

Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum

Minutes of the Meeting held via Zoom on Tuesday, 5th April, 2022,
at 2 pm.

Present:

Linda Hoggarth	Disability Forum for Suffolk (Chair)
Simon Barnett	Transport Development Manager, Passenger Transport, Suffolk County Council
Simon Daws	Resident / Suffolk Guide Dog Forum
Julia Ewart	Kelsale Parish Council
Stella Frangleton	Diverse Communities Advisor, Suffolk Police
Bryan Frost	Trimley St Mary Parish Council
Hannah	Disability Advice Service – East Suffolk
Paul Kelly	Resident
Vicki Lee	Suffolk Carers Matter & Economic Development, BSEVC
Margaret Morris	Resident (Secretary) – from 3.30pm
Joss Mullett	Communities Officer – Framlingham, Wickham Market & Surrounding Villages, East Suffolk Council
Kerry Overton	Community Development Officer, Healthwatch Suffolk
Cllr Edward Thompson	East Suffolk Council / Woodbridge Town Council

Guest:

John Mapiscay	Senior Clinician, Suffolk & North East Essex Long Covid Assessment Service
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Apologies:

Celia Bonwick	Dementia Together, Sue Ryder
Deborah Darby	Melton Parish Council
Tracey Evans	Later Life Community ENGAGE Co-ordinator, BSEVC
John Fitzpatrick	Resident
Trevor Garrod	East Suffolk Travellers Association (ESTA)
Steve Hodgkiss	Disability Forum for Suffolk / Suffolk Sight
Sylvia Izzard	Resident
Linda Layton	Resident
Geoff Manning	Resident
Gill Manning	Resident
Cllr Caroline Page	Suffolk County Council / Woodbridge Town Council
Della Rayner	Green Light Trust
Graham Walker	Kirton Parish Council

1. Welcome & Introductions

Linda welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

2. Apologies

The above apologies were received and noted.

3. Long Covid – Services provided in Suffolk by the NHS

3.1 Linda welcomed John Mapiscay, Senior Clinician for the Suffolk and North East Essex Long Covid Assessment Service (SNELCAS).

3.2 Through a presentation using slides, John gave a clear and comprehensive explanation of the services provided for people with Long Covid in Suffolk.

3.3 Long Covid or Post Covid-19 Syndrome is defined as signs and symptoms that develop during or following an infection consistent with Covid-19 which continue for more than 12 weeks and are not explained by an alternative diagnosis. There are 1.2 million people in the UK affected by long Covid and 426,000 of those have had symptoms for over a year. It feels similar to chronic fatigue syndrome. It is recognised as a true illness and there are 90 assessment points in the UK.

3.4 John explained the symptoms that can affect people including fatigue, shortness of breath, chest pain, joint pain and insomnia. There is also an emotional impact including anxiety and feeling low in mood.

3.5 SNELCAS was launched in December, 2020, as a virtual clinic, and receives 80 to 100 referrals a month. There are currently about 4,000 active cases in Suffolk. An increase is expected now there are no longer lockdowns or compulsory wearing of masks. This support will need to be in place on a long term basis. Younger people now are getting long Covid. Most of the funding for the service comes from NHS England.

3.6 Referrals to SNELCAS must be made by a patient's GP, and only after 12 weeks of symptoms with no improvement. SNELCAS screens the referrals and patients can be referred into a combination of other services such as physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, dietetics, mental health services and social prescribing with hospital treatment, if necessary.

3.7 Once the referral is made, it can take a month for SNELCAS to set up a virtual conference to screen the patient and decide whether they have long Covid. Once treatment is started, patients are followed up after 12 weeks and then at 6 months but treatment can continue for as long as necessary.

3.8 It is not possible to self-refer into the service, referrals can only be made by GPs. Members noted that being able to see a GP in order to be referred was not always very easy.

3.9 As the numbers of patients affected increase, knowledge will be expanded and more treatment options can be explored. It was anticipated that the NHS were gathering information to be able to establish best practice in helping patients recover.

3.10 Further information and sources of assistance can be found at <https://www.esneft.nhs.uk/service/suffolk-and-north-east-essex-long-covid-service/>

3.11 John will forward his slides for distribution to members and will ensure that an explanation is given regarding the initials used to shorten his text.

Action: John Mapiscay

3.12 John was thanked for making the time to talk to members and responding to questions raised. If members have further questions, these can be sent to Joss for forwarding to John. He will do his best to respond.

4. Bus Services including an update on the Bus Back Better Strategy

4.1 Linda invited Simon B, Transport Development Manager, Passenger Transport, Suffolk County Council to update members.

4.2 Simon explained that the long awaited Department for Transport Bus Service Improvement Plan (Bus Back Better Strategy) funding has just been announced and Suffolk was not successful in its bid.

4.3 This is very disappointing but it is possible that further funding will be made available and Suffolk's bid would be reconsidered. Funding for the Enhanced Partnership Officer would be available and therefore work to develop the Enhanced Partnership would continue.

4.4 Suffolk intends to ask the Department for Transport why the bid was not successful and how the bid could be refined to be more likely to be funded.

4.5 Members noted that additional funding was very important in order to improve services and help people with disabilities use buses.

4.6 It was felt that Suffolk had not been ambitious enough in its plans and was now left to soldier on with current funding. Perhaps Suffolk should be less gracious in its approach and more assertive.

4.7 Simon B spoke about work that would continue including working with operators regarding the provision of new buses to higher standards, providing a central hub for information, and improving the timetable information.

4.8 With regard to signage, Simon D pointed out that improved signage is required so that everyone can find out where buses are starting from and going to. It would help if the screens at the Bus Station at the Old Cattle Market were compatible with the React system but people need a key fob to be able access this. He would be happy to test this.

4.9 It was noted that signs in braille are of limited assistance to visually impaired people as not many of them can read braille. It was thought that tactile signs with raised lettering would be better. Members discussed the provision of tactile maps and how these would help people to find out information about bus services.

4.10 Simon D commented that First Group continues to run bus services along the by-pass instead of going through Martlesham. The reason for doing this is to meet target times and ignores the need for Martlesham residents to have a bus service. Despite raising this with First Group, the situation has not changed.

4.11 Very few bus services are able to use the Ipswich Hospital site which makes it very hard for people to be able to reach the hospital without long walks. Simon B said that two additional bus stops were to be put in at the hospital but the arrangements will not be clear until the building works are complete.

4.12 The regulations for free bus passes are set by the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme and people throughout England qualify through age or disability. Some members felt that it would not be unreasonable to introduce a small charge per journey in order to

provide more bus services. However, this would require a change to the National Scheme.

4.13 Simon B was thanked for his contribution to the meeting and members welcomed the opportunity to raise issues with him directly at Forum meetings.

5. Terms of Reference for the Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum and Election of Officers

5.1 Terms of Reference:

5.1.1 Linda explained that the Terms of Reference had been distributed with the meeting papers. These were the result of considerable work and discussion with members of the Planning Group and Joss on behalf of East Suffolk Council.

5.1.2 Appendix One has been prepared in full consultation with East Suffolk Council and relates to the support and assistance that the Council provides to the Forum, including the role of the Councillor appointed by East Suffolk Council.

5.1.3 A member had asked about the financial arrangements for the Forum and had been reassured that our funding is held in a specific fund by the Disability Advice Service – East Suffolk and monitored by the Planning Group.

5.1.4 The Terms of Reference were agreed unanimously.

5.2 Election of Officers:

5.2.1 Linda handed the chair to Joss for this item.

5.2.2 Joss explained that officers should be elected every two years as detailed in Clauses 3.3 and 3.4 of the Terms of Reference.

5.2.3 The following nominations were made:

Chair: **Linda Hoggarth**

nominated by Bryan Frost, seconded by Simon Daws

Vice Chair: **Paul Kelly**

nominated by Linda Hoggarth, seconded by Simon Daws

Secretary: **Margaret Morris**

nominated by Simon Daws, seconded by Paul Kelly

5.2.4 The above nominees were elected unanimously.

5.2.5 It was noted that elections would need to be held in two years' time i.e. April, 2024, unless there were any changes in the meantime.

6. Minutes of the Meeting held on the 11th January 2022

The Minutes of the meeting of the Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum held on 11th January, 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

7. Matters Arising

7.1 Item 3.5 Booking Arrangements, Seashore Village Beach

Huts: Following concerns raised regarding the booking policy for the accessible beach huts, East Suffolk Council had confirmed that the development of the policy has not yet commenced. Jenny would keep the Forum advised.

7.2 Item 4.7 Traffic Regulation Order, Thoroughfare,

Woodbridge: Confirmation of the Forum's view that the Traffic Regulation Order should be made permanent had been sent to Suffolk County Council. Joss would find out if the Order has now been made permanent.

Action: Joss Mullett

7.3 Item 6.1.10 Booklet 'Keeping Safe - how to avoid Covid': This has not been received from Katie Sargeant. Linda will follow this up.

Action: Linda Hoggarth

7.4 Item 7.1 Lasting Power of Attorney: Joss reported that he is still seeking information on this and the matter is ongoing.

Action: Joss Mullett

7.5 Item 10.3 High Street Car Park, Leiston: Members had asked how many spaces there are for blue badge holders following the upgrade of this car park and whether the number had been reduced. Lewis Boudville, Transport, Infrastructure and Parking Services Manager at East Suffolk Council has said that he does not believe the number of spaces have been reduced and that the Car Park meets the Disabled Parking Accreditation (DPA). Joss would check with Lewis.

Action: Joss Mullett

Post Meeting Note: The website for the DPA indicates that there are 6 spaces for blue badge holders but this may be out of date.

7.6 Item 10.4 Station Car Park, Woodbridge: Joss reported that the blue badge parking area in the Station Car Park, Woodbridge, had been moved last summer to a higher section of the Car Park because of flooding. Joss would check this.

Action: Joss Mullett

8. Issues, Concerns and News from members

8.1 Pedestrian Crossings, Martlesham: Simon D reported that he had met with Cllr Patti Mulcahy, Suffolk County Councillor for Martlesham, regarding the possible provision of safe road crossings on Main Road, Martlesham. With the current volume of traffic, it is currently not safe to cross and presents considerable danger to older and disabled people and children. It was thought that pedestrian crossings were more likely to be installed if the Parish Council was able to assist with funding.

8.2 Landlines: Bryan expressed his concerns at the withdrawal of telephone landlines in 2/3 years' time and questioned BT's attitude regarding this. It would cause considerable difficulty for older people and mean that people's emergency alarms would not work. It was suggested that a representative from BT should be invited to a future meeting to discuss this. The Planning Group will take this forward.

Action: Planning Group

8.3 Holiday Activity and Food Programme: Joss reported that he is responsible for holiday activities for children in receipt of free school meals in East Suffolk. A programme of activities has been organised and Joss can provide information on these if requested.

8.4 Swimming Sessions for Disabled People: Simon D said that the set up for swimming sessions for disabled people at the Deben Pool in Woodbridge is now good and he is enjoying the sessions. Precautions are taken to ensure visually impaired swimmers do not bump their heads against the hard surface at the end of the pool.

9. Views on Health and Social Care with Healthwatch Suffolk

9.1 Kerry provided the following update from Healthwatch Suffolk.

- **Your Care – Your Way:** The NHS has a legal duty to provide accessible information to disabled people. Feedback is required to ensure that disabled people in Suffolk are receiving information in the way that they need it. Links to the survey have been sent to organisations throughout Suffolk including this Forum. Simon D noted that he had seen the information on Facebook.
- **Elective Care:** Feedback has been sought from people who are waiting for elective care procedures. The survey will be closed at the end of April. The West Suffolk Hospital collected considerable information by texting patients on their waiting lists.
- **Sign Language:** Healthwatch will be undertaking some specific work with Sensing Change regarding ensuring that British Sign Language Users' needs are properly taken into consideration.
- **GP Surgeries:** Kerry covers 42 GP Surgeries and aims to visit each one on a six monthly basis. She finds it more helpful if she can talk to people on a face-to-face basis.

9.2 Kerry asked members to let her know if there are any other community groups in East Suffolk that she may not know about in order to communicate with as many people as possible. Additionally, she asked members to let her know if they encounter any concerns or difficulties at particular surgeries.

9.3 Linda had discovered that the number of parking spaces for blue badge holders near the maternity block at the Ipswich Hospital have been significantly reduced to just six as the area is now also used for 'sitting case' ambulances. It was felt that the Ipswich Hospital could improve its communication regarding changes such as this. Other car parks within the hospital have also been affected during the current building works making it even more difficult for blue badge holders to find a parking space.

9.4 Kerry noted that the new super surgery plans for the Cardinal Medical Practice in Ipswich had not considered how many accessible spaces should be provided in the car park. For a building such as a hospital or a surgery, more accessible spaces should be provided than just providing the bare minimum to meet current regulations.

10. Any Other Business

10.1 Ipswich Hospital's Patient Portal: Paul reported that Ipswich Hospital had closed its 'Patient Portal' with just one day's notice by letter. There is no date for its re-opening. He said that the 'Patient Portal' is very useful because people can check in advance if they are expecting a letter and can read it in advance.

10.2 Ask My Doctor: Members noted that people are not able to use the Ask My Doctor facility to contact their GP when their surgery is closed. This is to ensure that the system is not overloaded at the start of the working day.

10.3 Lateral Flow Tests for Covid-19: Members noted that, depending where they purchase Lateral Flow Tests, the results cannot be reported to the NHS. Sellers will have their own reporting system or none at all. Kerry will clarify what information is available for people who are still able to have free lateral flow tests.

Action: Kerry Overton

10.4 Booster Vaccinations: Some GP surgeries are now providing 4th booster vaccinations for Covid-19. It was noted that the Grove Surgery in Felixstowe was very well organised though it is difficult to reach without a car.

11. Dates of remaining Meetings in 2022

11.1 The next meeting of the Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum will be on Tuesday, 5th July, 2022, at 2 pm, via Zoom.

11.2 The following meeting of the Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum will be on Tuesday, 4th October, 2022, at 2 pm, via Zoom.

Action: All to note.