

Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum

Minutes of the Meeting held in the Richards Room, Martlesham
Community Hall, on Tuesday, 10th April, 2018, at 2pm

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
Simon Daws	Resident
Sylvia Izzard	Resident
Liz Mark	Resident and Bawdsey Parish Council
George Mark	Resident
Margaret Morris	Resident (Secretary)
Kerry Overton	Community Development Officer, Healthwatch Suffolk
Mike Titchener	Resident and Felixstowe Town Centre Residents' Assoc.
Graham Walker	Kirton and Falkenham Parish Council

Guests:

Ros Atkins	Project Manager, Suffolk Coastal & Waveney District Councils
Sara Barratt	Customer Experience Officer, Suffolk Coastal & Waveney District Councils
Chloe Winlow	Communities Support Officer, Suffolk Coastal District Council

Apologies:

Richard Best	Active Communities Manager, Suffolk Coastal & Waveney District Councils
Michael Friend	Carer and Hollesley Parish Council
Cllr Steve Gallant	Suffolk Coastal District Council (Cabinet Member for Community Health)
Steve Hodgkiss	East Suffolk Association for the Blind
Paul Kelly	Resident
Darren Knight	Head of Customer Services, Waveney & Suffolk Coastal District Councils
Cllr Stuart Lawson	Suffolk Coastal District Council
Linda Layton	Resident and Carer
Maureen Mee	Resident

1. **Welcome & Introductions**

Linda welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

2. **Apologies**

The above apologies were received.

3. **Consultation with Customer Services, Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils**

3.1 Sara Barratt, Customer Experience Officer for Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils attended the meeting in place of Darren Knight for a discussion and consultation with Forum members regarding their experience of contacting the Council and how this can be improved for customers with a wide range of disabilities. She explained that at present the telephone systems in Waveney and Suffolk Coastal are different, and their merger will not take place until after the Councils have merged.

3.2 Members advised Sara that Darren had made reference to a consultation document in respect of customer contact but Sara was not aware of this and would follow this up.

Action: Sara Barratt

Post Meeting Note: The consultation document has been delayed due to other work regarding the new East Suffolk Council but it is in the pipeline.

3.3 Members made the following comments regarding telephone contact with the Council:

- Not enough people answering the phones - excessive holding/ waiting times;
- Hold music is painful and causes confusion for callers with tinnitus, it is not possible to listen to the music and the handset has to be held far away which means they are not aware when the call is actually answered by the contact centre;
- An intermittent beep could be used instead of the music so that the customer is aware they are still on hold and not cut off;
- A hold message which tells the customer their position in the queue could be included;

- A periodic “comfort” message which tells customers that they are still on hold could be included;
- It was mentioned that there are telephone systems which give customers a choice of hold music, beep or silence. Could this be investigated?
- In general telephone options lists (for instance, “press 1 for council tax”, etc.) were not popular;
- The frustration of multiple-level menu options was discussed but Sara was reasonably certain that the Council only operates a single-level list;
- Sara confirmed that using menu options actually reduced overall waiting times for customers and helped to direct their calls more effectively;
- Large numbers of options can be confusing;
- Customers would like a phone option for “I have a disability and would like to speak to a real person”;
- Generally speaking, many telephone menus have mumbled announcements and do not speak clearly or slowly enough, especially when giving alternative contact phone numbers. This was not mentioned as specific to the Council, however the point should be taken into consideration when recording any new phone messages;
- With regard to interpretation for deaf customers, face to face-ability and awareness of staff to communicate, it was suggested that some staff are trained in British Sign Language. However, discussion concluded that this would be an inefficient use of resource as staff do not routinely need to use BSL and would therefore lose their fluency through lack of use. It was concluded this would not be a “reasonable adjustment”;
- It was suggested that rather than learning BSL intensively, front-facing staff could learn some simple sign language such as greetings and “how can I help”;
- For complex discussions, for instance a homelessness interview or explanation about a housing benefit decision, it is possible to set a date and time and bring in an interpreter if the customer does not have a friend or family member who can interpret for them;
- It was suggested that local hearing/ deafness service (such as the Suffolk Hearing Advisory Service) may be able to give awareness training for staff. Sara mentioned that there are awareness tips in the staff guide to translation and interpretation which was presented to the Forum for feedback.

Action: Sara Barratt would investigate the provision of deaf awareness learning sessions for Customer Services staff at both Councils.

- With regard to the availability of a text phone for deaf customers, Sara was aware that there used to be one at Waveney District Council but was unsure if this was in place now, or whether there was one at Suffolk Coastal District Council. She would investigate and report back;

Action: Sara Barratt

- It was noted that, if lack of use was a reason for not continuing with a text phone service, then possibly lack of awareness that it was in place may have been a factor in this. It was felt that publicity about methods of contacting the Council should be improved;
- Staff answering the phone do not always speak clearly. Clear diction is important;
- A webchat facility would be useful for customers with a variety of disabilities;
- Awareness and publicity about accessibility of services including a simple leaflet with key council contact details for customers who do not have internet access should be improved;
- Leaflets could be available at customer contact points and also in libraries where the council does not have customer contact points;
- The councils should publicise the facilities at their venues – e.g. low level customer service desk/ hearing loop/ text phone;
- Regarding whether the Council has specific guidance on the length of time it should take to respond to an enquiry, Sara stated that she did not believe there was one standard response time at present, but that for many teams, the response time was 5 working days for email contact. Additionally, there may be policy or statutory responses for some kinds of contact – e.g. complaints and Freedom of Information requests;
- Members felt it would be helpful to standardise expected response times (service levels) for each type of contact across all teams and make this clear to customers;
- One member noted the difficulty in contacting the contact centre to get a telephone number for Keith Fawkner-Simpson (Emergency Planning). The officer spoken to did not know who he was or have contact details for him. The importance of the availability of key information for front-facing staff via Frequently Asked Questions and the importance of up to the minute updates for front-facing staff in potential emergency situations was noted.

Action: Sara would feed back to front-facing Customer Services Management and Emergency Planning about the availability of key information.

3.4 Sara distributed copies of the Staff Guide to Translation and Interpretation. This contains useful advice on dealing with customers who require translation or interpretation services from the councils.

3.5 This document will be made available to members for their comments which are required by mid-May for forwarding to Sara.

Action: All

3.6 Members noted the following:

- The 12 point text is too small. It would be better to increase the standard text size to 14 point. Sara said that the councils worked to 12 point for standard correspondence in line with their style guide which was backed by research but that she would feed this back for discussion. It was discussed that this was not so important for electronic communication where the customer can change the text size on their screen but not all customers would be able to access this technology;
- Documents should be laid out simply;
- The colour contrast between the text and the background should be clear;
- It is important that staff ask customers how they would like to receive information rather than make assumptions.

3.7 Linda thanked Sara for her very helpful contribution. Sara agreed to write up her notes and provide an electronic version of the Staff Guide to Translation and Interpretation and send them to Linda.

4. Discussion on what facilities for disabled people should be included in a Leisure Centre.

4.1 Further to the previous discussions on the redevelopment of leisure centres in Suffolk Coastal, members were asked to consider the ideal requirements in a leisure centre for disabled people.

4.2 Their suggestions were as follows:

- Staff that understand disability;
- The pool should be easy to navigate for people with visual impairments;
- There should be tactile surfaces throughout including the wall tiles;

- Handrails would be helpful for guidance and support;
- The type of flooring needs to be appropriate;
- The interior of the building needs as few obstacles as possible;
- The temperature of the water – currently it is too cold for people with disabilities and allegedly not cold enough for swimming clubs;
- The provision of gym equipment that people with disabilities can use and for people of different heights;
- Inclusive design and access should be built in, not added afterwards.
- There should be equipment for getting from a wheelchair into the pool that is appropriate;
- There should be information on the walls to tell people where the facilities such as toilets are;
- It should be possible to have equipment that ‘talks’ to people;
- There should be good changing facilities including a properly equipped changing places facility;
- There should be sufficient car parking for blue badge holders as close to the entrance as possible;
- It must be accessible for everyone.

4.3 Members commented that the current consultation regarding a Leisure Centre for Felixstowe seemed to be directed towards Felixstowe residents only, but it is supposed to be a Destination Centre. The consultation finishes at the end of April.

Action: Planning Group to discuss this with Tim Snook

5. Follow up on actions arising from the Woodbridge and Felixstowe Action Days

5.1 Woodbridge:

5.1.1 Linda reported that she and Simon Daws had attended the meeting of the Joint Highways Committee in Woodbridge on the 31st January. She outlined the topics that were discussed. There had been a suggestion of a trial period where businesses were asked not to put out A-Boards and Linda had been asked to write to Cllr Caroline Page to suggest this. However, Cllr Page had not responded to the letter as yet.

5.1.2 Meanwhile, Cllr Holdcroft had indicated that the one A-Board per business policy was being followed up.

5.1.3 Cllr Page has said that the highlighting of the black bollards in the Thoroughfare was to be carried out by volunteers from the Quay Church. It was noted that bright yellow on black would be the best contrast.

5.1.4 Linda has written to Cllr Page regarding the siting of additional benches in Woodbridge. This has been delayed by the change of personnel in Suffolk County Council Highways.

5.1.5 The flooding of the blue badge spaces in the Station Car Park is being dealt with.

5.1.6 The Forum has prepared a letter to businesses in Woodbridge asking them to consider whether their business is disability friendly. This has been agreed by Suffolk Coastal District Council but it has proved difficult to get Woodbridge Town Council and Choose Woodbridge to respond to the invitation to be part of this initiative. It was agreed that the letter will have more effect if it goes jointly from all organisations. Linda will persist in trying to get approval from the Town Council and Choose Woodbridge.

Action: Linda Hoggarth

5.2 Felixstowe

5.2.1 Linda and Margaret met with the Town Clerk, Ash Tadjrishi, and Helen Greengrass from Felixstowe Forward at Felixstowe Town Hall. It was noted that access to the Town Hall for wheelchair users is somewhat hazardous.

5.2.2 There is now an Accessibility Guide on the Visit Felixstowe website and this includes a considerable amount of useful information. There is currently no funding for this to be produced in leaflet form.

<http://www.visitfelixstowe.org.uk/assets/Documents/Felixstowe-Accessibility-Guide.pdf>

5.2.3 The Forum agreed to keep Felixstowe Forward updated as further information becomes available.

Action: Margaret Morris

5.2.4 The issue of cars in the Shared Space area was discussed, along with the potential closing of that part of Hamilton Road on Saturdays.

Whilst that may not be popular with some blue badge holders, the Forum felt that it was important to ensure safety for all pedestrians.

5.2.5 It was noted that electric cars are dangerous to pedestrians as they are very quiet. After pressure from Guide Dogs for the Blind, it had been agreed in 2014 to put synthetic engine noise in electric cars by 2019, but this is still not happening.

5.2.6 It was noted that the beach wheelchair was not easy to use on Felixstowe beach particularly for larger adults. It was agreed to put advice on the Visit Felixstowe website as to where there were ramps that gave access to the beach. The reference to the availability of the beach wheelchair would be removed. Margaret had not been able to find out who had provided it and therefore it was thought that it could be disposed of.

5.2.7 It was agreed to advertise the inclusive play equipment at the Martello Park; while the Changing Places toilet is advertised, information about the play area is lacking.

5.2.8 Some toilet doors of the public toilets are difficult to open. Helen is doing a 'walkabout' and will check them and report back.

5.2.9 It was noted that there are still problems with the location of A-boards.

5.2.10 It was suggested that a repeat survey is undertaken of Felixstowe businesses, this time informing and involving staff of the various shops. It was agreed that the Planning Group would progress the planning for this.

Action: Planning Group

5.2.11 It was agreed to hold a catch-up meeting between the Town Council, Felixstowe Forward and the Forum each autumn in order to include updates in Spring advertising.

5.2.12 Mike noted that Suffolk County Council has Guidelines on the use of A-Boards but these are not enforced. It was noted that businesses find advertising in this way useful, and it was realised that the best that can be hoped for is that they will be kept inside the building line.

5.2.13 A member raised the issue of the bottle neck on the pavement outside Conkers / and the Bus Stop in Hamilton Road.

6. Minutes from the Meeting held on 9th January 2018

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 9th January 2018 were agreed as correct subject to the deletion of the second and third sentences in Item 9.1 and replacing them as follows: The national social care picture (at home and in care homes) is that 98% of people are receiving care that is considered 'good'.

7. Matters Arising

7.1 Felixstowe Action Day Item 8.2.1: Mike Titchener had spoken to Helen Greengrass of Felixstowe Forward about the information guide for people with disabilities and thought that there is very useful information on the Visit Felixstowe website.

8. Update on Specific Issues

8.1 Disability Focus 2018: This annual event will probably be held on 23rd October at One, Scrivener Drive, Ipswich, during half term week.

8.2 Report from Planning Group:

8.2.1 Membership has increased with the addition of Paul Kelly.

8.2.2 The Forum is now a consultee on major Planning Applications. Members of the Planning Group send their comments on the applications to Margaret for forwarding to the council.

8.3 Jetty Lane Path Surface, Woodbridge: Sylvia reported that there is good news regarding the upgrading of the section of Jetty Lane that runs from the railway line to the river (from the Avenue). The problem has been the right of way owned by Everson's boat yard. Martin Williams, Rights of Way Officer, Suffolk County Council has written to say that there is an indication that Network Rail would be prepared to undertake the resurfacing work. He is waiting to hear from Network Rail regarding further progress on their plans. The Forum congratulated Sylvia on her persistence and look forward to a successful outcome.

9. Views on Health and Social Care with Healthwatch Suffolk

9.1 Kerry reminded members that they needed to opt in to having their patient records shared, for example between the hospital and the doctor's surgery, by signing a personal record sharing form. The awareness of this needs to be improved. It means that surgeries can

share information with other organisations such as NHS 111, and that information can then be shared back with GPs. The form should be available at all GP surgeries.

10. Garden Waste – Brown bins

10.1 Ros Atkins, Project Officer, Suffolk Coastal District Council, was welcomed and she outlined the changes to the provision of brown bins for residents by the council. She said that there are no special provisions for people with disabilities and Richard Best, Active Communities Manager, Suffolk Coastal & Waveney District Councils had asked her to consult with the Forum regarding this. Residents will be charged £43 per year if they decide to have a brown bin.

10.2 Members raised a number of issues and Ros responded as indicated:

- What will be the size of the larger brown bins? They will be 240 litres – about double the volume but not double the size.
- How do people pay? People do not have to pay on line, they can pay by cheque or in cash;
- One member felt that he already paid sufficient council tax and did not want to pay an additional cost and would put garden waste in his grey bin. The contents of grey bins do not go to landfill but are incinerated. The council can refuse to empty a grey bin containing garden refuse. However, it was felt that this discriminates against people with disabilities and those who are not able to drive to take garden refuse to a Recycling Centre;
- There is an Assisted Collection Scheme whereby bins can be collected and taken for emptying. This is available for all bin collections. Further information is available from Suffolk Coastal Norse;
- Will people discard bins by leaving them on the pavements? Unwanted bins can be collected. They will be recycled;
- The charges have been introduced without consultation with people with disabilities.

10.3 Ros asked if a potential option would be for householders to have a roll of 5 compostable sacks for a charge of £10 and then only put the sacks out for collection when necessary. Members thought this could be helpful especially for those on low incomes who will find it difficult to pay £43.

10.4 The scheme will be implemented initially with a sticky label with the first line of the address, personal reference number and end date.

Eventually there will be a device inside the bin lid and a corresponding device in the lorry that will ensure only paid-up bins are emptied.

10.5 Members noted that there is still no guarantee that bins will be put back outside the right houses. They also felt that the brown bins were just as likely as other bins to be left obstructing the pavements once they have been emptied.

10.6 Further discussion may be needed on this issue.

11. Information Round / Any Other Business

Due to time constraints, no further business could be taken.

12. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday, 3rd July, 2018, at 1p.m, at Trinity Methodist Church, Hamilton Road, Felixstowe, IP11 7AN. The church is close to Ranelagh Road, Car Park, IP11 7HE.