

Sevenoaks District Seniors Action Forum

Working together in the interests of people aged 50 plus
[email comms@sdsaf.org.uk](mailto:comms@sdsaf.org.uk)

**Sevenoaks District Seniors Action Forum
Annual General Meeting
2.15p.m.
Friday 5th July 2024
at
Sevenoaks Indoor Bowls Centre, Hollybush Close, Sevenoaks TN13 3UX.**

Guest speakers on Hard of Hearing services will follow the formal meeting.

Please do come along to the meeting, if you can, the Committee always enjoys hearing from and meeting members. There will be light refreshments of tea, coffee and cakes following the meeting and the Indoor Bowls Centre Bar will be open prior to the meeting. All are welcome.

The Committee and members have been busy since the last newsletter, a coffee morning has been held at Bat and Ball Railway Station and we thank Marilyn for speaking at this event, giving us a comprehensive update on the activities of Sevenoaks Town Council. Committee meetings have been held, together with the Action Groups. Hear more of this work at the AGM.

We met with Tom Tugendhat M.P., and presented questions to him which many of you submitted to us. With the news of a General Election on 4 July, it is important that all prospective candidates for parliament listen to the voice of older people, we make up a large percentage of the total population entitled to vote, so ignore us at their peril! The committee will continue to meet at least every 6 months with both of our M.P.'s and if you have concerns we are happy to take these forward.

With the weather warming up, we hope that you are able to enjoy the summer months and enjoy reading the latest newsletter.

Looking forward to meeting you at the A.G.M.

Best wishes

Eileen and Gill

Co-Chairs



How to Make Best Use of your Doctor's Appointment – for reference:

1. If possible take a friend or relative with you. You only retain about 10% of information that you hear at an appointment.
2. Find out name and role of the practitioner you are seeing either when making the appointment or if they do not introduce themselves when you go in, then ask for their name and role.
3. Book a double appointment if you have several issues to discuss
4. Take a notebook and pen with you to write down any instructions or information that you are given.
5. Make a written list of your symptoms and any questions that you might want to ask.
6. Write a brief overview of your medical history to take in with you- date and type of any operations, any complications, any serious illnesses, list of current medications, any allergies.
7. Make use of any machines outside in the waiting room that measure weight, height and blood pressure - this will save time during the appointment.
8. Make use of health workers other than the doctor for questions ie receptionists, nurses - they might be able to help and thus reduce time spent with the doctor
9. Take a urine specimen with you
10. wear loose fitting clothes - short sleeves for blood tests, blood pressure checks

Do Not Resuscitate Instructions -DNRs

Staff have to ask these questions of hospital inpatients. We have received communication from our members who have been upset by this practice. This is especially so, if they or their relatives are old and vulnerable and have been alone when approached on this matter. Generally speaking it is considered that resuscitation of the over 80s does not necessarily have good long term results.

The Health and Social Care Committee are going to do some research into this to find out policies and procedures used in our local hospitals. Meanwhile our advice is to think about this issue beforehand. Discuss it with your family and friends so that when asked in hospital it does not come as a shock and you can give a decisive answer. Maybe communicate your wishes in out-patients or when attending a pre-op clinic. Make sure your wishes are written in your notes. If approached in hospital ask if you can have a relative present with you. Ask your relatives to check if anything has been written down. Junior Doctors have very little training in how to impart bad news. We really should be campaigning for doctors to have more training in these sensitive issues.

It is worth considering getting Power of Attorney for your family and relatives both for health matters and financial ones. This can be done online and roughly costs about £82 for each type.

Jackie Griffiths - Health and Social Care Committee - SDSAF

National trust-Access Guide

More funding has been made available to provide improved access for disabled people, every property has a guide to the facilities they provide. These include accessible toilets, level access to catering, step free route/map, provision of wheelchairs and even powered mobility vehicles at no extra cost and pre bookable. Details are available from the N.T. website or phoning individual properties. You can also obtain an essential companion card for free entry for a carer.

Our own experience has found that the volunteers are exceptionally helpful and gave tuition on how to drive a mobility scooter. With so many properties within less than an hour's drive it's well worth exploring. For example, at Sheffield Park near the Bluebell Railway they have two single seater shop riders and four Hercules two-seater mobility scooters.

Local Plan 2040

In January the Forum submitted a response to the November 2023 consultation on SDC's proposed local plan (this should be on our website). There were over 5000 responses and these are all being assessed and a revised final plan will be going out this Summer/Autumn to allow for final comments to be made before submission to the inspectorate for implementation in Spring 2025.

We are all aware of the need for more affordable social housing and this is reflected in the latest plans. Within the SDC area there is an acute need for more genuinely affordable housing to rent for our local workforce. For those with housing association property the rental prices in Sevenoaks are not much above the national average... But if people have to rent or buy on the open market it's much more expensive, just look at these data

	Sevenoaks	Kent	GB/ England	
Cost of residential building land	£8,3m/per hectare		£2.8m/ per hectare- exc London	
Workplace earnings year ending September 2023	£31885	33156	£35106	
Median house price year ending September 2023	£465k	£355k	£290k	
Median House price to earnings ratio 2023	14.58	10.71	8.26	
% of all housing that is Local Authority or housing association rented	12.9%	13.1%	16.7%	
Private Registered Provider Rented- mainly housing associations- 2023 rents per week	£113		£102	
Private rental 2022/3 PCM- ALL housing	£1579	£1035	£994	
“ “ “ 2 Bed	£1333	£1005	£932	

As we lead up to a general election all political parties are making promises to increase social housing, including ideas on how to better fund the building costs

What's happening with the buses

We are awaiting KCC's revised bus service improvement plan (due to be on their website by June 12). GO have a new route C3 which started on April 2nd which will link New Ash Green and Hartley with Longfield, Darent Valley Hospital and Bluewater on Mondays to Saturday. This new route has the support of local councillors and is financially supported by KCC for a limited period. It's continued operation will depend on the use made of it. There are 5 journeys in each direction , This is fine if you are going to and from Bluewater where you can plan your times. However, if you are going from New Ash Green to the hospital on the 10.32 bus arriving at 11.03 you would need to catch the 11.53 back or wait for the next bus at 13.08. The last bus back would be the 14.15 this means that with the usual unknown timing of hospital appointments it is of doubtful value

Indoor Bowls-report from open day

13 people attended the open day on April 10th at the Sevenoaks Indoor Bowls Club including 6 from Weald Heights Nursing Home. The letter below from Weald Heights shows that this was a very enjoyable and successful event, John Roberts from the club hopes that this may encourage more Forum members to give it a try. Give him a call on 01732 453593 or email ljdrob21@gmail.com if you are interested.

On 10th April, we took 6 of our residents to visit the indoor bowls club in Hollybush Close to enjoy a game of bowls. We parked just outside the Club and had easy access via ramps and lifts to the bowling rink.

Our residents, 5 ladies and one gentleman, some of whom were in wheelchairs, all performed amazingly well hitting targets that were laid out on the rink. Those in wheelchairs were all determined to get out of them in order to bowl unaided! The bowls club members who were helping found it quite inspirational. The residents were helped by Aimee and Jasminka from the Home who also tried their hand at bowls and took pictures of the activities. We finished bowling after about an hour and moved to the clubhouse bar area and had drinks and a bite to eat. Thanks to the Bowls Club for an enjoyable event.

On returning to the Home the residents were excited to talk about their excursion to others in the Home and to their visiting families and friends. The afternoon was very enjoyable but also beneficial to "our bowlers" who had to physically move and concentrate when playing. As a Home we have decided to become corporate members of the Club and bowling will become a regular monthly activity for some of our residents.

Joy Corbett", Lifestyle Lead, Weald Heights Nursing Home

Staying Safe Online



Preventing fraud

Together, let's **stop scammers**

Remember, ABC:

-  **never Assume**
-  **never Believe**
-  **always Confirm**

Get the latest scam advice @KentPoliceCyber

ABC rule to deter criminals

The police tell us that 'Criminals will go to great lengths to appear genuine, and this can include obtaining personal information which they then disclose to the victim to give an appearance of legitimacy. These are organised criminals who can be very convincing and whose techniques sadly often scam people from all walks of life.

'Even if you do not consider yourself to be vulnerable, it is important to be vigilant.'

- Never give personal information in response to an incoming call, particularly if the caller is asking you to do something that will affect you financially.
- The police or your bank will never request money from an individual, nor will they ever direct a person to make a

transaction on their bank card.

- 'If you receive such a call, end it immediately. **Wait for five minutes for the phone line to clear** and contact Action Fraud or the police, if you think you have been scammed. If possible, call from a different number'

- You can dial 159 on your mobile phone which will give you a menu of which bank you need to talk to.

Remember the ABC rule to help protect yourself and others against fraud –

- **never Assume** someone is telling the truth,
- **never Believe** what they say unless you are confident that they are who they say they are,
- and **always Confirm** the details they have provided.

Email issues (From an article on the Express.co.uk website)

Anyone with a Gmail, Yahoo, Outlook or other email account would be wise to make a quick, simple and very important check without delay. The team at Action Fraud have just issued urgent new advice after revealing that over 22,000 people in the UK were targeted by hackers last year with over £1million lost to online crooks. It's a worrying statistic but Action Fraud says there's an easy way to stop becoming the next victim of online attacks.

"Anyone with a social media or email account can be a target for fraudsters or cyberattacks. It is important to take action to secure your accounts, as fraud becomes even harder to detect with technology on a global scale," explains Pauline Smith, Head of Action Fraud "Protect your information by ensuring your email and social media passwords are secure and different from all your other passwords. You can also set up 2-step verification for a layer of extra security. Remember, prevent the potential for fraud and hacking, never share your password or any 2-step verification code with anyone."

It's always a good idea to keep check of your online passwords as millions of us continue to use easy-to-crack codes. Data breaches can also lead to passwords ending up in the hands of cyber crooks so making regular changes will help to keep things safe.

"Your email and social media passwords should be strong and different from all your other passwords," said Action Fraud in an update on its security page. "Combining three random words that each mean something to you is a great way to create a password that is easy to remember but hard to crack."

Another top tip is to add so-called 2-Step Verification (2SV) to accounts. This gives you twice the protection so even if cyber criminals have your password, they can't access your email or social media account.

2SV works by asking for more information to prove your identity," Action Fraud added. "For example, getting a code sent to your phone when you sign in using a new device or change settings such as your password. You won't be asked for this every time you check your email or social media."

One thing you must never do is share this code with anyone - even close friends. In recent years, hackers have used a tactic, called on-platform chain hacking, where they get real codes sent to unsuspecting users.

"This is when a fraudster gains control of an account and begins to impersonate the legitimate owner," said Action Fraud.

"The goal is to convince people to reveal authentication codes that are sent to them via text. Many victims of this type of hacking believe it's a friend messaging them, however the shared

code was associated with their own account and the impersonator can now use it to access their account."

If you don't think you have changed your passwords in a while or added 2SV to you account it could be time to act.

Your scammer may be artificial but the results aren't

From the latest newsletter from McAfee, one of the main software online security providers. In the ever-evolving landscape of cybercrime, the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has introduced a new level of sophistication and danger. With the help of AI, cybercriminals now possess the ability to manipulate social media platforms and shape public opinion in ways that were previously unimaginable.

One of the most concerning aspects of this development is the power of AI tools to fabricate photos, videos, and audio. These tools enable criminals to create highly convincing and realistic content, making it increasingly difficult for users to discern between what is real and what is manipulated. This opens up a whole new realm of possibilities for cybercriminals to exploit unsuspecting individuals and organisations.

One alarming consequence of this is the potential for celebrity and influencer names and images to be misused by cybercrooks. With the ability to generate highly convincing content, these criminals can create fake endorsements that appear to come from well-known personalities. This can lead to an increase in scams and fraudulent activities, as unsuspecting consumers may be more likely to trust and engage with content that appears to be endorsed by their favorite celebrities or influencers.

Local online marketplaces are also at risk of being targeted by cybercriminals utilising AI. By leveraging fabricated content, these criminals can create fake listings and advertisements that appear legitimate. This can deceive consumers into making purchases or engaging in transactions that ultimately result in financial loss or other negative consequences.

As AI continues to advance, it is crucial for consumers to be aware of the potential risks and take necessary precautions. This includes being vigilant and sceptical of content encountered on social media platforms, verifying the authenticity of endorsements or advertisements, and utilising secure online marketplaces with robust verification processes.

Digital Exclusion

Our members constantly remind us that many seniors suffer from a lack of understanding and ability to use computers, smartphones and other digitally focussed operations. The increase in cashless operations can also severely handicap older members of the community. There is an urgent need to accommodate the element in society that is not computer or smartphone enabled (whatever age). For instance, analogue landlines are to disappear 2024/5 leaving seniors no option but to go down a digital path. Many are unable to do so and there is great concern about

- those with additional needs
- those without an internet connection
- people with personal alarms
- anyone who can't get a mobile signal in their home
- those with dementia

BT have said that they expect to turn off their analogue network by the end of 2025, so we can expect they will force everyone to make the landline change by that point.

Whilst we recognise that efforts are being made to retrain Seniors to become digitally savvy, there is still a need for organisations to accommodate those who remain digitally excluded.

We continue to ask our policy makers to find solutions to mitigate this problem which is causing increasing alarm and distress amongst many of our seniors.

Basic Pension

Many thanks to our member Anna for pointing out that many basic rate pensioners are concerned and distressed about the imminent prospect of having to fill in tax returns for the first time, even for tiny amounts, possibly necessitating the use of an accountant or risk being fined. This is because of the fiscal drag created by freezing personal tax allowances and maintaining the triple lock. Seniors see the Government giving with one hand and creating havoc with the other. We will be keeping tabs on this impending problem

Praise

We pass on words of praise from our members

- Congratulations to Alan Dixon, our renowned SDSAF statistician, who has a significant statistic of his own - he and his wife Maureen are celebrating 60 years of marriage
- Dementia singalongs in New Ash Green
- Otford Palace Trustees for keeping Mayday traditions and celebrations alive and making us aware of an amazing historical building in our District
- The speedy and caring support given by staff at Maidstone Hospital's oncology Unit
- Sevenoaks Town Council for refurbishing the public loos in St John's Hill carpark
- All the efforts made by the Teams working on the regeneration of Sevenoaks District
- Otford Library for running sessions every third Thursday 10.00-12.00 to help people acquire digital skills
- Paul Robertson, recently retired community warden, for winning a 'superstar award' after 20 years of unselfish service
- We also thank Graham Withers for reminding us that we have an Indoor Bowls Centre in Swanley

Frank McConnell Honorary degree



Past SDSAF Chair, Frank McConnell, was awarded an Honorary Degree in March by St Mary's University in Twickenham. Frank trained as a teacher when the University was still a College of Education and the University has acknowledged the experience and qualifications of its older alumni this year. 'It took a mere 66 years for me to get through my finals' says Frank.

You may remember Frank and Jean Bentley entertained us with zoom sing songs during the Covid lockdown, or perhaps you have been around long enough to be one of his past pupils! Congratulations Frank on this further string to your bow.

Fruit Soup

With summer approaching and fruits plentiful, fruit soup makes a pleasant change and can be made with most fruits.

Try combining 2 types eg apple and blackberry, blueberry and raspberry, rhubarb and strawberry. You can use fresh or frozen fruit which makes this a recipe you can use all year round. It's brain healthy and many people like the tart surprise for the palate.

500 gm fruit
approx 1 tablespoon sugar
approx 1 tablespoon of cornflour dissolved in 2
Tablespoons water
A cup of water
Chopped mint leaves
Cream to drizzle.



Put fruit, sugar, cornflour and water in a pan and gently bring to the boil, stirring as you go. Simmer for a few minutes then purée in blender. If the fruits contain seeds, you may like to pass through a sieve. You may also like to add some spices such as clove, nutmeg or cinnamon. Serve warm or cold, decorated with a drizzle of cream and a few chopped mint leaves. Enjoy ringing the changes and improvising with this very flexible recipe.

Getting Together



With help from a grant from Sevenoaks District Council, our Forum held a successful Coffee morning at Bat and Ball Station on 21 March. The station booking hall was a new venue for us that worked very well. Cllr Dr Merylyn Canet gave a well received talk on Sevenoaks Town's latest Green Initiatives.

Visitors from Tonbridge and Malling Seniors Forum joined us to share ideas about ways of making life better for seniors and members were given the opportunity to put forward concerns that they feel need to be addressed



My Little Treasured Friend Chases the Blues Away



Feeling a bit down? Can't get out like you used to? Feeling lonely? Many others are too. I'm fortunate to still be reasonably active, but loneliness and depression can camp at my door from time to time. Friends are very important; most from church or my film club.

Recently, my thoughts wandered to my childhood. My family couldn't read music, yet memories of a home filled with beautiful harmonies come back to me. It all stemmed from my father's horrendous stutter as a child. The film 'The King's Speech' gave me glimpses of the level of anxiety such an impediment can create, only exacerbating the stutter. My dad, just as the King had, went for therapy. Learning to breathe properly was the key to his recovery and that's where the harmonica, otherwise known as a mouth organ, came in. How beautifully he played that instrument to us children. It was like a language to him, pouring out emotions from his heart that he could never have expressed in words.

More recently, all three of my brothers purchased small 10 hole harmonicas and have been able to get a tune or two out of them. I followed suit. I knew that if I breathed in and out with the harmonica held to my lips I would get a little tune from it. Turning to YouTube I found a film that opened my eyes. So that's how you play it!<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zc-EcRFrxcA&t=4s> Within a few days I was able to play reasonably fluently. I still don't understand the lettered notes or their placement and I can't read music, but it only took two days to get one or two beautiful melodies from it, and like my father before me, the music comes from my heart, calming and dispelling anxious moments and helping with my breathing.

My little 'treasured friend' accompanies me wherever I go and when I'm feeling down or lonely I pick it up and start playing; sad feelings are quelled and the blues chased away and I can't help but feel happy.

The harmonica changed my father's life; and now it's changing mine. You too could have a happy little companion to chase the blues away. Why not give it a try?
Jane Oliver, June 2024

Meeting with Tom Tugendhat

A group of SDSAF members met with Tom Tugendhat MP on 15 March at his offices in Tonbridge to bring to his attention questions raised by our members. The questions were wide ranging covering health, housing, transport, carers, increased mortality, security & scams, probate delays, excessive car insurance, pension issues and more. We have been promised written answers but these have not yet materialised. Any information we receive will be put on our website.

Is KCC's pothole service going to pot?

One of our members has given us a progress report on the thrills of dealing with KCC after a tyre was damaged by a pothole at the beginning of January 2024

'Although it felt as though the form and the whole process had been designed to put me off pursuing a claim, I assembled all the requested documents and posted the required 20 pages of information back to KCC on 10 March.

Having had no reply after 5 weeks, I sent a follow up message to be told that I would need to wait a further 12 weeks for the matter to be investigated and they would be unable to update me during this period.

I asked if KCC could let me know their administrative costs for dealing with this small claim and received a lengthy letter back telling me how this was impossible to calculate as each case was considered on its own merits.

Five months have elapsed so far, the bureaucrats have had a field day and I feel no further forward. I do hope I am still alive by the time this case reaches a conclusion'

How to stand up Straighter

As we age, we can develop a tendency to hunch forwards which alters our body's centre of gravity and can lead to headaches, back & neck pain, breathing and digestive issues and increased risk of falling. Chest, back and abdominal muscles may weaken and it can become harder to straighten the spine.

Our use of technology may also make our posture worse as we bend forwards to use our computers and mobile phones sometimes for hours on end.

Our friend Lynn P in California has sent us these tips to help us keep an upright posture.

From a side view, good posture means the ear is in line with the shoulder, hip, knee and ankle. To help maintain good posture

- take breaks every hour or do to do shoulder circles, shoulder squeezes and chin tucks
- Position any electronic devices at eye level to avoid straining your neck
- Practise straighter posture by standing with your head, shoulders, upper back, buttocks and heels against a wall. Imagine a chord is pulling you upwards and hold for 30 seconds. Relax and repeat three times daily
- Aim to build your general strength 2-3 times a week with workouts, chair exercises or whatever you can manage
- Take care of your bones with weight bearing exercises like walking and lifting weights. Taking adequate amounts of nutrients like calcium, vitamin D and magnesium can help to reinforce bones
- Know when to get help - if you are experiencing pain or numbness or your rounded posture interferes with your ability to do daily tasks, then it is important to consult your doctor

Letter to the doctor

It was a letter to the doctor that set this piece in motion. I needed a referral and handed in a letter containing the background to my request, to be told (incorrectly) that the surgery no longer accepted written letters to the doctor, and everything had to be submitted through the Accurx system. That misunderstanding was quickly resolved. Yes, the surgery does accept letters. But there is a deeper problem.

Accurx works well for fairly simple requests (I have a pain in my abdomen; please will you arrange for a referral for an x-ray) but it has some crucial limitations, particularly that you have a maximum of 500 characters (about 70 words) to describe the problem. There is no way of providing more information, or attaching a letter from a healthcare provider. In the case above, the helpful receptionist summarised my request and submitted it on my behalf. The Princess Royal University Hospital uses a system called MyChart to provide you with information on forthcoming appointments and the (sometimes partial) results of tests. There are restrictions on your ability to email back with any questions. For that you have to use the telephone with varying degrees of success. I understand that Maidstone and Tunbridge Well hospitals have a different system – but I haven't had to use it yet and so I cannot comment on its capabilities. Presumably there is a good reason why two adjacent trusts use two different systems? It is the luck of the draw as to which hospital you attend: our appointments range from Farnborough, Maidstone and Pembury with visits to Sevenoaks in between times. I have no complaint about the levels of care. All four hospitals rate as excellent in my judgement.

But their use of IT for communications leaves much to be desired. I am fortunate in having a computer and a smart phone. I have been working with IT for 58 years and so I have no problems in using Accurx – although I have yet to find a way round the tyranny of the 500-character limit! But up to 25% of people in Sevenoaks District are digitally disadvantaged. This group probably includes a disproportionate number of vulnerable people. How will they fare? Training in the library will work for some, while for others the surgery will complete the form for them. That still leaves a significant minority who are being progressively cut off from primary healthcare. So, what could be the solution?

Firstly, acknowledge that there are still, and will be for some time to come, many people who are unable – for a variety of reasons – to use systems like Accurx or My Chart. Surgeries and hospitals have a duty of care to ensure that these people are not further disadvantaged by putting barriers to their access to primary healthcare.

Secondly, don't use IT systems to create a wall between doctors and their patients. Over recent years, primary healthcare has become increasingly depersonalised. Too much technology is not in the best interests of either doctors or their patients.

Thirdly, for the near future, beware of introducing artificial 'intelligence' agents into the process of handling calls. Their limitations are obvious (if relatively harmless) when you are trying to report a fault on your washing machine. In healthcare, there is too much at stake for their failings and hallucinogenic assumptions.

(And lest anyone should assume that I am a luddite who doesn't understand Artificial Intelligence, I carried out my postgraduate research on AI way back in 1971 and have kept abreast of the field for the past 55 years.)

Nick Rushby

Car insurance



According to [moneysupermarket.com](https://www.moneysupermarket.com), seniors are considered one of the safer groups of drivers - they are more experienced, less likely to make a claim and therefore qualify for cheaper car insurance premiums.

But we are hearing that the cost of car insurance has risen prohibitively in recent times for many seniors, price rises being well in excess of inflation. Some of our members in their 80s and 90s

feel that price hikes are a form of age discrimination.

Also, certain cars are targeted eg Range Rovers, because they are particularly attractive to thieves. One member had his insurance raised from £400 to £4000 this year, with no accident record. Thankfully, he was able to improve on this price by using a comparison website.

Poor transport links and the rural nature of much of Sevenoaks District means that a car is a lifeline for many of our seniors.

We would be interested to hear your stories about car insurance and any tips you are able to share to help others.

FORUM CONTACT DETAILS

To contact the Forum Committee:- email Eileen Murray-Giles at :
chair@sdsaf.org.uk, or write to

"Sevenoaks District Seniors Action Forum" C/O 22 Lambarde Road, TN13 3HT
or ring 07784 677626

SDSAF Website: www.sdsaf.org.uk

Please let us know if you would like to receive the Newsletter in large print and an audio version can also be made available