

# SEVENOAKS DISTRICT SENIORS ACTION FORUM

The meeting place for the interests of people aged 50 plus

Newsletter 30

February 2018

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**BUSES** When we described buses as an endangered species in Newsletter 29, we didn't know what the County Council was doing behind the scenes. So much has happened that it's hard to keep up – and it's not finished.



In case you've missed it, there was an ENORMOUS clamour against the County Council's proposals to slash subsidies on buses and they were forced into rapid reverse. It may have gone quiet lately but the County Council has to make massive savings and nothing is out of the firing line. The story goes...

Central Government has been cutting grants to local government for years whilst the demand for local services has been increasing massively. We all know that the economy has been in a bad way and something needed to be done. Various political parties have their own ideas on what that might be but SDSAF is non-party political and our concern is what happens in our communities to older people. We do not take a party political stance on anything but if something has an impact on our Members, we will say so and we won't go away.

The increase in demand for services is a surprise to NO ONE. Much of the demand is based around the needs of older people and we have all known about the post war baby bulge since about... 1946! Has forward planning been nil?

Kent County Councillors were considering a multi-million pound cut in the subsidies they give to buses. When the cuts were first mentioned, SDSAF phoned KCC's Press Office to ask when a statement would appear and were told that none would. We suggested that this was a very important issue to a lot of people and that a statement was needed. The blank refusal from them in the morning turned into a Press Release by the afternoon – someone had realised that they had better come clean.

The reaction was almost immediate. Thousands of people signed a petition in days, the Chairman of the County Council was forced to issue a statement including a reference to a consultation, the Chairman of the committee who issued the Press Release lost his job, the consultation was cancelled (before it had begun) to be replaced by a 'different kind of conversation' – which has never happened. There has been no update since December 7th, 2017. The Chairman of the County's Bus Select Committee does not know what's going on.

Contact from SDSAF with MPs and County Councillors was massive. We met with Sir Michael Fallon and pressed home our points on this and other issues especially that some local services were beyond creaking now. All Kent MPs were against Kent's subsidy cuts. SDSAF emailed the new Minister for Hospital Transport, Stephen Brine, asking for his support against the cuts as these buses brought local people to hospitals without the need for passenger ambulances. His reply failed to answer the point. When prompted TWICE, he failed to reply at all. That's how much he cares about local reaction. Sir Michael Fallon has therefore offered to write to Mr Brine on our behalf. We look forward to the answer, if he gets one.

In early February, Central Government awarded an extra £3.9 million to Kent for Social Care (that's mainly for older people!) and the leader of the County Council claimed that this was the result of his campaigning – and there we were thinking that it might have been because of the massive outcry from people like SDSAF!

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SDSAF has had more correspondence with Members about transport than anything else in all the years we have been going. Members have quite reasonably pointed out that the bus companies are private companies and have to make a profit, that without a decent bus service they feel imprisoned, that not every one can drive or has a car or family members to transport them. Correspondence from Members has been invaluable when SDSAF talks with local and national politicians. **Without your involvement we would have been just a committee muttering! Thanks!**

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*SDSAF Action Group leader, Alan Dixon, has been keeping an eye on the facts for us, and making some suggestions for what we might need to do...*

**TRAVEL ISSUES** KCC announced plans to cut subsidies to Socially Necessary Bus Services (SNBS) by c.£2million in each of the next 2 years. SDSAF communicated with members on December 2nd and a public outcry began. The cuts have now been postponed but not “saved” as local headlines could lead you to believe. We believe that there now must be a consultation before cuts can be implemented. We asked you to let us know your feelings and you did with a good and varied number of responses. Our Action Group is now working on transport needs.

**THE LATEST STORY** A press release from KCC on Jan 15<sup>th</sup> stated that £450,000 was still to be cut from SNBS. These subsidies are discretionary. Councils are not obliged to fund bus services. Some 97% of bus services in Kent are deemed to be commercially viable with just 3% needing a subsidy.

**POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS?** The current operators could take the rough with the smooth balancing profitable and unprofitable services. Smaller operators may be able to provide services more cheaply. KCC could raise extra funds from other sources. There are just over 600,000 households in the county, a £2m cut would be paid for by 6p a week from each household. Would you pay more?

**OUR PERCEPTIONS** In our 2015 survey, SDSAF Members felt that bus services were inadequate. There have been many cuts since then. Cuts lead to fewer users leading to further cuts and the disappearance of services. How does the Council decide that a socially necessary bus service is no longer necessary?

**MONEY** KCC pays out over £40m in bus subsidies. If we read the figures correctly, Kent receives £8.7m from Central Government for Bus Service Operator Grants.

**THE REALITY IS...** The proposed cuts are just the latest in an on-going reduction in services over some years. It is unlikely that we will see funding increase. If we want to keep and improve our local transport then we need you to contribute to the debate in writing. A complete rethink is needed, not just millions of pounds of tinkering. We need a proper review of routes and operators. An in-depth local needs study will ensure that the views of Forum Members can be represented.

The study needs to consider; new ways of funding, new ways of providing local community transport, the current and future use of buses and trains, the future

for concessionary fares with the 60+ pop growing faster than the population as a whole, the dominance of cars, the impact of increases in housing, travel to and from work, raising the number of bus users from the current less than 2%, early and late transport, affordable costs to operators and passengers, the role of employers in transport for workers, rural transport, the example of other places (like the little white buses of Hawes, the car share scheme in the City of York, "click and ride" taxi sharing, and Kent Karrier mini buses), Hospital Transport and other medical journeys. This is nowhere near being a complete list but if SDSAF Members can chip in, we would have a lot to suggest to the powers that be. Together, we can help. *Alan Dixon*

**MEETING OUR MPS** We met Tom Tugendhat MP in November and Sir Michael Fallon MP in January. We have always promised our members that we would do our best to influence decision makers to bear in mind the needs of older people. It was the fuss kicked up by older people that led the Government to an about turn on social care funding in 2017. We know that the UK has to balance budgets, and we have made suggestions to government on this, but ill-thought out plans for older people by those who have not consulted us cannot gain our support.

*Mr Tugendhat and Sir Michael Fallon are two of our District's three MPs. We're sorry that MP Gareth Johnson has not yet agreed to meet us.*

We talked to Sir Michael about the threatened cuts in bus services and the impact that will have especially on rural life. We made the point that local councils are being starved of money by central Government and that funding for Kent is unfair in comparison to funding for London. Some Members have said they would accept a small rise in council tax to pay for necessary local services.

Sir Michael wrote later to us pointing out that 'together we changed minds on buses...' and suggesting that we keep our eyes on changes due in CCGs.

**OUR MEMBERSHIP** is 1082.



**ASH CHURCH TREE FESTIVAL** This tree in the festival was entered for SDSAF by Jean Bentley. Each angel shows a role of older people – friend, baby sitter, tea maker, family bank etc etc.

**A MINISTER IS NOW RESPONSIBLE FOR HOSPITAL TRANSPORT but not for transport to hospital!** 3,000 people wrote to their MPS, and the Government has named Steve Brine MP as Health Minister responsible for hospital transport. This is a great step forward but we need people to contact their MP to urge Steve Brine **to improve transport to hospital for older people.** Most older people go to hospital by bus or by a lift from someone. Buses are now in danger. Mr Brine should help us with this but see above for his lack of help!

**WEST KINGSDOWN'S THE PLACE FOR...** socialising and a bit of exercise, it seems! The Every Step Counts gentle wellbeing walking group is taking its second step on the road to better health and fitness by launching a new walk in West Kingsdown. The group has been organising successful walks in Otford for residents looking for light exercise and companionship including people with long-term health conditions, concerns about weight, and those who lack the fitness or the confidence to go out walking alone. In January, a group was launched in West Kingsdown by Peter Sissons from the Pavilion off London Road. The walks last around 30 minutes every Wednesday and are guided by qualified walk volunteers. Find out more by e-mailing [everystepcounts17@gmail.com](mailto:everystepcounts17@gmail.com), call 01732 227000 or e-mail [communities@sevenoaks.gov.uk](mailto:communities@sevenoaks.gov.uk).

**PUBLIC TOILETS** Action Group Member, Jean Bentley from New Ash Green, invites all Members to write to their Parish and District Councillors to ask for better public toilet facilities. She suggests...

For the attention of all Parish, Town and District Councillors.

### **Public Toilets**

There is a need for Public Toilets to be available. Many village facilities have been closed due to persistent vandalism but this does not remove the obvious need for them for all ages especially the elderly and the incontinent – this is an unseen disability.

How can we keep ourselves fit and active if we are unable to leave our homes for any length of time? Provision can be made in various ways e.g:-

Some communities have shops and cafes which have 'Community Toilets' allowing non-customers to use the facilities.

Medical Centres and public buildings like libraries are possible venues.

A small charge could be made for the use of new/refurbished facilities.

Please write to your councillors with these and your own ideas. SDSAF discussed the subject at our recent meeting with Sir Michael Fallon MP.

**AGE ACTION ALLIANCE** Whilst SDSAF does its best to represent Members' needs in Sevenoaks and Kent, the South East England Forum for Ageing (SEEFA) and Age Action Alliance work nationally. We like them both. If you use the web, look them up. There's lots of good stuff there.

**DON'T BE ALONE IN SEVENOAKS** If you are on your own, the Methodist Church in The Drive, Sevenoaks, organises a lunch in a local pub every month. Every week there is a Wednesday coffee morning in the vestibule on the front of the church. It's all glass so you can see people in there. So, be brave, don't be daunted. Coffee/tea biscuits and conversation for 50p !!! There's also a Tuesday afternoon meeting with speakers or activities although this does have a more Christian aspect to it. Contact [gillclayton51@gmail.com](mailto:gillclayton51@gmail.com) or just turn up.

## HOW DO OLDER PEOPLE GIVE £40 BILLION TO THE UK?

Forget the political headlines about older people being a 'drain on the economy'. We're living longer and contributing for longer as family members, taxpayers, consumers and volunteers.

### OVER 65s CONTRIBUTE TO THE COUNTRY

TAXES	around £45 billion a year	around £82 billion by 2030.
SPENDING	£76 billion	£127 billion by 2030.
VOLUNTEERING	over £10 billion a year	£15 billion by 2030.

### OVER 65s COST THE COUNTRY

SOCIAL CARE	£34 billion a year	£52 billion by 2030.
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**ON AVERAGE** Older people give:  
an average of 75 hours in charitable work each year and  
73 hours in voluntary community work

**an annual contribution of over £11 billion.**

They also provide on average 326 hours in free care for grandchildren,  
parents and other family members which is

**an annual contribution valued at over £15 billion.**

*[Source: MGM Advantage's Retirement Nation report (2012)]*

Older people give **£10 billion a year in charity and family donations**  
(including childcare services for families and neighbours)

This is forecast to grow to **over £15 billion by 2030.**

**Taking all these contributions together,  
older people make**

**an annual net contribution of £40 billion**

to the UK economy (i.e. net of the costs of pension, welfare and health support).

By 2030 the positive net contribution of over 65s is

**rising to an estimated £77 billion.**

*[Source: Royal Voluntary Services (RVS) Gold Age Pensioners report (2011)]*

**AGM 2018** Please note that the AGM takes place this year in Swanley, at the Bowls Club in Hilda May Avenue on the 23rd May. Our speaker will be Gillian Shepherd Coates who has a great deal of knowledge of the needs of older people. Do come, listen to Gill, and tell her what you think is important. More details later.

**MUSIC, MUSIC, MUSIC** Heard of Open Mics? Been to one? They happen all over our area and guess how old the audiences are? Yes, that's right, most of them are over 50. Guess how old the performers are? Yes, that's right, many are over 50 too. The top picture is of a Ukulele Band, there are seven of them (one's hiding on the floor at the back) and they were performing at a monthly Open Mic at The Olympic in Swanley. Who believes that all performers are young people? Music is far too important to exclude anyone. As Oscar Wilde nearly said, 'Musical performance should not be wasted on the young'.



And here is a picture from New Ash Green. Yes, they're Morris Dancing and about to throw sticks at each other. Sorry it's so dark – but it does make it more difficult to see the sticks coming at you! The audience of all ages loved it.

Yes, the dancers were over 50. The musician accompanying? Yes, he was over 50 too. There's life in these old dogs yet!

**BOCCIA? GOTCHA** Yulia La-Kruz is working as a Community Sport Project



Coordinator at Sevenoaks District Council and hopes to set up regular recreational boccia sessions for older people at West Kingsdown village hall. Call Yulia on 01732 227149... socialising? game playing? Boccia? (Bot-cha), is a game related to bowls, boule and petanque, (No, I didn't know, I looked it up!)

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

Chairman	Frank McConnell	frank@frankmcconnell.com
Vice Chair:	Merilyn Canet	01732 461397 merilyncanet@talktalk.net
Secretary	Derrick Bateman	bateman.derrick@gmail.com
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Action Leader	Alan Dixon	
Action Group	Eileen Murray Giles, Jean Bentley	

**Write to us; Roger Bryan, 10 Greenside, Swanley, BR8 7ER Email us via the website**

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