

Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum

Minutes of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Suffolk Coastal District Council Offices, Woodbridge, on Tuesday, 7th October, 2014 at 1pm

Present:

Linda Hoggarth	Suffolk Consortium of User Led Organisations & Individual Disabled People (Chair)
Gillian Benjamin	Active Communities – Community Development Officer, Suffolk Coastal & Waveney District Councils
Moyra Bevilacqua	Resident
Gill Bishop	Home Instead Senior Care
Wendy Chard	Home Instead Senior Care
Cliff Cocker	Resident/Family Carer
Janet Davy	Sensing Change
Michael Friend	Resident and Hollesley Parish Councillor
Brian Hall	Resident - Felixstowe
Sylvia Izzard	Resident - Woodbridge
Linda Layton	Resident/Family Carer
Cllr Margaret Morris	Resident & Suffolk Coastal District Council
Dawn Rourke	Age UK Team Leader, Suffolk Coastal

Guests:

Cllr Graham Newman	Cabinet Member for Roads, Transport and Planning, Suffolk County Council
Martin Best	Regional Health & Safety Officer, First Group
Stephen Fountain	Staff Manager, Ipswich Depot, First Group
Hilary Goram	Regional Insurance Manager, First Group
David Brown	Deputy Chief Operating Officer, Ipswich & East Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group
Louise Hardwick	Head of Operations, Ipswich & East Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group

Apologies:

Carmel Ambridge	Resident
Tom Ambridge	Resident
Lorna Bellamy	Walton Parish Nurse
Kate Chate	Parent carer/Better Lives
Jean Cook	Leading Lives
Stuart Ellis	Resident
Sophie Hawkins	

Allen Hoffman	Coastal Accessible Transport Service
Liz Mark	Bawdsey Parish Council
Maureen Mee	Resident - Bawdsey
Cllr Frank Mortimer	Waveney District Council
Matthew Percy	Youth Patron of Ambitious about Autism
Andrew Simpson	Community Action Suffolk
Fran Stockley	Action for Blind People
Judith Wood	Resident - Felixstowe

1. **Welcome**

Linda Hoggarth welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

2. **Apologies**

The above apologies were received and noted.

3. **Further Debate on Transport Issues for Disabled People with Cllr Graham Newman**

3.1 Cllr Newman was welcomed to the meeting and invited to respond to questions from members as follows:

Question: What can be done about the fact that access to pavements is being disrupted for blind or partially sighted people and wheelchair users by road works signs? People are forced to go into the roads to avoid them.

Response: Cllr Newman replied that they try to be careful with the signage for road works but it is difficult. Only half the road works are the responsibility of the County Council, the rest are utilities such as water, gas and electricity.

Question: Are contractors aware of placing signage correctly?

Response: New contractors for the County Council should be better than in the past.

Question: What can be done about A-Boards outside businesses throughout the district? Cliff added that his wife is a wheelchair user and he considers the A-boards are dangerous. There is a blind woman in Woodbridge who keeps her guide dog on her left – when the dog encountered an A-board he stepped into the road, and it was only prompt action by passers-by that prevented the woman being run down

by traffic. Cliff said that pre 1970/74 shops had to pay the County Council to have A-boards.

Response: At a meeting of traders in Felixstowe, the traders explained how they needed to use them to promote their businesses. It might be possible to have a single sign advertising a number of businesses in a particular area or street. Cllr Newman would make enquiries with officers in the County Council.

Question: What about displays of goods outside shops? They are a considerable obstacle for blind and partially sighted people. It would seem that communication with traders is not successful.

Response: It could be that the space in front of the shop belongs to the particular trader. The County Council is investigating ways whereby agencies work together to discourage the plethora of A-boards.

Question: When there are cars parked on pavements, the space for pedestrians, wheelchair users, people with guide dogs, and people with pushchairs is severely restricted, is the Traffic Regulation Order being enforced in Woodbridge?

Response: Cllr Newman would seek further information.

Comment: Cliff explained that blue badge holders are not Permit Holders in Woodbridge. Blue badge holders can park on Tuesdays and Thursday afternoons only. The permits are specific to Woodbridge and are for residents of The Thoroughfare who need access to off-street parking. Lack of enforcement is down to the decline in the number of traffic wardens. Information would be sought on the eligibility for permits in Woodbridge.

Action: Linda Layton

Comment: In the Shared Space in Felixstowe, where the traders do not own the street in front of their shop, people with visual impairments have considerable difficulties in negotiating the area.

Question: What about cars being parked thoughtlessly on pavements?

Response: People should phone Suffolk Police on 101 to complain about all obstructions, including cars on pathways and across access from pavements and houses. It is an offence to park a vehicle across a dropped kerb.

All County Council 0845 numbers are changing to 0345 numbers which should make calls from mobile phones cheaper.

Comment: White H-markings across dropped kerbs should be mandatory.

Response: This is a national issue.

Question: In terms of the Concessionary Fares Scheme, the criteria state that people only qualify if they have lost both arms, as opposed to having lost one arm. Why is that? If I lose my bus pass, then I will not be able to go out.

Response: This is a national scheme. Cllr Newman will check the national criteria. Efforts will be made by the Planning Group to find out if there are national groups campaigning on this issue.

Question: Concessionary fares can only be used from 9.30am to 11pm on weekdays. Can hospitals/surgeries give people appointment times that fit in with these time limits?

Comment: People should say this when they are given an appointment.

Comment: People do not always think to do this at the time. It ought to be possible for staff making the appointments to just ask the patient how they are going to get to the hospital or surgery.

Response: Cllr Newman would enquire as to whether Suffolk County Council was in discussions with the NHS in respect of people's appointment times fitting in with transport services.

Comment: It would help if bus timetables could be available in hospitals.

3.3 Cllr Newman would follow up the issues raised and advise the outcome of his investigations.

4. Improving First Bus Services for Disabled People

4.1 Hilary Gorham, Regional Insurance Manager, Martin Best, Regional Health and Safety Manager, and Stephen Fountain, Staff Manager, Ipswich Depot, all from First Group, were welcomed to the meeting. They were hoping to get an insight on how to improve the

experience and make journeys safer for all disabled people when travelling by bus.

4.2 Members contributed by asking the following questions:

Question: Do bus drivers have training about people with hidden disabilities?

Response: All bus drivers have training, which has to be renewed every 5 years. They have to have this qualification in order to drive buses.

Comment: Examples of cards that can be shown to drivers were distributed: these can be downloaded but they do not last or look very professional. It would be better to have prepared ones in small wallets such as those distributed to the Waveney Disability Forum.

Comment: Drivers should have disability awareness training more regularly than once every five years. It should include all disabilities and not concentrate on any specific disability such as visual impairment.

Comment: Many people with disabilities avoid public transport because of difficulties with access and because they are not confident about travelling by bus.

Question: I have a disability that cannot be seen. Once I asked the bus driver why he was late – and his response was rude.

Response: This was not acceptable. However, there are initiatives coming to improve information to passengers. First Bus should have real-time passenger information available from 19th October but this will only be at the Cattle Market bus station in Ipswich, not at every bus stop. Information can also be obtained via apps for mobile phones. When people say 'The bus didn't turn up' First can now see in their office where each bus is.

Comment: The information will be of the format: *The next bus to Felixstowe is at 14.15.* There will be no sound, which will not help people with visual impairments.

Comment: The County Council had consulted on and been given input on colour contrast and fonts for the real-time display. The Cattle Market display is not as good as railway station displays for good contrast. It

would help to have the wheelchair symbol next to a bus number to indicate that it is wheelchair accessible.

Comment: Buggies and pushchairs are a barrier to wheelchair users and people with mobility aids on buses.

Response: Drivers can ask for the buggies to be folded up but their owners cannot be made to fold them.

Comment: It would help if all passengers can be educated about keeping the wheelchair space free and being helpful to all disabled people.

Question: I have driven a mini-bus for people with disabilities for 8 years. The springing leaves a great deal to be desired. Is it possible to have better suspension on buses?

Response: All First buses are being overhauled. By Christmas all will have leather seats and Wi-Fi.

Comment: Speed humps are difficult as there is a conflict between the need for speed humps to cut down speeds and the needs of bus passengers for a comfortable ride.

Response: First Bus use Drive Green: a system of lights that record the actions of the bus as it travels along the road – for example, if it goes too quickly round a corner. Drivers get a safety score. If the driver's lights are red too often then their driving is discussed with them.

4.3 In summing up, it was noted that disabled people would welcome the following:

- Well trained drivers with appropriate training in disability awareness to take account of all disabled people including those with hidden disabilities and learning disabilities;
- Drivers who always drive safely and with consideration for their passengers;
- Re-education of other passengers so that they understand better the needs of disabled passengers;
- Good information about bus services including real-time information but not forgetting those people who do not use technology such as smart phones and apps;
- Information needs to be produced in a range of formats and follow good practice guidelines;

- Comfortable vehicles;
- Opportunities to try travelling by bus to develop the confidence to use public bus services;
- The 'Better Journey Card' and its wallet holder need to be freely available to disabled passengers as this looks more official than downloading a printed version from the website.

5. Ipswich & East Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group

5.1 David Brown, Deputy Chief Operating Officer, and Louise Hardwick, Head of Operations, Ipswich & East Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group were welcomed to the meeting.

5.2 David explained that Clinical Commissioning Groups were set up to put local General Practitioners in charge of health.

5.3 He explained that there were some contracts coming up for renewal, such as Serco, the 111 Service and the Out of Hours Service, and this provided the opportunity to change, take account of what works well and what does not.

5.4 In terms of the health and social care system, it was recognised that the system needs to work together, particularly for patients with complex needs. It is planned that there will be integrated neighbourhood teams which will include social care, community health and mental health staff and also the voluntary sector. There are likely to be 8 in East Suffolk, each one covering 4 GP Practices. Staff would do what they have always done but in a more joined up way. People with complex needs would have Care Co-ordinators.

5.5 Currently the call handlers for the 111 service are not doctors or nurses. The aim is to include more doctors and nurses within the system

5.6 An Urgent Care Service will be developed. This would be located in front of Accident & Emergency Departments, staffed by experienced GPs, with the aim of streaming patients, deciding who needs emergency treatment and who can be dealt with by GPs. It is not the recreation of a Minor Injuries Unit.

5.7 People over the age of 75 will have a named GP. It will not necessarily be the person's favourite GP but the aim is to support people and keep them out of hospital. It was noted that a person does not have to make all their appointments with their named GP; they can still make appointments with other GPs in their Practice.

5.8 In respect of hospital transport, there is a call centre approach to decide eligibility. The criteria for eligibility are very strictly applied. However, it was noted that the way the questions are answered can mean that a person inadvertently rules themselves as ineligible. For example, being in receipt of the higher mobility component of Disability Living Allowance does not automatically mean that a person can afford a taxi to get to hospital. It is possible to appeal against a decision by telephoning PALS on 0800 3896819.

5.9 Members contributed as follows:

Comment: There is no automatic eligibility to hospital transport for a blind person.

Comment: It would be possible to use Community Transport instead.

Comment: Community Transport drivers are not able to get information as to whether a patient is ready to be picked up because of patient confidentiality. Hospitals need to recognise the status of Community Transport drivers.

Comment: Licences for Community Transport drivers can be extended beyond 70 but a medical examination would be needed every 3 years, which is expensive for a voluntary organisation.

Comment: Age UK Suffolk now has Area teams. They are trying to embed Age UK into GP Practices. They have one number: 01473 351234. Their plan is to integrate with the health and social care teams.

Question: Why are the 65 / 66 buses not allowed to go right into the hospital bus stops?

Response: There are only 2 stops at the hospital and these are fully utilised so if an extra service goes in, another would have to revert to dropping patients outside in Heath Road.

Comment: The Forum will pursue this issue.

5.10 Linda thanked all the guests for the information they had provided, their very helpful comments and responses to questions.

6. Minutes of the Meeting on the 8th July, 2014

The minutes of the Meeting held on the 8th July, 2014 were agreed as an accurate record.

7. Matters Arising

7.1 Item 3.2 Tesco Martlesham: Despite reminders being sent, Tesco Martlesham had not responded to the suggestion of considering posters to encourage proper use of parking spaces for blue badge holders.

7.2 Item 4 Leisure Strategy: There was a further comment that the water of the Swimming Pool at Fore Street, Ipswich, is cold.

7.3 Item 6.4 Fort Green Car Park, Aldeburgh: Photographs had been provided by Suffolk Coastal to see if the exact problem could be identified – however, no-one present had any information. It could be that mini-buses are being parked in blue badge spaces as they are wider.

8. Updates on Specific Issues

8.1 Disability Focus: This event will take place on 28th October, 2014 at One, the Suffolk Sixth Form College, Ipswich, which has good facilities for disabled people. It is free and lunch is to be provided. Information and booking details have been distributed to all members on our mailing list.

8.2 Planning Applications: Cliff Cocker has had no contact recently from Avenues East and this will be followed up.

8.3 Framfield House Surgery, Woodbridge: There are difficulties in accessing Framfield House. Whilst the outer door is automatic, there is an inner door which is very heavy. People get caught between the two doors. This will be referred to the Suffolk Disability & Health Action Group.

9. Any Other Business

9.1 Suffolk Coastal Consultation on Polling Stations: Reports had been received from Suffolk Coastal District Council in respect of their review of Polling Stations in Suffolk Coastal. Improvements have been made to a number of Polling Stations such as installing ramped access. However the Polling Station at Chediston (Church Room) is

not accessible, but there is no alternative building in the village. Voters will be advised of the lack of access and postal voting will be promoted as an alternative to voting in person. Forum members agreed that this approach would be a reasonable solution. No other issues about the accessibility of Polling Stations were raised.

10. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday, 6th January, 2015, in the Council Chamber, Suffolk Coastal District Council Offices, Melton Hill, Woodbridge, from 12.45pm for a 1pm to 3pm meeting.

The meeting closed at 3.15 pm.