

Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum

Minutes of the Meeting held at Kesgrave Community Centre, Twelve Acre Approach, Kesgrave, on Tuesday, 14 January, 2020, at 2pm.

Present:

Linda Hoggarth	Disability Forum for Suffolk (Chair)
Andrew Cassy	Resident & Boyton Parish Council
Peter Coleman	Resident
Simon Daws	Resident
Jane Drummond	Resident & Martlesham Parish Council
Brian Frost	Resident
Trevor Garrod	East Suffolk Travel Association (ESTA)
Michelle Gerrie	Resident
Marion Hine	Resident & Framlingham Town Council
Paul Kelly	Resident
Margaret Morris	Resident (Secretary)
Yvonne Smart	Trimley St Martin Parish Council

Guests:

Nigel Crisp	Staff Manager, Ipswich, First Group
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Apologies:

John Fitzpatrick	Resident
Steve Hodgkiss	East Suffolk Association for the Blind
Sylvia Izzard	Resident
Linda Layton	Resident & Carer
Alison McWilliam	Health Promotion Specialist, Terence Higgins Trust
Geoff Manning	Resident
Gill Manning	Resident
Liz Mark	Resident & Bawdsey Parish Council
Alan Neville	Community and Customer Engagement Manager, Greater Anglia
Kerry Overton	Community Development Officer, Healthwatch Suffolk
Graham Walker	Kirton Parish Council
Chloe Winlow	Communities Officer for Felixstowe, East Suffolk Council

1. Welcome & Introductions

Linda welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

2. Apologies

The above apologies were received and noted.

3. Bus Services

3.1 Linda welcomed Nigel Crisp, Staff Manager, Ipswich, First Group and thanked him very much for stepping in at very short notice and being ready to respond to questions.

3.2 Questions and comments were invited from those present:

- Concerns were noted regarding the reduction in bus services particularly in relation to the No 64 Service (Old Martlesham) and its new route. When this service travels down the bypass, it is not picking up any passengers. To get back on timetable, the bus simply waits at a bus stop. There is an infrequent No 65 Service which people have to rely on. Members did not understand the logic behind such changes.

Response: New routes were designed by the First Group Commercial Team in Norwich. Nigel will take this back to First Group for an explanation.

- It has been noted that more older people are having to stand on buses now they are less frequent. There were also concerns that some young people continue to take up seats while older people stand.

Response: The law allows people to stand on buses. It was felt that First Group could set up an initiative to go into schools to help young people understand how they should behave on public buses and how they could assist older people.

- For people who rely on buses to get around the changes can be very isolating.

Response: Unfortunately, whilst the Government pushes the idea of public transport, no additional funding is made available. Lobbying the government would be one way of raising the issue at national level.

- Are First Group running their services down?

Response: It is understood that First Group is not intending to discontinue its services. However, the fleet has had to be upgraded to be environmentally friendly.

- The Community Partnership in Framlingham had identified the lack of rural transport as an issue.
- Members noted that it is a vicious circle, fewer buses result in lack of use and then results in even fewer buses.

Response: First Group does listen to a number of Community Groups. In fact, Ian Rankin from First Group will be attending a meeting of Felixstowe Travel Watch.

- Concerns were expressed in respect of bus services going into the Ipswich Hospital. Why do all the bus services from Felixstowe travel past the hospital as opposed to going in? It is a long walk from the bus stops to reach the entrances of the hospital. People from the Felixstowe area would welcome improvements to access the hospital.

Response: It is understood that, at the Ipswich Hospital, Ipswich Buses have priority in respect of bus services going into the hospital. However, the hospital is on private land. The buses wait there blocking usage of the stops for bus services provided by other operators. With the creation of an Urgent Treatment Centre and a new Accident and Emergency Department, there will be changes on the hospital site and this may have an effect on access for bus services. However, Nigel will raise this issue with First Group and Linda will again raise this with the Ipswich Hospital User Group.

Action: Nigel Crisp / Linda Hoggarth

- Concerns were expressed about the over-reliance on the use of technology instead of having timetables at bus stops. A mix of Real Time Information and Bus Shelters with audio facilities is a very good idea as this would tell passengers what is actually happening instead of just having a timetable. It was noted that the information at the Cattle Market Bus Station in Ipswich is not Real Time.

Response: Suffolk County Council has not provided the type of information at the Cattle Market Bus Station that can be updated when buses are late. Suffolk County Council no longer puts timetables at bus stops and leaves that to bus operators. Until there is more funding from central government there will be no changes.

- The English National Concessionary Travel Scheme enables people with disabilities to have bus passes but these cannot be used before 9.30am. Members felt that people with disabilities should be able to use their bus passes before 9.30am in order for them to be able to access their activities.

Response: Despite this being raised with Suffolk County Council on numerous occasions, there are no plans to enhance the use of bus passes for people with disabilities due to insufficient funds. It was noted that the remuneration from the use of bus passes to First Group is being decreased each year. First Group do allow travel in the ½ hour before 9.30am at a reduced rate.

- A member expressed the view that people should pay more for bus services.
- Where is the call centre for First Group?

Response: The call centre is now based in Leeds where call centre staff are not likely to have any local knowledge.

- It is very costly to get a new bus stop installed but bus shelters can be funded by Parish Councils.
- The current debates about climate change means that people should be encouraged to use buses as opposed to their cars.

Response: In some towns, buses are charged for going into Town central areas, but cars are not.

- It was noted that First Group had intended to set up a Customer Panel and Bryan had volunteered for this but had heard nothing since.

Response: Nigel noted this and would take this back to First Group.

- The need for public transport to be inclusive regardless of ability to access technology, age or disability was noted.

The following actions were noted:

- Refer the issues raised to groups discussing Climate Change.
- Lobby the County Council on public transport issues.

- Comment on the budget setting for Suffolk County Council.

3.3 Trevor said that the East Suffolk Travel Association is affiliated to Bus Users UK and Railfuture. He will be meeting with Councillor Andrew Reid [Suffolk County Council Cabinet member for Transport] and Ian Rankin [Commercial Team at First Bus]. It was possible that a member of the Forum could be included in the meeting.

3.4 As a follow up to this meeting, it was suggested that there should be a meeting with Councillor Andrew Reid who has responsibility for transport and Ian Rankin from the Commercial Team at First Group. This would necessitate adjusting the date of the next Forum meeting.

Action: Planning Group

3.5 Linda warmly thanked Nigel Crisp for standing in at very short notice and responding to the many comments. His attendance was very much appreciated.

4. Greater Anglia

4.1 In the absence of Alan Neville, Community and Customer Services Manager, for Greater Anglia, members discussed a number of issues to be raised with him or with the Accessibility Manager for Greater Anglia, as follows:

- There are many instances where rail services are replaced by buses. A member said that he had been in a situation where a non-accessible coach had been provided. Additionally, there were instances where the bus could not accommodate all passengers.
- The legal position is that from 1st January 2020 a replacement bus / coach must be accessible. But bus/coach operators have been given dispensation until March 2020. Very few coach operators have accessible coaches. Greater Anglia should in future be able to find a replacement coach that is accessible to all people.
- Ideally the coach/bus driver should park as close as possible to the station and check that no-one has been left waiting on the platform. But this is likely to require 2 drivers as there must always be one driver on the bus, whilst the other goes on to the platform to assist passengers.
- What are the contractual arrangements between Greater Anglia and the replacement bus/coach operator? It was noted that the driver was not able to leave the bus at Trimley Railway Station.

- If someone with a disability books a specific seat and this is then taken by another passenger, what action does the train crew take?
- If a rush hour train breaks down on the East Suffolk line, what happens?
- A member reported on when the pump at the depot broke down and the train was cancelled – with no replacement. What should have happened?
- From the 3rd to the 17th/18th February there will be engineering work between Beccles and Lowestoft. Members could test the accessibility of replacement buses.

Action: Planning Group

4.2 In respect of the new trains, it is understood that the gap between the train and the platform is negotiated via a ramp that is activated on the train. Members were disappointed to note that an expected opportunity for disabled people to view one of the new trains had not materialised. A group of disabled people, including one of the members from the Forest Heath Disability Forum, were involved in commenting on the design of the new trains. It was thought that some new trains are now in service. 'Bimode' means that the trains can travel on electric or diesel routes.

5. Easy Stations: Report from the East Anglia Branch of Railfuture

5.1 Trevor from East Suffolk Travel Association presented this Report and a summary of recommendations was distributed to members. The aim of the Report was to survey the 111 Railway Stations in the East Anglia Region for ease of access.

5.2 The Railway Stations are owned by Network Rail and rented to Greater Anglia.

5.3 Four stations were commended as examples of good practice, the only one of these in Suffolk is Wickham Market. This was largely due to the refurbished Station House which offers new community facilities as well as an accessible entrance to the Station.

5.4 Planning permission has been given to re-build at Saxmundham Railway Station after a fire there.

5.5 There continues to be considerable criticism of Needham Market Railway Station where there is no step free access to the Ipswich bound platform. It is understood that Greater Anglia has finally applied for funding to install a lift.

5.6 In respect of Woodbridge Railway Station, members commented that it did not deserve a B grading, as it is a long walk to the Ipswich platform from the car park area, and there are also concerns about the lack of tactile paving on the platforms.

5.7. With regard to Beccles Railway Station, the ramp is very steep and almost impossible to push a wheelchair up.

5.8 Halesworth Railway Station is also thought to be of concern in respect of accessibility for people with disabilities.

5.9 Trevor was thanked for his input to the discussions.

6. Exercise for People with Disabilities

6.1 Andrew explained that he is starting a new activity session, 'Ping Pong Parkinsons' this year. Whilst this is initially restricted to people with Parkinson's as a trial, it is hoped that this can be extended to become more inclusive. The current venue at Britannia Dome on Defoe Road is not suitable for wheelchair access.

6.2 The importance of activity and exercise in helping to manage disabilities such as Parkinson's was noted. Andrew was seeking advice and suggestions from Forum members.

6.3 A number of suggestions and contacts were made including: FIT Villages (Trimley St Martin Parish Council has information); ActivLives in Ipswich; local councillors could provide funding from their Enabling Communities budgets; and Social Prescribing initiatives in Ipswich and East Suffolk.

6.4 Local sports and leisure centres are generally accessible to all people and could be considered as alternative venues.

Post Meeting Note: Information on the Fit Villages initiative had be found at <https://www.activesuffolk.org/fitvillages>. Another suggestion is to contact the Ipswich Sports Club for the Disabled which meets at Northgate Sports Centre. There is a specific reference to table tennis and further information can be found at <https://www.activesuffolk.org/directory/ipswich-sports-club-for-the-disabled>.

7. Minutes from the Meeting held on Tuesday, 1st October, 2019

The Minutes were agreed as a correct record.

8. Matters Arising

8.1 Members noted that the Planning Group were continuing to progress matters arising from the previous minutes.

8.2 In respect of bin collections, a member reported that he had applied for an Assisted Collection some weeks ago but this had not yet been provided.

9. Updates on Specific Issues

9.1 Access Surveys – Felixstowe and Woodbridge: Outstanding issues continue to be progressed. It had been agreed not to pursue another access survey at this time.

9.2 Report from Planning Group:

9.2.1 Simon has agreed to join the Planning Group and will attend meetings depending on his availability.

9.2.2 Members continue to comment on relevant planning applications.

9.2.3 The suggestion of a further survey of Woodbridge has been deferred to the next meeting of the Planning Group.

10. Possible Consultation Event for Disabled People in the Suffolk Coastal Area

10.1 In Chloe's absence, it was not possible to discuss this in detail. However, as Disability Focus was unlikely to take place in 2020, local Forums were considering whether smaller more local events should take its place.

10.2 The Planning Group felt that, rather than arrange a specific event for disabled people in East Suffolk, it would be better for the Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum to join in with events already taking place to ensure their inclusivity.

11. Views on Health and Social Care

11.1 In Kerry's absence, she had provided the following update:

Care Homes Project: Healthwatch Suffolk has launched a Suffolk-wide Care Homes Project coproducing surveys both for Residents, and Relatives & Friends. Their website has numerous resources available including easy read and plain text formats of both surveys.

<https://healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/whatsitlike/>

Online links are:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HWresidents>

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HWfriendsandrelatives>

All surveys are available in hard copy. Facilitation is offered to care homes to assist residents to complete the survey. Members are encouraged to get involved if this is relevant to them and can get in touch with Healthwatch on **Freephone 0800 4488 234**. Or email: research@healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk.

The closing date for residents, relatives and friends surveys is the end of February. There have been 127 residents surveys and 153 relatives and friends surveys completed so far.

Surveys are now being drafted for care home staff and these will go out for feedback from staff prior to finalisation and dissemination. A survey for visiting professions (such as GPs, nurses, physiotherapists or hairdressers) will also be shared shortly.

Coproduction: Healthwatch Suffolk now has a coproduction resource on its website at:

<https://www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/co-production/>

along with news of their most recent event, 'Cooking up Co-production', which was held in Haverhill on 5th December, there is more information at

<https://healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/news/cooking-up-co-production-in-haverhill-creating-a-recipe-for-co-production-in-suffolk/>

If members would like to be involved with this co-production work, please let Healthwatch know at:

<https://www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/co-production-updates/>

Healthwatch is interested in receiving best practice examples of co-production – challenges, benefits etc., – blogs of around 300 words please. Contact Simon King at simon.king@healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk for more information.

Healthwatch Suffolk/Integrated Care System Public Engagement Officers: A new public engagement officer for West Suffolk started in October and officers for North East Essex and East Suffolk started in January. The role involves engagement with people about topics within

the NHS Long Term Plan, informed by the Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care System.

Safeguarding: Healthwatch is looking at the safeguarding process within Suffolk from making a referral to the result. Experiences within the last 18 months are being sought from people in order to carry out in depth interviews. Experiences can be from service users, members of public or professionals. All interviews will be anonymous and can be carried out face to face or by telephone.

My Health, Our Future: This project is now in its fourth year. Changes to the questions are being considered. This may also involve primary schools. The Report for Year 3 is now being completed and the project has reached 12k children and young people. The report will be split into 10 mini reports by subject (e.g. self-harm) as well as the main report.

12. Information Round / AOB

12.1 Assistance Dogs at Swimming Pools: A member noted that assistance dogs could not be accommodated at the Deben Leisure Centre in Woodbridge. This will be referred to East Suffolk Council.

Action: Planning Group

12.2 Framlingham Inclusivity: This is a new project looking at hidden needs in and around Framlingham. Their first meeting is taking place shortly.

12.3 Consultation on Adult & Community Services Transport Policy for Adult Social Care Customers: Suffolk County Council is consulting on its revised policy which brings the council into line with current statutory requirements. The link to the consultation is www.suffolk.gov.uk/acstransportpolicy.

12.4 Terence Higgins Trust: Alison reminded members that if they had any issues, then they could contact the Trust.

13. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held in Felixstowe and the revised date will be confirmed as soon as possible.