

# SEVENOAKS DISTRICT SENIORS ACTION FORUM

*The meeting place for the interests of people aged 50 plus*

**Newsletter 28**

**August 2017**

---

## **AN OPEN LETTER TO OUR MPs**

*SDSAF has sent the following letter to our three MPs.*

**Dear Sirs,**

**We invite you to formalise meeting with the Sevenoaks District Seniors Action Forum movement so that you can;**

**hear what we have heard from our 1000+ Members (and others),  
change perceptions of high level decision making, and  
improve communication between Parliament and people.**

**SDSAF AND PARTY POLITICS.** The Sevenoaks District Seniors Action Forum, SDSAF, is strictly non-party political although we realise that many of the issues our Members raise are political ones. We tell our Members that SDSAF is whole heartedly independent and its officers will not sway from that. If we did, we would lose our credibility with them.

**WHAT SDSAF DOES.** Throughout the year, SDSAF attends village fêtes and town gatherings across the whole of the District. Without being too scientific, I suspect we listen to/talk with 1500-2000 people in an average year: the vast majority of them are over 50.

We ask for their comments on public services and work very hard not to 'lead' in our questioning. We gather impressions of the current concerns that people have. We invite those who are not already Members to register with us (membership is free!), to receive our communications, and contribute their concerns.

**WHAT PEOPLE TELL US.** Time and again, we are told that people feel that individuals have no power to influence decision makers. The biggest single reason why SDSAF has grown from some 200+ Members to nearly 1100 in just five years is that people become Members because they feel that a larger group may grant individuals impact. In the last couple of months alone we have added some 70 recruits.

A couple of years ago, we did a survey of our Members, then about 600, on their concerns. The 3000+ points made have formed the focus of our work since. No significant changes have happened in the balance and spread of those points although it is time we repeated the exercise.

**SDSAF AND KENT COUNTY COUNCIL.** This year, SDSAF was invited to attend a Select Committee at Kent County Council on bus transport and we surprised the Chair of that meeting when he asked what SDSAF's view was on this very important matter. On behalf of my four colleagues, I replied that SDSAF does not have a view because as an organisation we exist only to pass on the views of our Members and the people we meet. My colleagues gave the Chairman their views and I added what may have been missed and commented that the views expressed fairly represented the kinds of things we hear.

**SDSAF'S NEAR FUTURE** SDSAF keeps its position and processes under review and we try to ensure that we remain relevant to our Members' concerns. As such, we have recently reshaped the organisation into an administrative group and an action group.

We worry that there is an increasing disconnect between the local people we meet and decision makers and because of this we now wish to be more accessible to decision makers.

We wish to play our part in offering decision makers the intelligence that we gather from the events we attend. We wish to ensure that our contributions to consultations help to ensure that these consultations take into consideration the actual needs and concerns of older people. We refer to one of our opening statements, SDSAF is non-party-political, and what we offer is information and understanding that is not influenced by any politicking.

**RECENT DECISIONS** A feeling voiced by many of the people we meet is that some surprising, and yet critical, decisions have been made in recent times. These might have been better influenced by 'the common man' than has been the case. These decisions have been at every level of government.

Organisations like SDSAF could have contributed to intelligence, good sense if you prefer, but whilst we have been banging at doors for some years now, getting the attention of the decision makers has at best been sporadic.

We offer one simple example at a County level. At a meeting SDSAF (and our neighbours from Tunbridge Wells) held with two of Kent's County Councillors in February concerning older people, firm positive statements and promises were made by the Councillors about specific actions. In 5 months they did not return to those statements and promises.

When we sent them the draft of our next newsletter detailing these failings, we received a response within a day or two from a senior officer and a suggested meeting date. The suggestion contained had already been rejected, 5 months before. This was clearly a holding response to make it appear that they were doing something. One Councillor replied in a reasonable form, the other has not. His staff officer explained that he was away and would reply fully in September (7 months after the initial meeting).

**SDSAF OFFICERS** Our committee is not naive: many of us have had important careers at senior levels. All of us are sufficiently experienced and alert to be able to offer a lot more to society yet. Several of us are younger than currently planned retirement ages. Others are not far above. We recognise a similar age distribution in our Councillors. I would defy anyone to guess the age of our oldest committee member from the way that person is.

**WE WOULD LIKE TO OFFER YOU...** We would like to offer you now the potential for adding some grass roots objectivity to the advice and information you get from your own staff and colleagues. The intelligence that we can give you will be unlikely to give you any major surprises, after all you've had those in the EU renegotiations, Brexit, and the General Election, but this intelligence will add a layer of back up to what you are hearing, or challenge it, and handled well by you will add to your credibility at a local level.

**WE ASK YOU TO...** We would like you to formalise meeting with us on an occasional basis, once or twice a year, so that you can hear what we have heard, add credibility to decision making, and demonstrate that you do not want a gap between people and decision makers.

-oo0oo-

**MEMBERSHIP** Membership continues to grow. Our present total is 1070. We are constantly reminding our decision makers that older people have a lot to offer - and not just our votes!

**AGM REPORT** Kent's Police and Crime Commissioner, Matthew Scott, promised to chase some issues raised at the AGM, he responded; "As you know I agreed to look into three issues ... the use of scooters, speeding in and around Pilgrims Way and the 101 service. The use of mobility scooters is provided for in the Highway Code. With regards their specific use on the pavement the Code states that users of scooters should give priority to and show consideration for other pavement users.

... legislation determines how fast a scooter may travel as well as requirements for when they may be used on a road. The investigation of any potential offences would be dependent on specific circumstances of the case. For example, if serious injury or death occurred as a result of the use of a scooter on the public highway or footpath then the Police would be responsible for the investigation on behalf of the coroner and to determine if any offences were committed... dependent on which of three types of scooter, you could be stopped by the police if it is not appropriately maintained.



Ultimately the enforcement of any offences ... will be based on the individual circumstances of the incident. In the first instance, individuals should contact Kent Police in order that an appropriate assessment can take place to determine if any offences have been committed.

Speeding ... my office has raised the issue with the local District Commander... if there still concerns about parking I would advise you or your membership to contact the relevant authorities direct. If issues with regards parking continue please let me know and I will raise it with the local councils.

I regularly discuss the 101 service with the Chief Constable. Call waiting times have been reduced but there is always room for improvement. The matter was subject of discussions once again recently at the Performance and Service Delivery Board. This is the process for holding the Chief Constable to account and ensuring that the Force is delivering on the priorities I have set. My office has also raised the ideas put forward about how best to keep people informed of how long they may have to wait to speak to someone."

**BUS TRANSPORT (AGM)** Representatives of three bus companies made it clear that relationships between the private bus companies and local authorities are not great because of the low payment they get when we use our Bus Passes. Private companies cannot afford to run bus routes which do not cover their costs. KCC subsidies may need to increase for some routes. The amount paid per journey is not the same in every local authority. Kent people and London people should be treated equally.

**NEW COMMITTEE PEOPLE** We usually ask new Members if they would consider joining the Committee. We have had positive response lately and hope to meet some new recruits soon or at our next Committee meeting.

**WEBSITE FIGURES** Our website is an important way of making sure our Members know what's going on. In its five years, half a million people from across the world have looked at it. Many have taken a quick peek and moved on but many stayed longer. Thousands live in countries without our freedoms.

**TEA TIME** Thanks to Merylyn Canet for arranging 'tea' at the AGM rather than just a biscuit. It was nice!

**SCAMS, FRAUD, THEFT....** Have you seen the new page on our website? [http://sdsaf.org/?page\\_id=142](http://sdsaf.org/?page_id=142) Don't get very badly ripped off!



*We are fruit ripe for the picking! Even if it's a bit early this year!*

**KENT COUNTY COUNCIL** We work hard to influence County Councillors and they asked us to their Select Committee on bus transport. Their report included many of our Members' comments. The official minute mentioned our wish to be partners with KCC rather than opponents BUT KCC organised annual meetings for all the County's Forums have not happened for a couple of years. Along with TWOFF (the Tunbridge Wells Forum), SDSAF had three meetings with County reps to persuade them to call a Kent Forum. We want to check with all our colleagues what is important to their older people. In February 2017, the two Councillors responsible for older people **agreed with all of our suggestions**. Since then? Nothing - until we sent them a draft of this paragraph. We had an immediate offer of a meeting but for a time we had already told them was not possible. What are they afraid of? Of course, the Elections have come and gone....

*Thanks to all our partners*



**Contacting SDSAF Management People. (Please note changes);**

Chairman	Frank McConnell	frank@frankmccconnell.com
Vice Chair:	Merylyn Canet	01732 461397 merylyncanet@talktalk.net
Secretary	Derrick Bateman	bateman.derrick@gmail.com
Treasurer	Brian Gasson	
Membership	Roger Bryan	07470 201703 roger.bryan@me.com
Action Group Members:	Eileen Murray Giles, Jean Bentley	

Write to us via Roger Bryan, 10 Greenside, Swanley, BR8 7ER

**Membership Forms are available online at:**  
[http://sdsaf.org/?page\\_id=158](http://sdsaf.org/?page_id=158)