

Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum

Minutes of the Meeting held via Zoom on Tuesday, 11th July, 2023,
at 2 pm

Present:

Linda Hoggarth	Disability Forum for Suffolk (Chair)
Paul Kelly	Resident (Vice Chair)
Julian Cusack	Middleton Parish Council
Deborah Darby	Melton Parish Council
Bryan Frost	Resident / Trimley St Mary Parish Council
Sarah Garbutt	Resorts Manager, East Suffolk Council
Steve Hodgkiss	Disability Forum for Suffolk / Suffolk Sight
Paul Horne	Senior Transport Planner, Suffolk County Council
Margaret Morris	Felixstowe Town Council (Secretary)
Joss Mullett	Communities Officer – Framlingham, Wickham Market & Surrounding Villages, East Suffolk Council
Alan Neville	Customer & Community Engagement Manager, Greater Anglia
Cllr Rosie Smithson	East Suffolk Council (Felixstowe)
Cllr Edward Thompson	East Suffolk Council / Woodbridge Town Council
Graham Walker	Chair, Disability Advice Service – East Suffolk

Guests:

Jackie Markell	Provider Account Manager, Activities Unlimited
Christine Steward	Social Care Practitioner & Technical Officer for People who are deaf or hard of hearing, Sensing Change

Apologies:

Simon Barnett	Integrated Transport & Enhanced Partnership Manager, Suffolk County Council
Nigel Crisp	Staff Manager – Ipswich Depot, First Group
Simon Daws	Resident / Suffolk Guide Dog Forum
Jane Drummond	Resident
Cllr Julie Ewart	East Suffolk Council (Kelsale & Yoxford)
Trevor Garrod	East Suffolk Travellers Association (ESTA)
Sylvia Izzard	Resident
Linda Layton	Resident
Kerry Overton	Community Development Officer, Healthwatch Suffolk
Steve Race	Manager, Disability Advice Service – East Suffolk

1. **Welcome & Introductions**

Linda welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

2. **Apologies**

The above apologies were received and noted.

3. **Closure of Ticket Offices at Railway Stations**

3.1 Given Alan's time constraints, he was asked to update members on the consultation regarding the closure of some Ticket Offices at Railway Stations as this was of concern to members.

3.2 Alan referred to the recent announcement by the Rail Delivery Group that train operators were proposing to close a number of ticket offices. As only a small percentage of passengers now buy their tickets from ticket offices, it was felt that a different way of providing the service would provide better face-to-face contact with passengers. Therefore, it is proposed to close some ticket offices and move staff on to the platforms and station concourses. The consultation is open until 26th July and can be accessed via <https://www.raildeliverygroup.com/uk-rail-industry/customer-focused-reform/customer-focused-stations>.

Alternatively, comments regarding Greater Anglia Railway Stations can be emailed to **TicketOffice.GA@transportfocus.org.uk**.

3.3 Members were concerned that having to locate this member of staff on the platform/concourse could cause considerable difficulties for many disabled passengers. Members are therefore invited to respond to the consultation.

3.4 Members noted the short consultation period and the difficulties of using the on-line consultation form.

Post Meeting Note: The consultation period has been extended to the 1st September, 2023.

4. **Activities Unlimited**

4.1 Jackie Markell, Provider Account Manager for Activities Unlimited, was welcomed to the meeting and invited to talk about the work of Activities Unlimited.

4.2 Jackie explained that Activities Unlimited has been in existence for 25 years. It aims to provide short breaks for children and young people aged up to 25 years of age who have additional needs and live in Suffolk. There is information on their webpage and via Facebook and Twitter. <http://www.activities-unlimited.co.uk>

4.3 Activities Unlimited is based at Endeavour House in Ipswich but their services cover the whole county. It is funded by Suffolk County Council. Prior to the pandemic, Activities Unlimited was supporting 3,000 children and young people but this has increased to 9,000 though with the same amount of funding provided by Suffolk County Council. It also supports young carers and families that need behavioural support for their child.

4.4 Families who have children with additional needs can visit the website, register their child(ren) to become a member and then book lots of exciting and interesting activities and short breaks online. These range from clubs through to residential activities. Personal budgets can be available for individual children depending upon the needs of the child to help pay for the activities.

4.5 Currently, 96 different projects are being supported through their grant aid programme. This opens each September for the upcoming financial year.

4.6 Members asked the following questions:

- What about children with sight or hearing difficulties?

Response: There are many activities which are accessible to children in the Suffolk Coastal area such as Achieving Aspirations in Felixstowe. There are opportunities for children with sensory impairments in Waveney and Ipswich.

- Does Activities Unlimited receive funding from other sources in order to boost the funding from Suffolk County Council?

Response: Yes, Activities Unlimited seeks funding from a wide range of organisations.

- Does Activities Unlimited provide support to help children get back to school?

Response: A wide variety of needs are supported via Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in Suffolk.

4.7 Jackie will provide information on Activities Unlimited to Joss to be sent out with the minutes of this meeting.

4.8 Jackie was thanked for explaining the work of Activities Unlimited and for responding to members' questions.

5. Services for people who are deaf or hearing impaired

5.1 Christine Steward, Social Care Practitioner & Technical Officer for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, Sensing Change, was welcomed to the meeting and invited to talk about the services provided by Sensing Change.

5.2 Christine explained that Sensing Change is a county-wide organisation for people with sight or hearing difficulties. They provide a range of Community Services for people who are deaf or hearing impaired, as well as those with sight impairment. They employ Social Workers, Technical Officers and Support Workers. They are based at Endeavour House in Ipswich. Christine herself has hearing loss and uses hearing aids. She therefore has personal experience of the difficulties that can be experienced.

5.3 Examples of the support provided were as follows:

- Assistance for people who have hearing aids, for instance, and may not be able to hear smoke alarms. They may have level 1 or level 2 hearing difficulties.
- With difficulties with hearing impairment, people can self-refer.
- In our area, the James Paget and Ipswich Hospitals both provide a full service for people with hearing difficulties.
- For people who have tinnitus, the Suffolk Hearing Care Centre provides information and support. For further details contact: <https://www.hearingcarecentre.co.uk/your-hearing/tinnitus/coping-with-tinnitus>
- Hand-in-Hand clubs are run for people with dual sensory loss. Typically, those attending have a meal together followed by an activity.
- Lip reading classes are available as are classes for learning British Sign Language.
- Sensory awareness raising is also available.

5.4 Christine demonstrated Live Transcribe which converts conversations to text quickly and easily. <https://www.livetranscribe.app/>

5.5 More information about Sensing Change can be found at <https://www.sensingchange.org.uk/>

5.6 Members noted that there are long waiting lists for British Sign Language Courses.

5.7 In response to the NHS deciding that clearing ear wax is not an essential service, Christine said that it can be expensive to clear ears – for example Specsavers charges up to £100. If someone seems to be developing problems, it is sensible to suggest they first check with their doctor. However clearing ears can have a dramatic effect.

5.8 Healthwatch had commented that they are unable to make recommendations of services providing clearing ear wax and encourage people to shop around but also ensure that those undertaking this are properly qualified to do so. However, people can still seek advice from their GP Surgery regarding preventative measures.

5.8 Linda thanked Christine for joining the meeting and for providing such a lot of information. Christine will send further information to circulate.

6. Update – Seashore Village, Felixstowe

6.1 Sarah provided an update on the progress on the new beach huts being built in Felixstowe. She reminded members that 27 of the beach huts will be for sale. A further five will be fully accessible and available to hire. These are located close to the new block of public toilets which includes a Changing Places facility.

6.2 Members were shown the layout of the accessible beach huts. The walls can be adjusted so that the huts can be used to provide larger areas. One hut has a toilet facility included. There are basic kitchen facilities and non-slip floors. The hiring arrangements are still under discussion.

6.3 Improvements are to be made to the car park near to the Leisure Centre to enable easier access.

6.4 The beach wheelchair is to be located nearby and close to the nearest access point to the beach to enable wheelchair users to gain access to it. Arrangements for the use of this will be publicised but it will need to be booked in advance. It is anticipated that the current

beach wheelchair can be used by children using wheelchairs as it is smaller.

6.5 The availability of the beach wheelchairs and the accessible beach huts will need to be widely publicised. Information could be included in the Accessibility Guide on the Visit Felixstowe website.

6.6 Sarah will continue to keep the Forum informed and will include representatives from the Forum at meetings that are being held to discuss the developments. She stressed that the developments will not impede the Park Proms.

7. Minutes from the Meeting held on 18th April, 2023

The Minutes of the meeting of the Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum held on 18th April, 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

8. Matters Arising

8.1 Item 7.1 Patient Experiences at Ipswich Hospital: Further comments had been sent to Steve Bruce, Patient Experience and Carer Manager, following our last meeting but no response has yet been received.

- Members noted the continuing difficulties in parking, particularly due to the ongoing building works.
- The Patient Portal is not easy to use.

8.3 Item 7.3 Parking for Blue Badge Holders:

8.3.1 East Suffolk Council have confirmed that there will continue to be a Pay and Display machine in each of their car parks.

8.3.2 It is not possible to ascertain how many spaces there are in the Council's Car Parks for blue badge holders. The RingGo website does not provide this information. Joss will raise this with Lewis Boudville, Transport Infrastructure and Parking Services Manager.

Action: Joss Mullett

8.4 Item 7.7 East Suffolk Travel Association: Simon has now provided a response to some of the issues identified by the East Suffolk Travel Association in their recent survey. Due to its length, this will be produced as an attachment for the minutes.

9. Issues, Concerns and News from Members

9.1 Accessible Play Areas: Rosie raised her concerns regarding the availability of accessible play areas throughout the area. She highlighted the Let's Play Fair campaign which wants all playgrounds to be inclusive. Linda said that members of the Planning Group do draw attention for the need for inclusive playgrounds when a playground is included in a planning application. She also referred to the Playground in the Martello Park in Felixstowe – between Sea Road and Manor Terrace – as a good example of inclusivity which also has a Changing Places facility. However, it was clear that this was not the usual provision but rather an exception. Joss would make enquiries within the Planning Department to see if there were conditions imposed on developers of large estates that included a playground in respect of the use of the Community Infrastructure Levy.

Action: Joss Mullett

9.2 Sensory Garden, Woodbridge: Edward said that a Sensory Garden is being developed in Elmhurst Park in Woodbridge.

10. Views on Health and Social Care with Healthwatch Suffolk

10.1 In her absence, Kerry had provided a detailed update regarding the work of Healthwatch Suffolk. This will be sent out as an attachment to the Minutes.

10.2 She also drew attention to the work undertaken with Sensing Change regarding meeting the Accessible Information Standard. It is now possible for users of British Sign Language to communicate with Healthwatch. There are numerous areas where the Accessible Information Standard should be considered such as noting access needs on patients' records, asking the patient how they wish to be contacted, and how proactive services are in letting people know that a BSL interpreter can be provided.

11. Information Round / Any Other Business

11.1 Disability Advice Service – East Suffolk: Graham commented that their 'target audience' do not seem to have heard of the Disability Advice Service and sought views as to how to improve publicity. Members talked about articles or advertisements in local magazines, such as The Felixstowe Flyer. Organisations such as the Disability Forum for Suffolk would be happy to include a short article on their websites. There was possibly an opportunity to share publicity with

other organisations. For example, the Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum was currently working on exactly the same issue of needing to increase publicity and make disabled people more aware of the Forum's work.

12. Format of Next Meeting

12.1 Members agreed that meetings should continue via Zoom as it was felt that attendance was better and transport difficulties were avoided. However, it was thought that it might be worth having one face-to-face meeting in due course simply in order to meet up.

13. Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum will take place on Tuesday, 10th October, 2023, at 2 pm, via Zoom.

Linda closed the meeting with thanks to everyone for their contributions.