

## **Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum**

**Minutes of the Meeting held in the  
Council Chamber, Suffolk Coastal District Council Offices, Woodbridge,  
on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> July, 2016, at 1pm**

**SCDC: Suffolk Coastal District Council, SCC: Suffolk County Council**

### **Present:**

Linda Hoggarth	Disability Forum for Suffolk (Chair)
Moyra Bevilacqua	Resident
Simon Dawes	Resident
Leigh Horton	Resident
Karen Hubbard	Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils
Sylvia Izzard	Resident
Paul Kelly	Resident
Simon King	Healthwatch Suffolk
Liz Mark	Resident and Bawdsey Parish Council
Kathleen May	Resident
Maureen Mee	Resident
Margaret Morris	Resident
Graham Walker	Avenues East

### **Guests:**

Cllr Tony Goldson	Suffolk County Council, Chair, Health & Wellbeing Board
Phil Magill	Operations Manager, Passenger Transport, Suffolk County Council

### **Apologies:**

Gillian Benjamin	Active Communities Officer, Suffolk Coastal & Waveney District Councils
Michael Friend	Resident and Hollesley Parish Council
Steve Hodgkiss	East Suffolk Association for the Blind

## **1. Welcome**

Linda welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made. She welcomed Cllr Tony Goldson who had kindly agreed to attend in the place of Cllr Colin Noble, Leader of Suffolk County Council, who was

unable to attend for personal reasons, and Phil Magill, Operations Manager, Passenger Transport, SCC. Cllr Goldson is the Cabinet Member for Health and chairs the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board.

## 2. Apologies

The above apologies were received and noted.

## 3. Questions to Cllr Goldson

**3.1 Question:** What can be done about the siting of A-Boards and Banners advertising shops and businesses in Suffolk Coastal? These present obstacles for many people especially those who are blind or partially sighted. This issue had been highlighted as part of the findings from the Disability Action Day in Felixstowe on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> July.

**Response:** Pavements are the responsibility of the District Council as the Planning Authority. However, the Shared Space in Felixstowe is the responsibility of Suffolk County Council.

**Action:** Cllr Goldson agreed to write to SCC Highways Department to ask what can be done about this issue.

For those with web access the following link may be helpful in explaining how SCC deals with highways or pavements.

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/roads-pavements-and-verges/obstructions-on-roads-and-footways/>

**3.2 Question:** Can SCC put pressure on First Bus to introduce Talking Buses?

**Response:** Until the requirement for Talking Buses is enshrined in law, there will not be universal provision of Talking Buses. It was thought that it was not difficult to add the technology to provide Talking Buses. However, when trialled in Ipswich, passengers and bus drivers had complained about the announcements on the buses and no further progress has been made. It was thought that one solution could be the use of an app which would advise users.

**3.3 Question:** What about the signage and facilities at the Ipswich Cattle Market Bus Station?

**Response:** There had been considerable consultation about the signage with Sensing Change and the Access Group for Suffolk and, as a result, SCC had made a number of changes. However, it was noted

that it was difficult to make signage accessible to all people given the wide spectrum of visual impairment. There is an accessible toilet at the Bus Station but its provision is under review due to damage caused by anti-social behaviour.

**3.4 Question:** Why is priority not given to wheelchair users on buses?

**Response:** A change in legislation is required to ensure that wheelchair users are given to priority. The outcome of a case in which it was decided that priority could not be given to wheelchair users has gone to the Court of Appeal and a ruling is expected at the end of 2016/beginning of 2017. It was noted that any enforcement would have to be carried out by the bus driver- so it would be up to the bus operator to support drivers. Cllr Goldson noted that maternal mothers with up to six month old babies are a protected category as well as disabled people. What is really needed is a change in attitudes so that people are more helpful and understanding of each other's needs. The problem is exacerbated in rural Suffolk – if a wheelchair user cannot get on a bus because the space is already in use, it can be a very long wait until the next one.

**3.5 Question:** A member asked why it was taking so long to have her mobility scooter tested so that she could travel on First Bus. She had waited 9 months.

**Response:** The member was asked to contact Phil with the details.

**3.6 Question:** What is happening about the Park and Ride Service at Martlesham?

**Response:** Cllr Goldson explained that SCC cannot continue to subsidise the Park and Ride service and there are plans for changes which will improve the flow of the buses through Ipswich. There are no plans to close the service and bus operators are keen to keep it running.

**3.7 Question:** What about the greenery that overhangs footpaths and the soil that creeps onto pavements? If guide dogs encounter such an obstruction, they stop even if it is just greenery.

**Response:** Cllr Goldson said that if members raise specific enquiries providing the location of such instances, he will respond.

**3.8 Question:** Will SCC seek to make all information more accessible especially taking steps to remove the reliance and priority that appears to exist on usage of the internet as a primary source of information and engagement?

**Response:** Cllr Goldson noted that a variety of formats is needed and the needs of those without access to the internet should always be considered.

**3.9 Question:** Does SCC have a 'Directory of Council Services'? This should be made available in a range of formats and not purely published 'on the web'. Distribution of the Directory could be easily and cost effectively achieved utilising the existing support organisations and charities active across the county.

**Response:** Cllr Goldson thought there was such a publication.

**Action:** Cllr Goldson will make enquiries.

Members suggested SCDC should also provide a Directory of their services.

**Action:** Karen Hubbard will raise this within SCDC.

**3.10 Question:** Does SCC carry out Equality Impact Assessments?

**Response:** SCC takes into account every protected characteristic when carrying out Equality Impact Assessments. Cllr Goldson is a Dementia Friend. SCC has provided dementia training for staff.

**3.11 Question:** A member asked about the level of care and support provided to residents in sheltered accommodation.

**Response:** This needs to be referred to Flagship Housing.

**Action:** The Planning Group will consider an item on Housing Issues for a future meeting (probably January, 2017).

**3.12 Question:** What about access to footpaths in Woodbridge? A specific example was given.

**Response:** It was not known whether the path referred to was a public footpath or a public right of way. A map denoting the correct site would be helpful in order to take this forward.

**Action:** Details would be provided by the member raising the concern.

**3.12 Question:** Could SCC remove the time restrictions so bus passes for people with disabilities could be used before 9.30 a.m.? It would enable people to use them for work or college. Additionally, would SCC consider introducing companion passes for those disabled bus pass holders who cannot travel alone because of their disability? There was a suggestion that the reserves held by SCC could be used to provide these enhancements.

**Response:** Cllr Goldson indicated that reserves should not be used to provide ongoing additional services. He said that the criteria for the use of bus passes is a national problem and needs a national solution. In his view, the original purpose of issuing bus passes has been lost and more should be done to support disabled people. It was noted that if bus passes were means tested it would mean considerable bureaucracy and additional costs. He would continue to bear the comments in mind next time SCC discusses bus passes.

**3.13 Question:** Why are there difficulties in accessing services provided by Occupational Therapists? A member had had problems with the provision of services of an Occupational Therapist. The problem arose because one Occupational Therapist on a time limited contract left at the end of their term leaving no cover for the disabled person. As a result, the disabled person could not progress their need for assistance.

**Response:** Cllr Goldson said that he would need specific details to take this forward. However, it was noted that part of the difficulty is that a person needs an assessment by a SCC Occupational Therapist in order to proceed with an application for a Disabled Facilities Grant.

**3.15 Question:** Why is this called a grant when it is a loan and has to be paid back in certain circumstances such as moving within ten years?

**Response:** It is a scheme operated by local authorities and its criteria and eligibility could be discussed by the Forum at a future meeting.

Unfortunately, Cllr Goldson had to leave the meeting at this point. He was thanked for his input to the meeting and it was agreed that he would be invited to a future meeting with more emphasis on health and social care issues. Phil Magill responded to the remaining questions.

**3.16 Question:** Is there a possibility that more buses could stop within the grounds of the Ipswich Hospital?

**Response:** There are only two bus stops outside the Garrett Anderson Centre. Whilst SCC would have liked more bus stops, the hospital did not want them. There is no quick solution to this. The Forum noted that the Ipswich Hospital said that more buses did not access the hospital grounds because of the bus operators and SCC. The SCC Scrutiny Committee had looked at the issues relating to people who have hospital appointments and how they get to their appointments noting the need to co-ordinate with bus services. However members felt that appointments were sent out without any thought as to people's transport difficulties.

**3.17 Question:** What are the changes to Community Transport?

**Response:** It was explained that SCC had gone through a tendering process to award contracts for community transport for each area of Suffolk, 7 in all. In Suffolk Coastal, the contract had been awarded to Coastal Accessible Transport Service (CATS) with a sub contract to FACTS, the Felixstowe Accessible Transport Service. The whole service across the county is rebranded as Connecting Communities and is a transport service provided by Suffolk County Council to help people travel around the county of Suffolk who might not have access to a regular bus service or who might have a disability. The service has incorporated DIAL a RIDE, Community Car and Links Services and should be far less confusing to passengers.

**Action:** Members felt that it would be helpful to learn more about how the Connecting Communities Service was operating in Suffolk Coastal and it was agreed to invite CATS and FACTS to the next meeting.

Phil was thanked for his input to the meeting.

#### **4. Next Meeting**

The next Meeting will take place on **Tuesday, 4<sup>th</sup> October, 2016**, in the Council Chamber, Suffolk Coastal District Council Offices, Melton Hill, Woodbridge, from 12.45pm, for a 1pm to 3pm meeting.