South Woodham Ferrers Health & Social Care Group

Report to South Woodham Ferrers Town Council For Events Community & Leisure Committee Meeting on 3rd November 2026

Since our last Report for the meeting held on 1st September 2026 there have been few significant developments.

HSCG took part in the second "Heart of the Community" event on 13 October and look forward to contributing to the next one on 12 January 2027.

The South Woodham Ferrers Community Hub has moved out of 19 Woodham Halt. The experimental steps taken during the twelve months to 31 August 2026 have proved to be informative. Consideration is now being given to ways in which this much needed facility can be established somehow on a sustainable basis. It is recognised that the present time is very hard for finances in the VCFSE (Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise) sector and for people in need.

Our Chair is slowly starting to catch up with things. The academic report "**Maldon Central, Dengie & South Woodham Ferrers: Integrated Neighbourhood Team (INT) Area & Neighbourhood Health Future"** has been shared with a few key partners including NHS Essex and they have welcomed it. It will be published very shortly. In the meantime a proposal for the next such project is in process of drafting. It will build further on the series of these reports, looking at: ways to enhance the early identification of, treatment of and support for cardiometabolic disease (a broad umbrella term that combines cardiovascular conditions with metabolic disorders). And also deeper diving into digital exclusion, being a range of complex factors, not just age related.

There have been a number of important matters with local connotations which Councillors will want to be aware of. These have all been covered in our latest weekly newsletter so for ease of reporting and reference that newsletter is appended. Attention is especially drawn to the items about:

- The continuing shortage of prescription medicines;
- Improvement to Basildon A&E announcement; many SWF people go there rather than Broomfield;
- Couldn't resist the story about the 96-year-old who has worked in the NHS since its 1948 inception!
- CQC reports Ipswich & Colchester Hospitals' leadership requires improvement (so it's not just Mid & South Essex with this problem!);

- Opening of Braintree Diagnostic Centre which will complement the services at Braintree Community Hospital where a lot of SWF patients go;
- Official report from NHS Essex about the plans for a new neighbourhood health centre for Maldon, which seems to indicate the plans for the future of St Peter's;
- The Minor Injuries Unit announcement about the pending move;
- Latest Flu, Covid & RSV data;
- Latest warning about Salmonella outbreak and specific warning about the Ukrainian batch not to eat;
- Q&A with NHS Essex ICB Board;
- And other items from recent weeks.

Our Chair continues his involvement in meetings across the NHS which directly impact on our local NHS. Our weekly newsletters continue to be e-circulated to over 300 subscribers. Our contribution to the monthly Issues of Focus is established as a regular item. Our weekly article is published on our website, the Town's social media and is included in our weekly newsletter.

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Sunday 25 October 2026 - new and updated items first

The serious shortage of some prescription medicines in SWF and elsewhere continues and worsens. Common medications like ramipril, co-codamol, and dispersible aspirin are affected. Link to current information is at Current Drug Shortages List - Drugs.com . Please don't blame pharmacy or GP staff; it isn't their fault.

NHS England announced £140m will fund 14 urgent care schemes to boost NHS capacity and ease pressure on A&E. This includes **£6m over 2 years to improve and refurbish Basildon Hospital's Emergency Department**. This will double the rapid assessment, triage and treatment area from 3 bays to 8, allowing more patients to be assessed simultaneously and improving patient flow to reduce delays.

Audrey Joughlin, 96, has worked for the NHS since its formation. She started work for the NHS in 1948 and has volunteered at Royal Liverpool Hospital since 1994. She worked in histology diagnosing disease and infection. She now runs the book trolley service for patients.

In its report published on 16 October **CQC** rated the **leadership** at East Suffolk and North Essex NHS Foundation Trust, which runs **Colchester and Ipswich Hospitals** as **requires improvement** following an inspection in November 2025.

Braintree Community Diagnostic Centre has officially **opened,** helping more patients access important tests and scans closer to where they live. Located at Braintree Community Hospital, the centre is expected to provide around 75,000

additional appointments each year, including MRI and CT scans, ultrasounds, blood tests, and heart and lung checks. Many go there from SWF. The centre opened to patients in September and is already helping improve access to diagnostic services, reducing the need to travel to larger hospitals and supporting earlier diagnosis and treatment. It's the third of four community diagnostic centres planned across mid and south Essex, with centres already open in Thurrock and Southend and another planned for Pitsea. Community diagnostic services are also available in other parts of Essex, including centres in Epping and Clacton, helping more residents access tests and scans closer to home.

Government backs **plans for new neighbourhood health centre in Maldon**. Plans for a new neighbourhood health centre in Maldon have received government support, marking an important step towards improving local healthcare facilities. Health Minister Karin Smyth confirmed the government's support in Parliament, following years of campaigning by local residents and community groups, including this SWF Group, for modern, accessible health facilities. The proposed centre would support efforts to bring more health and care services closer to people's homes, while work continues with local communities and partners to protect existing services.Further work is still needed to confirm the detailed plans and next steps. NHS Essex will continue working with local partners and keep residents updated as plans develop. This may indicate the plans for **St Peter's Hospital's future**.

From Monday 2 November 2026 the **Minor Injuries Unit** will move from Orsett Hospital to Thurrock Community Hospital, Long Lane, Grays, RM16 2PX. That's not much further from SWF and takes about 30 minutes to reach it. This brings the service into more modern facilities at the John Tallack Centre, alongside the Community Diagnostic Centre (CDC). Patients will be able to access minor injury care, tests and diagnosis more easily in one place. The service will continue to offer walk-in care seven days a week, from 1000 to 1530, for minor injuries such as wounds, bumps, sprains, suspected broken bones, minor eye injuries and minor burns. It will use x-ray facilities at the CDC which operate 0800-2000 every day.
The same experienced team will continue to provide care, and the new location will offer a larger waiting area and free parking. The MIU at Orsett Hospital will close its doors at 12noon on Friday 30 October. If you meet the criteria this offers a more appropriate and quicker service than visiting an A&E.

National **flu, COVID-19 & RSV** surveillance reports have restarted. In week 42 to 18 October:

- Flu activity remained stable and is circulating at baseline levels; A&E attendances above seasonal norm. The latest data shows that activity throughout September has been higher than in the same period during all past 4 winter seasons. While still at baseline (very low) levels, flu trends have been rising since August and there are possible signs that we may see an early flu season. **If you're eligible please get vaccinated.**

- COVID-19 activity showed mixed trends and is circulating at low levels; hospital admissions increased to 2.64% per 100,000 from 2.48% the previous week; attendance at A&E with Covid-19-like symptoms has continued to rise since August
- Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) activity showed mixed trends and is circulating at baseline levels. Positivity increased to 1.1% from 0.7% in the previous week. Hospitalisations increased to 0.33% from 0.23%.

UKHSA has **declared a national outbreak of Salmonella food poisoning. As of 15 September two people have died and there have been 586 confirmed cases, mostly in the last year, up 37 in last week.** Cases are associated with eating eggs at various food outlets, including small cafes, restaurants and takeaway businesses, not eggs cooked at home. It's believed the outbreak is linked to imported eggs. About a third needed hospital care. **Don't eat undercooked food.** A new Food Alert has been issues by The Food Standards Agency (FSA) after finding a **new variant** in eggs from a Ukrainian supplier contaminated with Salmonella Enteritidis. These eggs may be available for retail sail in small shops. Shell eggs originating from **Yasensvit Ltd, Ukraine, stamped with the code 3UA1012066 should not be consumed** and shouldn't be on sale. The FSA says eggs bought in major supermarkets are produced in the UK and aren't affected. Eggs thoroughly cooked and handled hygienically shouldn't present food safety risk. Infants, young children, pregnant women and older adults only et raw or lightly cooked eggs if the carry the British Lion mark or are produced under the Laid in Britain scheme.

Our Chair posed the following question to the NHS Essex Board meeting in public on 15 October:
My recent experiences and those of others in South Woodham Ferrers lead me to ask please:

- Since your last meeting in public there has been much discussion about end of life and death in the community. Recent local experiences have reflected the financial stress being experienced by local hospices, the struggle in hospitals to deal with patients approaching end of life, and primary care struggling to support those who choose to die at home. The liaison between hospice and community palliative care is stretched, GPs lack experience of palliative care, and community palliative care is struggling to cope with increasing demand. Being at end of life and dying overnight and at weekends is particularly challenging.
- It is very disappointing to see neither the Chief Executive's or Neighbourhood Health Reports giving this subject the comprehensive coverage it requires. How do the Thirlwall Inquiry and the nine National Bereavement Care Pathway standards relate to our experiences? Why is this not addressed in the Population Health Improvement Plan (PHIP)? It is good to see there is a Hospice Services Review underway. Dying is something which will affect everyone one day. The effects of bereavement are also widespread. Dashboard

and Reporting Increased numbers of people recorded on end-of-life registers will at least provide information about demand. Please give full attention to supply, the supply of respectful and sufficient compassionate care.

- Please will NHS Essex undertake a full review of this in conjunction with South Woodham Ferrers Health & Social Care Group and others in the communities of Essex so we can 'get this right'?

The Chief Executive answered this with:
'Thank you Peter for your question and highlighting a really important issue that affects every family and community. We recognise the concerns you have raised regarding end-of-life care, hospice sustainability, community palliative care capacity, support for people wishing to die at home, and the experience of bereaved families. End of life care is a key priority reflected within the Essex Population Health Improvement Plan through the ambition for people to "Die Well", which includes supporting people to receive personalised and compassionate care, with clear care plans and the opportunity to die in their preferred place where possible. The PHIP also includes measures relating to end-of-life registers, advance care planning and preferred place of death.

We acknowledge, however, that there is more to do. The Board is already overseeing work on the review of hospice services, the development of future palliative and end of life care arrangements, and an Essex-wide end of life needs assessment to better understand future demand and how services should respond. We agree that the voices of patients, families, carers and community groups should help shape this work. We will therefore ensure that engagement with local communities, including the South Woodham Ferrers Health & Social Care Group, is considered as part of the ongoing review and development of end of life and bereavement services across Essex.

Our ambition is that every person approaching the end of life receives compassionate, coordinated and dignified care, and that families are supported appropriately through bereavement.'

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UKHSA is concerned that almost 75% of eligible young people remain unprotected against MenB (meningitis). **Please** encourage those eligible to **get vaccinated**; they are:

- Everyone born between 01/09/2007 and 31/08/2008
- Young people under 25 (born on or after 21/07/2001) who are starting higher education for the first time, or who will be starting further education for the first time as a residential student, in autumn 2026
- International students under 25 entering their first year of university. They should receive their first dose in their home country where possible.

A&Es and ambulances in England saw a **record number of patients in September**, showing "ominous" signs of winter pressure building in hospitals across the country. Plans for 'winter pressures' are in place across NHS England, including in NHS Essex. September had its busiest ever month with 2.44m patients attending A&E and 806,707 ambulance incidents. NHS England delivered a record 4.7m planned treatments, procedures and appointments during June, July and August.

'**The Big Conversation on Care'** provides the opportunity to say what we want and expect from a future National Care Service. We'll arrange a SWF consultation. This is now more important than ever with the Prime Minister setting out plans for a **new National Care Service** to be established in the next Parliament, providing free personal care for older people, based on need rather than ability to pay. For a long time we have recognised and said that the pressures on the NHS will only be reduced when the social care system is improved.

The Measles outbreak continues but is slowing. **Parents should get children vaccinated and check children's vaccination status.** In 2026 to 14 September **1003 English measles cases** have been confirmed, exceeding the 2025 total of 959. **Two children and one adult have died of measles in 2026. Essex remains in danger.** Updated reports about this outbreak are now being published on a monthly basis; the next is due on 15 October.

2026 **Flu vaccinations** started in September for pregnant women and children aged 2yrs+. From 1 October eligible others being: people aged 65+, immunocompromised people and their close contacts, adults with certain long-term conditions, care home residents and carers, can book. You'll get a GP invitation. **Please get vaccinated!**

2026 **COVID-19 vaccinations** will be offered to those:

- aged 75+ (including those 75 by 31 January 2027);
- aged 6 months to 74 years with weakened immune systems;
- living in a care home for older adults.

You'll get a GP invitation. Appointments will be from 1 October. Those eligible can book online or using the NHS App. Vaccinations will also be available at walk-in sites, community pharmacies and in care homes.

Our **local Hospitals'** Trust, for Broomfield, Basildon and Southend Hospitals, has launched a new phase in its **improvement journey** as it continues to improve services for patients, support the staff and strengthen our hospitals for the future. You can watch an informative video on what this means on their YouTube channel. The improvement plan focuses on a small number of priorities that they know will make the biggest difference, including improving patient flow, making the best use of buildings and resources, supporting staff and ensuring improvements can be sustained over the long term. Communication like this is welcome; it's good to know improvements are being made.

Our weekly newsletter includes everything we've published on our website in the previous 7-days. Libraries provide online services and help with internet access. For welfare information and subscription to our newsletter, email **swfhealthsocial@outlook.com** or leave a voicemail on 01245 322079.
https://swfhealthsocial.co.uk/ End