

Stuart Ellis	Resident
Holly Granville	Local Area Co-ordinator for Saxmundham and Leiston, Public Health, Suffolk County Council
Steve Hodgkiss	East Suffolk Association for the Blind
Linda Layton	Resident and Carer

Paul Little	Head of Strategic Commissioning, Adult & Community Services, Suffolk County Council
Maureen Mee	Resident
Anita Moxley	Action for Blind People

## **1. Welcome & Introductions**

Linda welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

## **2. Apologies**

The above apologies were received and noted.

## **3. Housing for Disabled People including Supported Housing**

3.1 Linda explained that Paul Little, Head of Strategic Commissioning, Adult & Community Services, Suffolk County Council, was unfortunately unable to attend but would be willing to attend a future meeting and to respond to specific questions arising from this meeting. Additionally, Flagship Housing had been unable to send a representative to the meeting.

3.2 She welcomed Cllr Kerry, Suffolk Coastal District Council, and Jack O'Sullivan, Housing Enabler, Suffolk Coastal District Council, to the meeting and invited them to explain their roles and responsibilities.

3.3 Jack gave a brief overview of his role as a Housing Enabler. He works to identify sites to meet local housing needs. He said that SCDC is aiming to boost the number of affordable houses across the Suffolk Coastal area. Waveney District Council has their own housing stock so it can directly influence the number of affordable homes by building more. SCDC cannot build their own affordable homes as all their housing stock was transferred to Flagship Housing in 1991. Housing need is recorded on the Housing Register and this is constantly reviewed with a view to ensuring affordable housing is provided where it is needed.

3.4 He explained that there is a need for housing which is not being provided by developers. From the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) levied on developers, SCDC has £1.6 million to spend.

3.5 Cllr Kerry explained that he is the Cabinet Member for Housing. Part of his role is to approve grants awarded to people with disabilities for adaptations to their homes. These are known as Disabled Facilities Grants – there are specific terms and conditions to be met, one of which

is that the grant has to be repaid if the house is sold within 10 years. Cllr Kerry was not able to confirm whether the necessary Occupational Therapy assessments are carried out by SCC staff or whether the service is contracted out and whether grants are delayed by the assessment process.

3.6 In Trimley St Mary, the Mushroom Farm development has provided 22 houses allocated to people in the local area who are on the housing register.

3.7 Justin Hunt, Head of Housing Services, East Suffolk Councils joined the meeting at this point. He confirmed that the main provider of affordable housing in Suffolk Coastal is Flagship Housing. Previously Flagship Housing used to fund adaptations for disabled tenants but they no longer do so and tenants have to apply to SCDC for a Disabled Facilities Grant.

3.8 In response to a question, it was noted that if there is a disagreement between Flagship and a tenant, the tenant has to apply to the Housing Ombudsman.

3.9 Housing Benefit is now paid direct to tenants so the contract is between Flagship and the tenant. Housing Benefit should cover the costs of communal areas for people living in housing schemes.

3.10 The conversion of the old Bartlett Hospital in Felixstowe provided 10 affordable homes in the Felixstowe area. It was noted that what was most needed to enable downsizing were 1 or 2 bedroom bungalows.

3.11 Planning conditions now mean 33% of developments over 10 houses have to be affordable, which can be enforced now the Local Plan has been agreed.

3.12 A member pointed out that it is difficult for an owner occupier to buy a specially built home for a disabled person. In Woodbridge, bungalows are sometimes purchased and then turned into houses resulting in fewer bungalows being available.

3.13 There is a high percentage of holiday (or second) homes within Suffolk Coastal. A member reported that, in Bawdsey, there are now 60 holiday homes, and 15 out of 25 houses at Shingle Street are holiday homes. Cllr Kerry noted that the St Ives restriction on building second homes has not worked in practice. The Government has awarded SCDC £1.5m to deliver more affordable housing to address communities affected by a large number of holiday homes.

3.14 However, the challenge is still the lack of supply of new homes. If the numbers of new build homes are increased then prices overall will decrease.

3.15 Justin noted that anyone can register their particular needs on the Housing Register – the aim is to identify and discover more about housing issues in the area and what the needs are going forward. This can be done by registering through Gateway to Homechoice. It should be noted that matching houses to people is an imperfect science.

3.16 In response to a question about Lifetime Homes, it was explained that the detailed specifications meant extra costs for developers. Consequently the development of Lifetime Homes was shelved. However, new homes should be 'visitable' in line with current building regulations.

3.17 Housing developments result in SCDC receiving Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments. These can be used to ensure there are adequate services in the development area such as extending GP surgeries. The amount of CIL increases if a town or village has a neighbourhood plan. It is the Council's role to take account of services in areas of housing development.

3.18 In response to a question about the shortage of bungalows, it was noted that SCDC has no policy to prevent a bungalow being turned into a house. Additionally, there are concerns that insufficient numbers of bungalows are being built. Cllr Kerry suggested that a representative of SCDC's Planning Department be invited to a future meeting to address these concerns which are planning issues.

**Action: The Planning Group will consider further action.**

3.19 Linda thanked Cllr Kerry, Justin, and Jack for their contribution to the meeting and for helping members to understand housing issues and answer their questions.

#### **4. East Suffolk House – Mark Speller, Building Manager**

4.1 Linda welcomed Mark Speller, Building Manager, East Suffolk House and invited him to comment on the concerns raised at the last meeting of the Forum.

4.2 Mark responded to the concerns detailed in the minutes from the January Forum meeting as follows:

- The General Housekeeping Notes (available to the Chair of the meeting) will be updated to improve on the information given in order to assist people with disabilities;
- SCDC does not own the grassed area at the entrance to Riduna Park so it is not possible to erect a sign at the entrance;
- The signage to the parking spaces for blue badge holders will be modified. There are no plans to increase the number of parking spaces for blue badge holders;
- There are now doorbells at the rear entrance to obtain assistance to access the building. A member suggested that there should be a sheltered area so that people do not get wet whilst waiting;
- Mark noted that clarification is required on the plans to evacuate the building in an emergency. Organisers of open meetings should not be expected to provide people trained in the use of Evac chairs. Members of the public attending meetings should not be expected to have to draw up their own Personal Evacuation Plan;
- A press button door opener has been authorised for the entrance to the Conference Room;
- All staff are, in theory, fire wardens. It was noted that village halls are inspected for Fire Risks but not, it seemed, SCDC offices;
- The concerns regarding the number of Evac chairs and the lack of a wheelchair available on the ground floor have been noted, along with the difficulty of getting to the assembly point.

4.3 Members commented that the microphone system was very helpful especially for those who had difficulties in hearing.

4.4 Linda thanked Mark for taking our concerns seriously and said that the Forum will be pleased to hear when improvements have been made. Mark would keep the Forum informed.

**Action: Mark Speller**

## **5. Consultation - Disability Advice Service East Suffolk**

5.1 Linda welcomed Jen Morcom, Manager of the Disability Advice Service East Suffolk (DAS). Jen introduced the Consultation and explained the purpose was to assist with the preparation of a bid to the National Lottery.

5.2 She summarised the DAS service as follows: DAS covers all of the Suffolk Coastal area with just over 2 staff and 15 volunteers. The

service provides advice on non-medical issues and welfare benefits. A considerable number of appeals against benefit decisions are carried out and the DAS wins some 79% of these. People also have a lot of housing issues and there is a bottle neck in obtaining services from occupational therapists. There is a growing number of people contacting the service whose primary need is really mental health issues. The average extra cost to a family where there is a person with a disability is £550 per month. There is a month long waiting list at DAS for appointments for people needing assistance with benefit claims.

5.3 Jen went through a consultation questionnaire with members and duly counted and noted the responses. Members were very happy to help with the consultation and hope that the funding bid is successful.

5.4 There is also a consultation event on Saturday, 13<sup>th</sup> May, at the Pavilion, Martlesham, from 10am to 3pm. Further information will be sent to members.

## **6. Minutes of the Meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> January, 2017**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> January, 2017 were agreed as correct.

## **7. Matters Arising**

**7.1 Item 6 Environmental Issues:** Further photographic evidence has been sent to Stuart Mortimer, Operations Manager, Suffolk Coastal Norse, to highlight the ongoing problems of wheelie bins being left thoughtlessly blocking pavements and gateways. It was agreed that he should be invited to the next meeting of the Forum on the 4<sup>th</sup> July to discuss the action that needs to be taken to prevent the pavements from being obstructed.

**Action: Linda Hoggarth**

**7.2 Item 8.1 Footpath in Woodbridge:** Sylvia has been in correspondence with Cllr James Finch, Suffolk County Council, regarding the public footpath to the river from the Avenues at Woodbridge. As a result the Rights of Way team have visited the public footpath and have confirmed that the crushed stone section is safe to use. Cllr Finch said it is likely that the surface was put down by Eversons Boatyard as they access along this path with vehicles and move boats along it. They should then maintain the path. The only realistic way to bring the path up to a standard that disabled people require would be to construct it to a highways road standard. Funding

is not available for that. Therefore, unless the Boatyard is sold off and funding becomes available there is no realistic prospect of the surface changing. Sylvia will continue her correspondence with Cllr Finch.

**Action: Sylvia Izzard**

## **8. Updates on Specific Issues**

**8.1 Disability Focus 2017:** Linda said that the next Disability Focus event would take place at One, Scrivener Drive, Ipswich, in the October half term. Further information would be made available in due course.

### **8.2 Felixstowe Action Day:**

8.2.1 An update had been received from Helen Greengrass, Felixstowe Forward, on the recommendations contained in the report from our Action Day. It had been hoped that the leaflet and on-line information to assist disabled residents and visitors would be ready for the launch of the 2017 Season and Linda will ask for a progress report on this.

**Action: Linda Hoggarth**

8.2.2 Helen has asked if there is a member from the Forum who would like to attend a Rotary Meeting and talk about the Forum, its Action Day and the suitability of the beach wheelchair.

**Post Meeting Note:** A member has volunteered his assistance.

**8.3 Meeting with Councillor Goldson:** Cllr Goldson is not able to respond to our invitation to attend a future meeting as this is the closed period before the County Council elections in May.

### **8.4 Report back from Planning Group:**

8.4.1 The Action Day in Woodbridge is being planned for the 28<sup>th</sup> June, 2017. The Planning Group will firm up the details and have these circulated to all members. The Mayor of Woodbridge has been invited and is able to attend. It was noted that there are many issues with cars being parked on pavements. Linda will ask Guide Dogs if they produce a notice which can be put on cars to deter thoughtless parking.

**Action: Planning Group**

8.4.2 In response to a member's concern about the design of new trains, Abellio had responded by saying there is flip up seating in the

wheelchair area but this is only to be used if there is no wheelchair user in the space. The wheelchair user will always have priority to use these spaces. New mainline trains will have lower floors so in a lot of cases the train will be at the same height as the platform. There is a ramp that comes out of the train towards the platform so that the 'gap' is filled. There is to be only one accessible toilet per train and this will be near the wheelchair spaces.

**8.4.3 Prosthetic Services:** In response to a member's concern about the relocation of the prosthetics clinic from the Ipswich Hospital to Hartismere, Eye, an explanation of the reason for this was received from Norfolk Community Health and Care who run this on behalf of NHS England. It came down to the space required for the clinic as it was not feasible to hold a consulting room, a casting room and gym space for a weekly clinic at the busy Ipswich hospital. Whilst it is recognised that the travelling arrangements might be difficult for some people, the facilities at Hartismere are excellent. Linda asked if members were still concerned regarding this and to advise her if they had any further questions they wished to ask. She would forward the full explanation from Norfolk Community Health and Care to the member concerned. In the meantime she had asked for the information on their website to be corrected. It was noted that Hartismere has great facilities but is an 8 minute walk from the nearest bus stop.

**Action: Linda Hoggarth**

## **9. Health and Social Care with Healthwatch Suffolk**

9.1 Kerry explained that, as from 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2017, 12 surgeries across Suffolk are now working together as Suffolk Primary Care. These include Haven Health, Howard House and Walton Surgeries in Felixstowe and Leiston Surgery. All staff have been transferred to the new Partnership. The practices will remain independent but work in closer partnership to make the best use of resources and share expertise. No surgeries will be closed but it is planned to move two Ipswich surgeries into a new building.

9.2 It was noted that the poster providing information on Suffolk Primary Care does not meet the Accessibility Standard which is an NHS England initiative that cannot be enforced. The posters are available in surgeries but do not appear to be in public places. Consequently many people were unaware of the changes.

9.3 Kerry reminded members that GP Plus is a service where people are able have appointments to see a GP in the evenings or at



weekends if there are no appointments available to them at their own surgery or it is difficult for them to get to weekday appointments. A GP Plus appointment can only be made through a person's own GP surgery.

9.4 The report on diabetic foot care is now available either via the Healthwatch website or Kerry will provide a hard copy.

## **10. Information Round / Any Other Business**

**10.1 Moyra Bevilacqua:** Moyra explained that this was her last Forum meeting as she is moving to South Africa on the 7<sup>th</sup> June. She was thanked for her commitment to and support of the Forum and good wishes were extended to her for the future.

## **11. Date of the Next Meeting**

This will take place on Tuesday, 4<sup>th</sup> July, 2017, at 1pm, at East Suffolk House, Riduna Park, Station Road, Melton, Woodbridge, IP12 1RT.