

## Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum

**Minutes of the Meeting held at the Gannon Rooms, 12 Station Road,  
Saxmundham, on Tuesday, 9th April, 2019, at 2pm.**

### **Present:**

Linda Hoggarth	Disability Forum for Suffolk (Chair)
Gill Cook	East Suffolk Association for the Blind (Felixstowe)
Simon Daws	Resident
Pat Durham	East Suffolk Association for the Blind
Steve Hodgkiss	East Suffolk Association for the Blind
Margaret Morris	Resident (Secretary)
Kerry Overton	Community Development Officer, Healthwatch Suffolk
Chloe Winlow	Communities Officer, East Suffolk Council

### **Guests:**

Phil Cornford	Inspecting Officer Protection (Fire Safety), Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service
Annette Cotton	Passenger Transport, Suffolk County Council
Trevor Garrod	East Suffolk Travellers Association
Andrew Gee	Senior Transport Officer - Network Planning, Passenger Transport, Suffolk County Council
Theresa Salmon	Travel Training Manager, Integrated Passenger Transport Unit, Essex County Council

### **Apologies:**

Dan Bristow	Disability Advice Service East Suffolk
Stuart Ellis	Resident
John Fitzpatrick	Resident
Michael Friend	Carer and Hollesley Parish Council
Cllr Steve Gallant	East Suffolk Council
Sylvia Izzard	Resident
Paul Kelly	Resident
Linda Layton	Resident and Carer
Geoff Manning	Resident
Gill Manning	Resident
Liz Mark	Resident and Bawdsey Parish Council
Yvonne Smart	Chair, Trimley St Martin Parish Council
Sheila Taylor	Hope Trust, Felixstowe
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. Fire Safety in the Community: Legal Requirements**

3.1 Linda welcomed Phil Cornford, Inspecting Officer Protection (Fire Safety), Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service, and asked him to explain the legal responsibilities in respect of fire safety.

3.2 Phil said explained that offices and shops are their main area of concern as the owners have corporate responsibilities in respect of fire safety. Before 2006, a business used to have a fire certificate and the Fire and Rescue Service had to check that everything was in place. Now, the responsibility is that the building is audited to check that it is compliant with Health & Safety at Work. A business has responsibilities to their employees, particularly if there are more than 5 employees, and there should be a written Risk Assessment in place. Current responsibilities are much more about staff than about visitors to businesses.

3.3 Emergency evacuation procedures should be in place and have to be suitable for everyone who is likely to be on the premises, including those with disabilities. Help for people with special needs is part of being DDA compliant. This means reasonable adjustments should be made, particularly in the event of fire precautions. Staff should have appropriate training in fire evacuation procedures.

3.4 There are Government Guides produced to ensure offices and shops comply with the legislation. These detail the requirements regarding written fire risk assessments, emergency evacuation, a checklist for means of escape, the premises, reasonable adjustments, training, and personal emergency evacuation plans for disabled members of staff. Fire and Rescue Services ensure that shops and businesses comply.

3.5 Members raised the following questions and issues:

- Following our surveys in Woodbridge and Felixstowe, members had noted that not all fire exits in shops were accessible to all people? What is the legal position?

**Response:** Phil said that there are only a small number of staff in his team. There are not many fires in shops so this is not a priority. Currently their priority is on care homes. Pre-Christmas inspections are carried out but only in towns where there are full time fire crews. If the distance to a Fire Exit is greater than 18m, then there should be good access. If concerns are raised about inaccessible fire exits, then these can be reported to the Duty Fire Officer at Suffolk Fire and Rescue.

- Are Government Buildings exempt from the regulations?

**Response:** It was thought that they were not exempt.

- Lifts in many public buildings such as shops are labelled 'Do not use in the event of a fire'. In the event of an emergency, disabled shoppers may find themselves stranded on an upper floor.

**Response:** The risk in this instance is with the shop. Disabled shoppers should be evacuated safely with reasonable adjustments in place.

- Members noted that the Forum was unable to hold meetings in the first floor meeting room at East Suffolk House because the Forum cannot guarantee safe evacuation of disabled people attending the meetings. The Forum is not in a position to train any of its members in the use of 'Evac' chairs. The Council could not provide sufficient trained staff to safely evacuate the building in the event of an emergency. Additionally there are insufficient 'Evac' chairs on the first floor or wheelchairs available on the ground floor to facilitate evacuation.

**Response:** It was noted that this decision was probably fair in the circumstances but was harsh. If a disabled member of staff could not be employed because of the inability of the employer to evacuate them safely from a first floor office, then that would be discrimination.

Chloe would enquire about the availability of 'Evac' chairs at East Suffolk House and the number of staff trained to use them.

**Action: Chloe Winlow**

- What about the provision of fire extinguishers? Are people trained to use them?

**Response:** They are not a requirement in buildings below a certain size. In order to be able to use one, a person has to be strong enough and capable of using one.

- What about fitting sprinklers?

**Response:** Sprinklers are brilliant but not obliged to be fitted. Suffolk Fire and Rescue would like to see these fitted in all schools but they tend to be left out of school developments because of the cost. It was noted that, in Wales, all new residential homes must have sprinklers.

- Are fire doors able to be wedged open?

**Response:** Fire doors should only be wedged open if they are fitted with devices that close them in the event of the fire alarm being sounded. All doors off corridors should be fire doors with a means to hold them open.

3.6 Linda thanked Phil very much for his very helpful presentation and for responding to our subsequent questions.

## 4. News and Information Items

**4.1 Suffolk County Council Operators Conference: Travel by Bus and Taxi:** Simon and Linda attended this Conference which was for operators of public transport. Their brief was to ensure that operators understood the experiences of disabled passengers when travelling by bus and by taxi. It was felt that this had been a useful exercise and it was hoped that operators had taken note of the examples given. Points made included:

- Bus drivers are not always sure what to do when someone with a disability wants to travel. There are some very good and helpful bus drivers – and others less so.
- Simon gave an example where he was waiting for a bus and it went past him without stopping. He was then stranded and it took him 2 hours to get home. He was able to make use of ‘Traveline South East and Anglia’, an app which gives travel information, and also ‘Soundscape’. Using the information from these apps, he was able to get himself home.
- Guide Dogs is actively campaigning to ensure guide dog users are not refused travel by taxi. Ipswich Borough Council uses ‘taxi testers’ to see how good taxi drivers are with assistance dog owners and wheelchair users.
- Gill said that asking for ‘Special Assistance’ when travelling by train works very well.

- Andrew said that all new trains should be compliant and in operation by January, 2020. Access to the trains for disabled people should be much improved. The new timetable will begin in May 2020. However, while the train should be compliant, if there are delays requiring a replacement bus/coach, that vehicle does not have to be. Train operators are likely to say 'we will put on a taxi for a disabled passenger – if we can get one'. It was agreed that the Forum would raise this issue with Greater Anglia.

**Action: Planning Group**

- It is understood that one of the new trains will be brought to Ipswich Station to demonstrate accessibility. Information on this will be sought.

**Action: Planning Group**

#### **4.2 Workshop – Travel for Disabled People:**

4.2.1 This workshop was held by Suffolk County Council in conjunction with the Disability Forum for Suffolk. Linda, Simon and Steve were involved in discussing the difficulties disabled people have in getting around the environment including layout of pavements and roads, location of crossings, bus stops, signs and street furniture and the siting of A Boards and Street Banners. The issues were evidenced by the use of photographs showing poor practice.

4.2.2 The Council would find it helpful to have some photographs of good practice in Suffolk and members have been asked to look for some good examples, photograph these and send them to Linda for forwarding to the Council.

4.2.3 It was reported that a disability group was doing a walk-about around the Cornhill in Ipswich on the 17<sup>th</sup> April to look at this development from the perspective of people with disabilities.

#### **4.3 Access at Railway Stations:**

4.3.1 Members were pleased to welcome Trevor Garrod from the East Suffolk Travellers Association and he explained that a survey was currently being undertaken as part of a campaign for better services over a bigger railway. This involved completing a check list to assess where stations are 'easy' to use.

4.3.2 An 'easy' station is identified as accessible to people with reduced mobility. There are 110 stations to assess in East Anglia. Copies of the survey form were distributed to enable members to participate.

4.3.3 Simon commented on the lack of tactile paving to indicate edging to platforms at the Woodbridge Railway Station. He will provide photographic evidence of this and send this to Trevor.

4.3.4 Trevor said that the East Suffolk Travellers Association plans to put up a plaque in the 3 most accessible stations where examples of good practice can be seen and to repeat this exercise in the future.

4.3.5 The Department of Transport has released information on the 'Access for All' funding. It is understood that 73 stations have been identified for improvement and the nearest in Suffolk is Stowmarket. Greater Anglia has said that there will be no updates to stations during this franchise period (unless by a third party funder).

4.3.6 Members were disappointed that Rebecca Richardson, Accessibility Manager, Greater Anglia, was unable to attend this meeting and it was agreed to continue to invite her to attend a meeting of the Forum.

#### **Action: Planning Group**

4.3.7 Members noted that information to passengers could be improved. For example, if the only accessible toilet on a train is not working, this could be flagged up on signs on the platform in advance.

4.3.8 It was agreed to maintain contact with Trevor and he would be welcome to continue to attend our meetings.

#### **4.4 Travel Training:**

4.4.1 Annette Cotton, Passenger Transport, Suffolk County Council, explained that Travel Training has been running as a pilot programme in Suffolk for four years. Funding has now been confirmed for a further five years.

4.4.2 Theresa Salmon, Travel Training Manager, Integrated Passenger Transport Unit, Essex County Council, explained the programme as follows:

- People may self refer, or be referred by parent, carer or service provider. There is no cost to the disabled person provided they meet

the criteria for the service. The criteria appears to be 'people with a learning disability'.

- When a disabled person is referred, a visit is arranged to talk through their needs, including issues such as safety, stranger danger or what to do if things go wrong. It may be necessary to provide assistance for a specific part of the journey.
- There is a clear client pathway from referral through to route planning, home visit, aims and objectives, training sessions, risk assessment, and becoming successfully independent.
- Trainers are experienced in being able to assist disabled people to travel to their chosen destination; this may be to work, college or placement.
- A wallet is carried by the disabled person to be able to show operators that they are being trained to use public transport with cards (as produced by First Bus) to tell the driver what assistance is needed.
- Over 300 students have been trained during the four year pilot programme. Many of these students have autism, asperger's syndrome or learning disabilities. More referrals for disabled adults would be welcomed.

4.4.3 Members noted that wheelchair users travel facing backwards in a bus so they cannot see where they are going. Consequently it can be difficult for them to know when to get off.

4.4.4 People are now able to be trained to get to their doctor's surgeries or to hospital, particularly as Community Transport Services cannot meet the demand for their services.

## **5. Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday, 8<sup>th</sup> January, 2019**

The Minutes were agreed as a correct record.

## **6. Matters Arising**

**6.1 Item 3 Health Service Developments in Felixstowe:** The changes to the Minor Injuries Unit came into force on the 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2019. Generally, people will now require an appointment to access the service. Alan Rose, Chair of the Howard House Surgery Patient Group, had taken issues raised back to the Project Team as requested. Further information is available on this website: [www.suffolkcommunityhealthcare.co.uk](http://www.suffolkcommunityhealthcare.co.uk)

## **7. Updates on Specific Issues**

### **7.1 Access Surveys – Felixstowe and Woodbridge:**

**7.1.1 Access to Felixstowe Cinema:** Margaret has not yet been able to identify the owner of the Felixstowe Cinema – this information is not on their website. She will make further enquiries.

**Action: Margaret Morris**

**7.1.2 Access to Railway Stations:** Trevor suggested that it could be possible to make use of councillors' locality budgets to improve access to stations. In addition an application could be made to the 'Access for All' fund.

**7.1.3 Beardmore Park, Martlesham Heath:** Simon reported that a crossing is being installed at Beardmore Park which may improve safety for pedestrians on the site.

**7.1.4 Bollards in Woodbridge:** It was reported that the highlighting paint on the black bollards has been replaced with 6 inch red reflective tape intended for car headlights.

**7.1.5 Additional Benches in Woodbridge:** Cllr Page has not yet responded to the letter seeking funding for the new benches.

**7.1.6 Other Issues:** These are being taken forward by the Planning Group.

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

**7.2.1 Leiston Leisure Centre:** The Planning Group are expecting an update on the redevelopment of the Leiston Leisure Centre at their next meeting. If there are issues, this information will be circulated to members.

**7.2.2 Funding:** A grant of £1,000 has been received from Cllr Gallant's Locality Budget to assist with the work of the Forum. Our thanks were recorded to Cllr Gallant for his assistance.

**7.3 Disability Focus:** Linda advised that there were considerable difficulties facing the organisation of the annual Disability Focus event, due to the withdrawal of administrative support by a partner

organisation. Members were asked if they had any ideas that would help.

## **8. Views on Health and Social Care with Healthwatch Suffolk**

Kerry reported that:

- Walton GP Surgery, Felixstowe, is in Special Measures. The surgery is beginning a Patient Engagement Survey and has set up an Action Plan. The problems have not affected patient care.
- Walton Parish Nursing is holding a Health Fair on the 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2019, at the Trades & Labour Club, 182 High Road East, Felixstowe. This should be a good event.

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

Due to time constraints, no items were raised.

## **10. Dates of Forum Meetings in 2019**

Meetings will take place as follows:

Tuesday, 9<sup>th</sup> July, from 2pm to 4pm, Deben Leisure Centre, Woodbridge

Tuesday, 1<sup>st</sup> October, from 2pm to 4pm, at Trinity Methodist Church, Felixstowe.