the coalition
Surrey Coalition of Disabled People

# Coalition News

## Autumn 2026, No. 86



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# Welcome



Dear Members,

I always love writing this letter as it gives me a chance to reflect and think about everything we have done and acheived over the past few months.

As always the team have been extremely busy delivering many meetings, events, organising coproduction activities and keeping the funding coming in despite us currently living in a very difficult financial climate.

As you know, I like to get out and about with our members as much as I can throughout the year. Through the Summer months, I was able to go sailing with some of the members. Sailing is one of my favourite activities because I am really able to see the difference in people that take part. Just to be outside in the fresh air with friends, enjoying the sailing, a cuppa and a piece of cake really enables people to switch off for a few hours.

Sadly we haven't been able to secure as much funding as we need for the Tech Angels project so have had to downsize the project. I'd like to personally thank all of the Tech Angel team past and present for their immense dedication and hard work! We're still opertaing in the East of Surrey so do get in touch if you're in that area and need some support with getting online.

I can't believe it's almost a year since our strategy launch! Progress on the strategy is going well, more on this later in the issue.

There's lots more planned over the coming months so do get involved, whether that's at one of our inperson meet ups or joining in with our virtual activities. Everyone is welcome and we love catching up with you all.

Hopefully I'll see some of you over the next few months! Thanks as ever for all of your wonderful support.

Nikki

CEO, Surrey Coalition of Disabled People

# Strategy Update



## Strategic Goals

1. Increased reach: We aim to reach more Disabled people in Surrey, expand our membership and cultivate more brand recognition

How we're working towards this: We've run more events than ever before, which has attracted lots of new members. Our membership this year has increased by 7%. There's more work to do but we have plans to increase that number in years 2 & 3 of the strategy. Our Tech Angel programme has almost 3000 members now!

# Strategy Update

2. Higher levels of involvement of our members in both the activities of the Coalition and also changes happening across Surrey

How we're working towards this: We have run quite a few different events this year which has helped with deeper engagement. For example the introduction of the Independent Mental Health Network coffee meet ups! And a trip to Buckingham Palace!

3. Secured funding, with multi-year project contracts for at least 50% of our activity by 2028

We're working on this one! We have applied for some multi year funding, that if successful, will help us to meet this objective and also build much more financial stability for the charity!



# Get More Active News



Get More Active have had a very busy summer with lots of activities attended and enjoyed by our members! In June we returned to the ever-popular Papercourt for some sailing. This was our largest group yet and members chose from sailing in dual access dinghies, the larger sailing craft the Lady Jay and the motorised Wheels on Water boat. It was a little chilly but the weather stayed dry (hard to believe that the whole summer wasn't a heatwave!) and a great time was had by all.

In July, we had the 2nd of the heatwaves, and some events had to be postponed making sure that everyone stayed safe and well. We still managed to start the Thames Water funded river-based activities and we learnt about the history and wildlife of the River Mole and the Hogsmill River whilst enjoying a walk and wheel along the banks.

In August we visited the Wey Kayak Club for the first time and tried a new activity. We rowed along the river in bell boats which are twin-hulled crafts that can take up to 12 people per boat. The boats are very stable and perfect for beginners - assistance dog Luna was even able to join us onboard! It was very peaceful on the water and being in a group meant that you could share the effort and take a break if you needed to. Everyone decided that this was definitely an activity to do again!

We finished the summer by taking 3 teams of Coalition staff and members to the 10th annual Superhero Tri at Dorney Lake in Windsor. Founded by Paralympian Sophia Warner, and sponsored by Marvel, the event is open to all ages and abilities, with no cut-off times or restrictive rules - making it truly accessible. Our teams swam, cycled, walked and wheeled around the course cheered on by family and friends.

Behind the scenes we have been setting up our East Surrey wellbeing group - this is a pilot for a different way of working. The aim is to create a smaller, active group who will have the opportunity for coaching sessions, regular taster activities and peer support to increase their activity levels. This group will run until the beginning of next year kick-starting in September!

To find out more, or get involved in any of our activities, please get in touch with Katy:
Tel/SMS 07434 865062
Email katy.hubbard@surreycoalition.org.uk

**For more information about Get More Active, please contact Katy Hubbard or visit: https://surreycoalition.org.uk/get-more-active/**

# Technology News



Helping more people feel confident online

Over the last few months, Tech Angels has been through a period of change. Unfortunately, we haven't been able to secure all of the funding that we have in the past, which has meant having to downsize the project. While this has been challenging, the heart of Tech Angels remains the same: helping people across East Surrey and Surrey Downs to get online, build confidence and feel more connected. We know that technology can make a huge difference to daily life, from staying in touch with family and friends to ordering prescriptions, shopping online, joining social groups, accessing appointments and finding information. For many members, having a helping hand at the right time can turn something that feels daunting into something that feels possible. The service is now 100% reliant on our fantastic Tech Angel volunteers. They continue to be at the heart of what we do, working alongside Tech Members at their own pace and focusing on what matters most to them. That might be learning how to send emails, use video calls, search safely online, manage accessibility settings, download useful apps or simply practise using a device until it feels familiar.

We are pleased to say that Tech Angels is back operationally supporting people who live in Elmbridge. This has included working alongside several voluntary organisations in the borough, including ElmbridgeCAN, a refugee charity based in Walton. One of our Tech Angels has been a regular helper there, supporting people with digital skills, navigating online forms and overcoming language barriers and other issues that can make using technology more difficult. We are also very grateful to Walsingham Care, another Elmbridge-based charity, who donated money to help us purchase devices that can be loaned to Elmbridge residents in need. This support means more people can access the right equipment as well as the encouragement and guidance they need to take their next steps online.

We are incredibly grateful to everyone who continues to talk about Tech Angels, recommend the service and help people find their way to us.

If you, or someone you know, would benefit from Tech Angels support, please contact by calling 01483 456558, texting Caroline on 07714 787286 or emailing getconnected@surreycoalition.org.uk. We are also always pleased to hear from people who may be interested in becoming a volunteer Tech Angel.

# Mental Health News



**Thank you to Jennie**

Our FoCUS Coordinator for the last three years, Jennie Coulson, has moved on to another role. We wish her all the best for the future and wanted to say a massive thank you to her for her hard work and support during her time with us. She oversaw a period of change for FoCUS, implementing more shared area group meetings, introducing more one to one conversation opportunities with members and creating meetings which work better for all involved to share experiences. We have all enjoyed working with her and she will be missed greatly.

**New FoCUS Coordinator**

We are delighted to announce the appointment of Wendy Smith as the new FoCUS Involvement Coordinator.

Started in September, Wendy is continuing the work Jennie Coulson had started to engage more SABP service users and carers in sharing their experiences with the Trust to create improvements where necessary, and replicate areas of excellence.

We are confident that her background working in both The Coalition and SABP on high level coproduction projects, such as Silverwood Hospital design and delivery, will provide her with the skills she needs to succeed in this new role.

Wendy said “I have been lucky enough to spend the last 4 years working with people to understand their priorities for mental health services in both community and inpatient environments, and ensuring Surrey and Borders take these views and experiences into account“.

Colette Lane, Professional Lead for Lived Experience Development at SABP has worked closely with Wendy over the last 3 years. Colette said “Wendy has led vital work in the Community Transformation Project, ensuring the voices of people who use services, carers and families are genuinely heard.

FoCUS

# Forum of Carers and people who Use our Services

Her compassion, integrity, and commitment to co-production inspire others and keep lived experience at the heart of change. Wendy consistently makes a difference through her ability to build trust and engage people in honest, open conversations. She creates safe, inclusive spaces where people who use services, carers and families feel able to share candid feedback.

Wendy then clearly and thoughtfully feeds this insight back to SABP, directly influencing service design decisions. As a result, proposed changes have been more responsive, inclusive and grounded in real experience, strenthening both the quality and credibility of the Community Transformation Project".

Congratulations Wendy, we look forward to working with you going forwards!

**Get Involved with FoCUS**

**FoCUS holds public meetings where NHS Managers learn from people who have experienced these services, what works well and what could be improved.**

**Who can join?**

**FoCUS members are carers and people who currently use services or have used services in the last five years. (Members must be 18 years +)**

**How much time do I need to provide?**

**We hold a meeting for each geographical area each month and meet either virtually or in person. If you are unable to attend meetings you can still be involved. We send regular updates by post or email and you can give us your views. You can also follow us on Facebook www.facebook.com/FoCUS.SABP**

# Involvement News

**Food bank training -** We have completed our foodbank training which offered free Disability Awareness training to foodbanks in Surrey. Over the course of the funding, we have trained 100 volunteers and staff members. Feedback from those who took part in the training sessions was very positive. 100% of respondents felt that the training was relevant to their role.



As a result of the training participants committed to a number of actions or changes they plan to make. The most common types of changes stated were:

- Focusing more on individual needs and providing tailored support.
- Adapting their service practises to be more inclusive.
- Improving communication accessibility for disabled service users.
- Assessing and improving physical accessibility in their foodbanks.
- Increasing support for those with neurodivergent and hidden disabilities.
- Accommodating Assistance Dogs.
- Conducting individual needs assesments.
- Raising dietary accommodation awareness.
- Offering delivery services for those with mobility limitations.



**Bupa events in Staines**

We have run three wellbeing events in Staines and the surrounding areas thanks to funding from Bupa. The first event took place at Wraysbury Village Hall and included foraging, trying herbal teas and balm making. We made a balm from plantain and lavender which can be used for bites and other skin complaints.



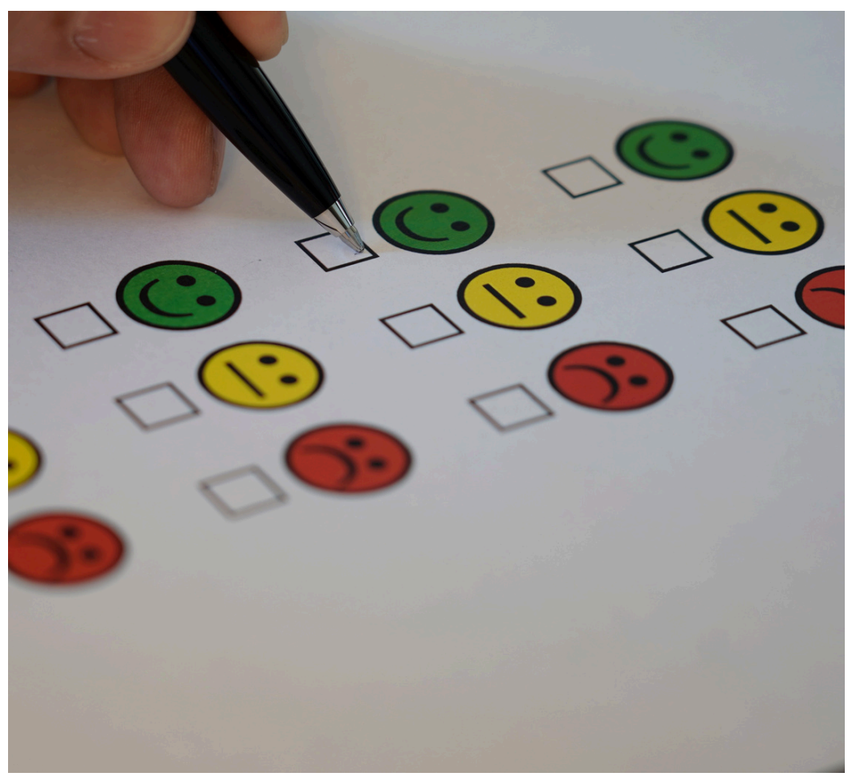
The second event took place in Egham Hythe. This time we tasted some different herbal teas and dandelion coffee! We foraged in the grounds of the church and then made some natural digestive drops. We also tried marshmallow bark, and we are very glad this is no longer used to make marshmallows although they would be much healthier!

The last Bupa event saw us return to Wraysbury Village Hall where we concentrated on immunity. We foraged outside and found plantain, nettles, elderberry and yarrow. We learnt how to make elderberry syrup and fire cider. We would like to thank Bupa for providing funding  for this project. We were able to reach many new people and learn a lot about using foods and herbs for better health.



## Campaigns

We have run two members surveys which identified a number of campaign priorities. The main themes centred on improving accessibility and inclusion, particularly through better disability awareness and confidence among staff, businesses and the wider public, as well as improvements to accessible buildings, parking, toilets and public spaces.



Transport accessibility was also a concern, with members highlighting barriers in public transport.

Members emphasised the importance for improved access to legal advice, advocacy, employment opportunities, volunteering, and support around welfare reforms.



Communication was another theme, with a need for more accessible information, Easy Read materials, hearing loops and alternative contact methods.

Healthcare accessibility, including reasonable adjustments and better communication, was also raised.

Over the last couple of months some members have experienced difficulties with broadband and telephone providers. Some members have been cut off from the internet and telephone lines for a number of weeks and were not seen as a priority because they did not use the community alarm service. Please let us know your experiences of phone and internet providers as we plan to launch a campaign about this which includes accessibility of websites and ways of reporting problems.

## JSNA



The physical disabilties and sensory impairment JSNA chapter is progressing well. The contents list has been signed off by the project sponsor, and we are awaiting the evidence review analysis.

We continue to gather and collate lived experience feedback. Lots of useful insights have already been collected, which highlight a wide breath of issues faced by people with physical disabilities and/or sensory impairments in Surrey.



Emerging themes include issues around navigating complex systems, challenges related to the provision and use of appropriate transport options, delays and obstacles with regard to adpated housing and waiting lists, inconsistent use of accessible communication options e.g. hearing loops and reasonable adjustments not acted on when accessing healthcare.

# Fundraising News




**Museum Accessibility project - Improving Museum Accessibility Beyond Statutory Requirements**

Over the last year, Coalition staff and members have enjoyed working with three very different museums in Surrey, The Rural Life Living Museum in Tilford, Guildford Museum and East Surrey Museum in Catherham. Through providing Access Visits and Disability Awareness Training workshops for staff and volunteers, it has been rewarding to see each museum become an even more inclusive space for visitors to their wide range of heritage.

Many improvements have already been made, with many more planned to come, including: a new hearing loop, fire exit ramp, chairs with armrests and new automatically opending front door at East Surrey, and a new visitor wheelchair, a grab rail on the back of accessible toilet doors and white contrast paint on outdoor steps at the Rural Life Living Museum.

Alex Fowler, Head of Learning and Development at the Rural Life Living Museum told us, ‘We really enjoyed the site visit in November. Alison and I found it extremely valuable to walk around with your members and hear their perspectives first-hand. It was one of the most insightful parts of the project. Meeting the Surrey Coalition of Disabled People members was truly a pleasure. Hearing lived experiences directly was invaluable, and we are very grateful for the opportunity’.

Speaking about the Disability Awareness Training workshop that Megan and Jennie delivered to over 70 volunteers, Alex told us, ‘To be honest we were initially a little anxious about how our volunteers would respond to the Accessibility Training Day, as they can sometimes find new ideas challenging. However, they absolutely loved it!’ ‘ Training has opened up many discussions and sparked interest around disability’.

Thank you to the Community Foundation for Surrey’s Heritage Fund for funding this project, and to all our members who have been so enthusiastically involved.

**Fundraising News**

We have recently been funded to work with the Head of Audiology and the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Lead at the Royal Surrey County Hospital to help make appointments more accessible and less stressful. Coalition staff will be working with Audiology patients to produce visual stories, containing video clips, pictures and plain text, explaining step by step what to expect, and how to prepare for an appointment.




We are also excited to have received funding to run LGBTQ+ Disabled Peer Support Groups across Surrey and to continue our campaigning work through the Virgin Local Legends Fund.

This year we have also been working on broadening our income streams by partnering with local organisations. Many of you will be aware that we participated in the Waitrose 'Community Matters' green token programme in Godalming and thank you to anyone who has popped in a token or two.

We have also been proud to partner with Kind Edward's School in Witley, who have raised £5,000 for us over the last year, through non-uniform days and donut sales! Rachel, Megan, and her assistance dog Rowley were invited to speak to pupils at morning chapel about the Coalition and the work that we do and they are also looking forward to talking to staff and pupils at Churchers College in Petersfield, later on this year.

We are very grateful for all the local support we receive, such a generous donation from the fruit farm Hall Hunter, and to Music Works in Milford for donating proceeds of their coffee sales to the Coalition as their Charity of the Year. If you know of any local schools, golf/sporting clubs or organisations that might consider supporting us as their chosen charity of the year, Rachel would love to hear from you!
Rachel.roberts@surreycoalition.org.uk

**DID YOU KNOW?**

**It costs The Coaliton £10 per Disabled person to take part in an accessible sports activity, e,g. sailing or cycling**



# Events

## Weekly Online Events

Online events are hosted on Zoom.
To access online events, please contact the Involvement Team for the Zoom meeting link.



| Day | Time | Activity |
|---|---|---|
| **Every Monday (excluding Bank Holidays)** | **11am - 12pm** | **Cafe** |
| **Every Tuesday** | **4pm - 5pm** | **Glee Club** |
| **Every Thursday** | **2:30pm - 4pm** | **Weekly Quiz** |
| **Every Friday** | **11:30am - 12:30pm** | **Cafe** |

# November 2026

| Date | Time | Activity | Location | Type |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Wednesday 4th November** | **1pm - 3pm** | **FoCUS Committee** | **Invite only** | |
| **Friday 27th November** | **1pm - 3pm** | **IMHN Coordinating meeting** | **Zoom** | **Online** |
| **November TBC** | | **Inclusive Archery** | **Sayers Croft** | **In person** |

# December 2026

| Date | Time | Activity | Location | Type |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wednesday 2nd December | 1pm - 3pm | FoCUS Committee | Invite Only | |
| Sunday 6th December | All day | Winter Wonderwheels | Dorney Lake, Eton Dorney | In person |
| Thursday 10th December | 12pm - 2pm | Surrey-wide FoCUS Christmas Social meeting | Leatherhead | In person |
| December TBC | | Christmas at Dapdune Wharf | Dapdune Wharf | In person |

# January 2027

| Date | Time | Activity | Location | Type |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tuesday 12th January | 5pm - 6pm | FoCUS Community Drop in | Zoom | Online |
| Thursday 14th January | 11am - 12pm | FoCUS Community Drop in | Zoom | Online |
| Friday 29th January | 1pm - 3pm | IMHN Coordinating Meeting | Zoom | Online |
| TBC | TBC | Boccia | YMCA, Redhill | In person |

# Contact Us

## We always love to hear from you!



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# Get in touch today!

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