Minutes of the Public Meeting held by Save Our Services in Surrey on 4 December 2014 at Brambleton Hall, Farnham, Surrey.

The purpose of the meeting was to oppose the closure of Cobgates Care Home and the five other Surrey County Council homes.

A similar SOiS meeting was held last Saturday (29.12.14) in Redhill and the minutes can be viewed on the SOiS website. The Chair (Alan Clyne) read out Paul Couchman's (Secretary) summary of the organisation, in which he explained that the aim of the group is to promote and defend Public Services and help campaigns to get off the ground. It has been active for example, around Fire Service, Libraries and Hospital cuts. It has no affiliation to any Political party.

The Chair explained the County Council's consultation is considering four options regarding the Homes, but they have a preferred option.

The options are to:-

1. Do nothing.
2. Sell home.
3. Re-invest in the home.
4. Close the home and move the residents.

This will of course affect the Staff, Residents and the Families of the residents.

It is important and impressive that the Local Community had come together tonight to air their views on this local resource, especially at a time of increasing population and health and social care needs.

Louise Irvine who will be standing at the next General Election for the NHS Actions Party for SW Surrey. She has been a GP for 25 years and was the chair of Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign, which by reaching out to the community, managed to save the hospital by taking the campaign to court and appeal.

Her knowledge of the home is that it provides a safe and secure atmosphere and has wonderful staff. She told how the residents did not want to leave their "home".

It has been named as a "Centre of Excellence" and "Beacon of Good Practice" for Dementia. There is in public services in general, cuts in Residential Care and she feels the Council are pushing for more people to stay at home and if a moved is required it would be straight into Nursing.

Home Care is often very lonely for the elderly and they should be given a choice to decide, they are being denied any options. It is a question of Dignity which is important for all people and respect should be shown for their choices/wishes/desires. The residents of Cobgates feel that they have become a family and have built up relationships with both staff and other residents. It is a very emotional issue and they Council are just seeing it from a practical side. It becomes a question of Human Rights and LI advises that the people of Cobgates and Farnham should fight to keep Cobgates open.

Next to speak was Howard Kaye – Labour Party candidate at the next General Election. He praised SOiS in facilitating the meeting about the closures and said that Cobgates was centre to the community and was positioned in a central transport hub. He said SCC should have chaired and facilitated proper public meetings, like tonight, so as not to exclude everyone from a full debate.

He said that tonight we should

1. Listen to the residents, relatives and staff.
2. That the rationale for closing the facility was political dogma. HK said that everyone he had spoken to about Cobgates was very positive and believes that it is still "fit for purpose".

HK said the Care Quality Commission said it was fit for purpose and in the 2011 census SWS said it was above the National Average for care for the over 65's. The facility that Cobgates provides is needed for the future. The affordability and quality means that it is not lacking in any way. It is a Designated Dementia Specialist Centre and includes Day visitors to the centre.

The preferred option is that all six homes need to close. So we all need to be active, sign the petition and give our own views to SCC before the deadline on the 12th December 2014. HK also promoted the demonstration at County Hall on the 6.12.14 between 12-2pm, arranged by the TU. HK also reminded us to write to other elected representatives (Pat Frost, Denise Legal, David Munro, Jeremy Hunt).

The next to speak was Mark Richards a Family Member, his father lives at Cobgates. He made the points that:-

1. There should have been included in the consultation a full and public meeting. He felt it was pre-meditated outcome to close. Closing the homes for financial gain. A "Behind Closed Doors" policy was being applied to negate public opinion.
2. Chair and the panel agreed Cobgates had an excellent reputation "Centre of Excellence" for Dementia. Felt that SCC was using reasons such as; access, ensuite facilities, challenge for staff, recruitment challenges, maintenance, hoists needed in room were just excuses and that some rooms could be remodelled and that the staff made the residents feel safe and applied correct working procedures. He stated that ensuite facilities were not needed and could cause a "trip and fall" risk for Dementia patients.
3. SCC said that there was a "lack of demand" even though there is an ageing population in Surrey. There has been no acceptance for referrals and the occupancy in August 2013/14 had between 29-37 residents and SCC said that they had not received enough referrals. Denying a waiting list and they are blocking referrals. There is a demand but they are not allowed to record or accept this and the waiting list has been done away with.
4. He explained he had become aware of RAGE a National website, which provided a lot of helpful information. When residents are moved it also reported that relocations can exacerbate problems both mental and physical and could bring forth earlier death. In MR opinion, the SCC are not concerned about "moving" the patients especially Dementia patients.

The next speaker was Douglas Dick, whose late wife was at Cobgates. Speaking on behalf of the residents, whom he now knew well and some of whom would not be able to attend tonight. Many had lived at Cobgates for a considerable time, it is their home. None of them had any complaints and all said that they were treated with kindness and consideration. Rooms were more than adequate and that the toilets had locks on them that showed engaged signs when occupied and were ideal because they were easily accessible although not on-suite and that the communal living quarters had some specially adapted baths or showers on each unit. DD said that ensuite facilities would cause, with the risk of falling and that a lot of residents require staff help with washing and dressing. The catering had good choices and was well prepared and the home was neat, tidy and clean. However, most important to the residents was that the staff who "provided respect, kindness, care and love".

Then three residents who attended the meeting spoke and described it as a "home from home". One lady said that if they moved her should would lose her friends and would suffer depression and upset. Would feel like an "outcast" in a new home and would lose the staff's friendship as well. The comments from family and residents were said with much emotion.

The meeting then proceeded with many comments and questions from the floor too numerous to minute, but all endorsing the good care and reputation of Cobgates in the Farnham public's perception. The "Mum's Test" which was mentioned by SCC as one of their difficulties in continuing to run the home themselves was mentioned by various contributors to be very subjective and those present felt that Cobgates did meet the test because of the comments of everyone in the meeting this evening. Mr Bennett, another resident's relative commented that the home provided a good combination, which his family proactively choose over a number of other options. He said what is needed for the future is to continue to invest in repairs, maintenance and minor adaptions.

SCC has continue to invest in all of the homes in the last few years, in fixtures and fittings, why waste money now by closing the homes.

Frank Minal (GMB) explained the implications of the Care Bill. He felt it all came down to economics and could result in a 2 tier care system with low quality care for state funded residents. People felt private residential care would cost the Council more if they had no homes they run themselves.

The Chair asked those present to vote on the motion that to close Cobgates was not acceptable. All agreed accept one against and one abstainer. (These individuals had previously commented what would SCC have to cut to keep the homes open).

David Munro, Councillor for South Farnham, said it needed much investment, but is seen as part of the "Centre of Farnham" and would not be good if it was taken away and the residents having to move to more rural areas outside the town. He questioned whether any new expansion of Cobgates could incorporate the Gostrey Centre in some way, or maybe some kind of joint venture with SCC and a private Nursing Home?

A family representative from Reigate Park Hall home, had made the journey over to listen and contribute to the meeting and mentioned SOiS had linked up with her Facebook site called SAVE. This was set up for Park hall originally, but a site for all to give their views.

The Chair now tried to conclude the meeting with what people might want to do next and some action points.

1. People to make sure they signed the petition and write to elected representatives. The paper petition was very popular on the night and copies soon ran out.
2. People were made aware of the demo this coming Saturday at Kingston.
3. Family members at the end of the meeting explained that they had been invited the same day Saturday to discussions with Cabinet member Mel Few at the Bush Hotel by appointment. It was proposed and agreed that some people wanted to go to the Bush to be present outside to give the message to the Councillor that they felt they had not had a full public meeting arranged by SCC. This would also give the opportunity to make the general public more aware of the issue and ask passers-by to sign the petition. The Chair asked people to identify themselves after the meeting if they would like to offer practical support and help by getting together locally.
4. There will be a lobby of the council in February arranged by SOiS and the TU the exact date is to be confirmed but it would be of great importance to influence the Councillors outside County Hall when they are making their decisions. It is possible that SOiS may assist with transport on the day if people are interested. The meeting gave the impression that this would be very popular.

Minutes take by Catherine Clyne. Numbers in attendance approximately 85. Standing room only at the back. Collection raised £185.50.