

West Suffolk Council
The story so far



As indicated in my Leader’s Statement I thought it may be helpful for the first Council meeting of 2023 to reflect on many of West Suffolk Council’s achievements since it was formed in 2019 as well as to highlight some of the challenges and opportunities we face moving forward.

At the heart of the creation of West Suffolk Council has always been the welfare of all our communities, businesses and the continuation of our plans to secure a prosperous future for them. Our priorities are focused on growing West Suffolk’s economy, fostering resilience in families and communities that are healthy and active and ensuring there is increased and improved provision of appropriate housing in both towns and rural areas while protecting our environment.

Indeed, we continue as a council to deliver initiatives and actions that improve the prosperity and wellbeing of our communities and businesses as well as our environment. Over the last four years we have attracted national and Government funding to help our businesses and communities access £110 million. In addition we will be spending nearly £2.7 million of UK Shared Prosperity Funding and Rural England Prosperity Fund in the next three years.

We have achieved much since West Suffolk came into being which I have highlighted in this update.



Councillor John Griffiths

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Griffiths". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

Contents

Introduction	Page 2
Working across the system	Page 4
Taskforces	Page 6
COVID-19 pandemic	Page 6
Economic growth	Page 7
Working differently across boundaries	Page 10
Families and communities	Page 14
Housing and development	Page 16
The environment	Page 18
Championing our communities	Page 19
High quality services	Page 20
Cost of living	Page 21
The future	Page 24



Working across the system

Part of the success of West Suffolk (and embedded in our DNA) has been our ability to work across the Suffolk system and beyond our geographical and organisational boundaries. This has allowed us to draw down additional millions of pounds of extra or match funding for the benefit of our local residents and businesses.



For example, Suffolk Public Sector Leaders which includes West Suffolk Council, work together to attract and use funding to tackle national and countywide issues in local ways. This includes the recently announced £1.5 million in funding for the next phase of the Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan.

The funding is designed to bolster the Suffolk wide ambition to be net zero by 2030 and help fund initiatives to further reduce carbon emissions and tackle the effects of climate change.

From January 2020 to December 2022 some £11.2 million has been agreed by Suffolk Public Sector Leaders for a range of initiatives including encouraging economic growth and helping the most vulnerable. **This has included £3.6 million for projects focused on supporting our communities with initiatives such as:**



A 10 year family programme to improve early literacy and therefore life chances as well as social mobility, targeting areas of greatest need.



Suffolk Family Focus - developing an Early Help model to better support our most vulnerable and prevent people 'tipping' into crisis.



Work with health and other partners to prevent and reduce need. This will use improved evidence led preventative approaches to targeting resource for better proactive and preventative support.



Funding to enable commissioning of activities recommended by the Suffolk Housing Board, which concentrate on inequalities made worse by COVID-19. Including initiatives such as multi-agency support to improve people facing homelessness, multiple disadvantage and poverty.

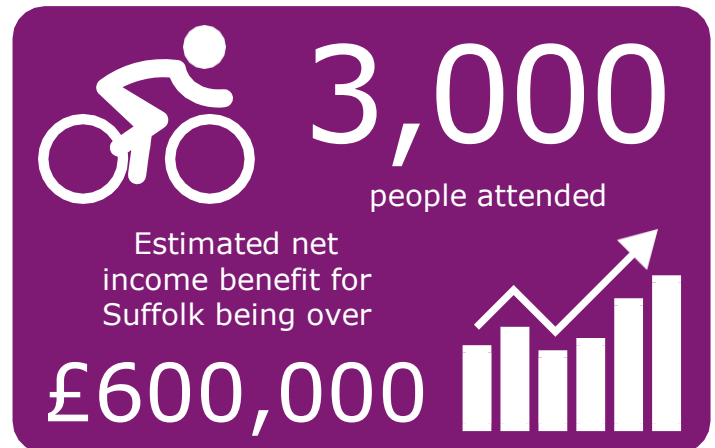


Local Welfare Assistance Service has been operating providing much needed financial support to people who are struggling as a result of Covid and/or cost of living.

Just over £2 million has been earmarked to help boost inclusive growth, including:

Funding of £750,000 for extension of Suffolk Inclusive Growth Investment Fund (SIGIF). This is a £2.4m fund allocated by Suffolk Public Sector Leaders and the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership to support local, place based economic growth and recovery across Suffolk.

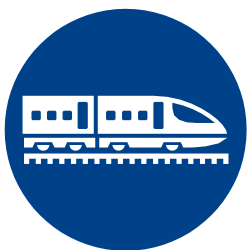
It helped fund the Women's Tour returning to Suffolk with Haverhill hosting the start of the sixth stage in 2019 and in 2022 Bury St Edmunds hosting the finish to the first stage of Britain's biggest professional women's cycling race.



The Suffolk Pound initiative aimed over two years at supply chain development with a programme of legacy skills and training engagement. One of the primary objectives is that more Suffolk businesses benefit from public sector contracts.



Investing in a Suffolk Growth economic recovery programme to include a range of initiatives such as business engagement and Suffolk Annual Business Survey as well as sector specific research and development of Suffolk wide programmes. One initiative could be the establishment of a Suffolk wide investment appraisal tool with relevant data and analysis available to support council project development and investment proposals.



Earmarking funding as local contribution to facilitate major infrastructure upgrade to vital freight and passenger rail connections such as the Haughley Junction.

This way of working meant we have acted in a partnership to negotiate a county deal with the Government. This should not only bring nearly half a billion pounds further investment and local powers to Suffolk and to us, here in the West, but also a louder and stronger voice to lobby Government.

Taskforces

Two of the first initiatives agreed through Council were the creation of taskforces to look into environmental and climate change and rural issues. These have reported and we are meeting and, indeed, going beyond the original findings of these working groups. Please see the link to the Environment update below as well as the section later in this brief on what we have achieved:

[West Suffolk Council Environmental Statement 2020-21](#)

The work carried out by our rural taskforce has informed all that we do, including the local plan and securing £753,701 in Rural England Prosperity Fund with a programme of measures to meet the ambitions of West Suffolk and Government.

We have just scooped (for the second time) the Regional Council of the Year Award in the Energy Efficiency Association, East of England Energy Efficiency Awards.

The award recognises the environmental work West Suffolk Council carries out to help residents and businesses cut carbon emissions (and save money).



COVID-19 pandemic

Almost immediately West Suffolk Council was created - we, like the rest of the world, had a new role in managing the impacts of the pandemic.

Our council was able to quickly organise as part of the Home But Not Alone scheme. Which meant we were able to deal with around 1,100 cases of need from the most vulnerable and worked with around 450 different organisations to deliver, food, medicine, and support. Equally we were one of the top performing councils in the country in helping our local businesses quickly access more than £120 million in Government grants.

Meanwhile, we maintained delivering services, such as continuing to emptying around five million bins a year, during the pandemic.

What is clear during the pandemic (which is still causing significant challenges) was the value of our families and communities approach. This put us ahead of the game in having a network of organisations, individuals and local councils that we could work with and was vital in delivering effective tailored solutions to benefit local communities, including tangible schemes and initiatives which are making a real difference.

Economic growth

We continue to support our existing businesses, attract millions of pounds of inward investment as well as help grow and establish new ones. From our smallest independent traders to multinational companies our council is focused on providing support to them.

This includes:



Investing £590,000 in the MENTA centre in Hollands Road, Haverhill, to support entrepreneurs, start-ups and those considering self-employment.



Taking on the day-to-day running of the Harvey Adams Enterprise centre in Brandon, in partnership with MENTA, to help support the existing tenants and new businesses.



Committing to create 40,000 square feet of start-up and incubation space at Suffolk Business Park (now approved) for new and growing companies, in the advanced manufacturing and engineering (AME) sector and its supply chain.



Supporting a multi-million-pound vertical farm due to be launched in an unused warehouse in Newmarket. This will be capable of producing 415 tonnes of food a year. This has involved support from the county council and the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).



We have worked closely with the internationally important horse racing industry and have commissioned an updated report on the economic value the industry brings to the area.



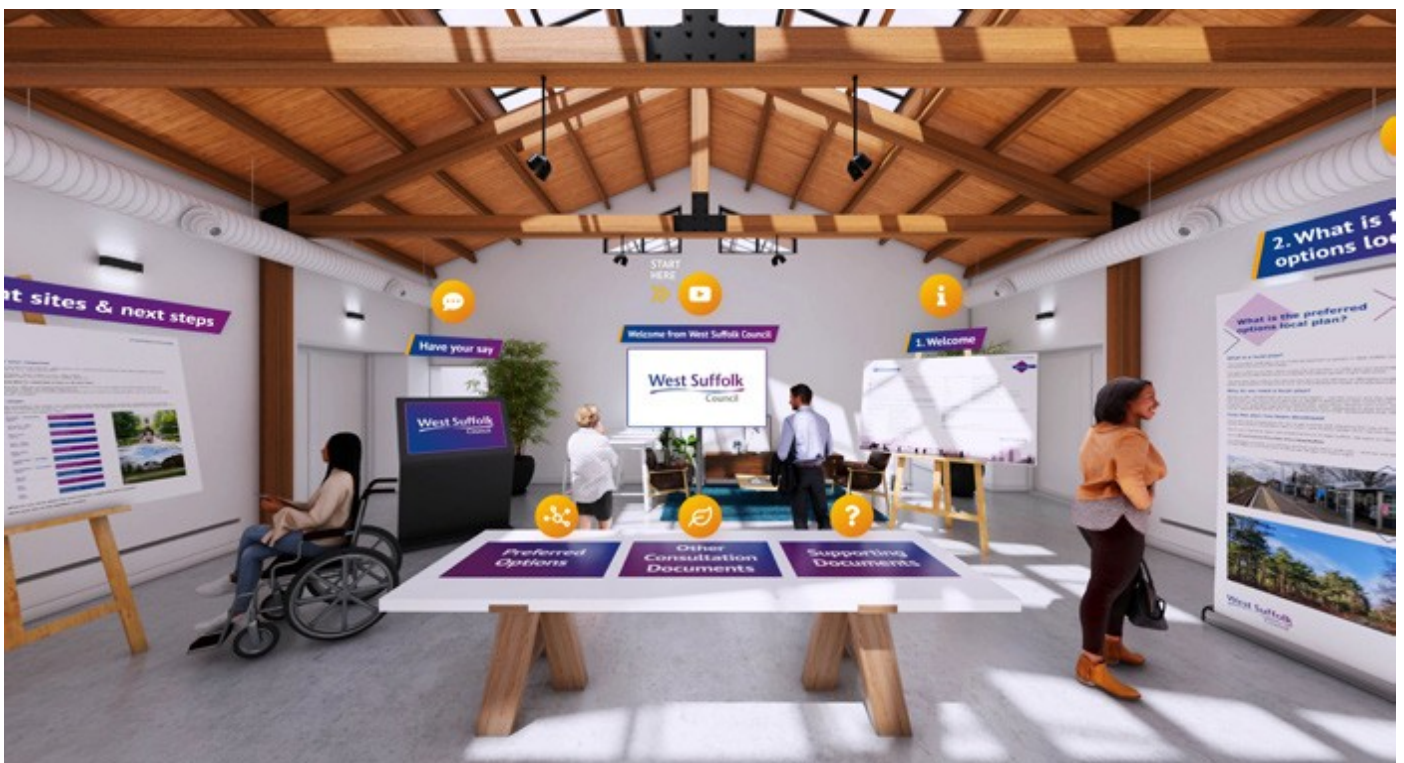
A £1.6m scheme at Bury St Edmunds rail station including a new entrance to connect the station lobby to the car parking on the northern side of the station, lobby remodelling and installation of a ticket gate line. Funding included a grant from the Government's Access for All Scheme, as well as financial contributions from Suffolk County Council and West Suffolk Council.



West Suffolk markets are held in all our towns and continue their recovery from COVID-19, with successful additional initiatives such as makers markets, a sustainable produce market, and support for the Young Market Trader of the Year competition. They, of course, play an important role in supporting our town centres and the wellbeing of our residents.

We have been bold in investing or attracting outside funding for infrastructure to bring commercial development forward; and used our finances to unlock further investment for companies while bringing in an income for West Suffolk. This includes the Epicentre in Haverhill (HRP) which also gained Local Enterprise Partnership support and has recently celebrated its second birthday (as well as having all its laboratory space full). West Suffolk Council put in place a loan facility of up to £3.5 million to assist the developer with delivering this project, helping move the project on to the now successful centre (which also provides mentoring). This loan also involved a grant from what is now the Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority who oversees HRP as an Enterprise Zone.

Our planners work closely to help encourage businesses to stay and grow West Suffolk, such as the Claas agricultural equipment headquarters. Issues such as the economy, environment and health are also part of the local plan process (which has more engagement already than previous Local Plans).



In addition, we are working with organisations such as Menta to support businesses as well as bringing colleges and companies together to improve skills and job opportunities for current and future residents. This includes investing in a project with schools to provide more opportunities for young children to learn about STEM (Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) subjects. We have helped arrange job fairs and talks as well as promoting new relationships between colleges, schools and businesses. This and supporting the set up, and commissioning the delivery of, a new youth employment scheme, 'One Step Closer,' managed by West Suffolk College support young people who are not in employment, education, or training.

By working with partners, such as the United States Airforce, we have also connected local companies, and apprentices to the millions of pounds of investment being made in the developments at Lakenheath for the arrival of the F35 fighters. Social value generated to date by this project is estimated at more than £85 million for the area. (The project won the Defence Infrastructure Organisation Sanctuary Award for Social Value). It has created more than 140 local jobs so far and almost a third of the budget spent on the project is with local small and medium enterprises.

We have invested in properties across West Suffolk to support place shaping and drive economic growth as well as improving the centre of our towns. This includes property in Newmarket for retail and residential use as well as Provincial House on Haverhill High Street and the former post office at Cornhill, Bury St Edmunds.

The income generated from the assets we own from our solar farm to businesses and properties totals around £15.4 million per year. This helps to support not only the delivery of services to residents and businesses in West Suffolk but our strategic priority of growth in West Suffolk's economy for the benefit of all our residents and, indeed, UK plc. Our commercial asset portfolio provides various types of industrial, retail and office accommodation across the district for businesses and supports their growth.

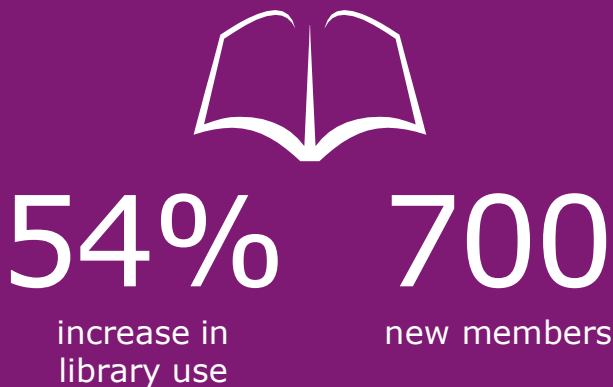
The West Suffolk Business Festival has been running for 12 years encompassing the whole West Suffolk geography. Partners run their own events within the annual schedule under the Festival brand which the council manages. The Festival both celebrates our excellent businesses and provides them opportunities to grow and gain skills.

Working differently and across boundaries

We have been at the forefront nationally of new ways of working with partners, such as our hub projects and the delivery of health and leisure services. Some of which I highlight below.



In 2021, the **Mildenhall Hub** officially opened and has already been winning awards. It brought together a range of services for the benefit of local people with the latest modern equipment and facilities. In the first year, the leisure facilities at Mildenhall Hub, managed by Abbeycroft Leisure, saw a positive increase in use compared to pre-Covid levels.



Jointly funded by the council and its partners, Mildenhall Hub is a £40 million plus award winning development designed to bring together a number of different services under one roof and was officially opened to the public in September 2021. The hub has been named project of the year in the Government Property Awards beating a shortlist that included other major national initiatives. The hub is an exemplar of the Government's One Public Estate programme, demonstrating how the public estate can be a catalyst for place-shaping and better health, wellbeing and education.

In addition, the building, which is powered with an array of environmental features,

has also been named best regional winner for best public or community building in the LABC (Local Authority Building Control) Building Excellence awards. The hub brings together a new school, new gym, fitness studios and 3G pitch, swimming pools and sports hall, a new town library, health centre, children's centre, Citizens Advice

West Suffolk and job centre. The hub also includes office space used by the NHS, Suffolk Police, Suffolk County Council and West Suffolk Council.

In its first year the hub has seen success for the local residents it serves. Mildenhall College Academy has seen exam results improve on pre-Covid levels, with principal Nicola Hood stating part of this was down to students and staff being 'lifted' by the investment in the building and resources available to them. Abbeycroft Leisure has seen its membership double since opening at the hub with over 1,650 members. And its swim scheme has seen a huge increase growing to more than 880 people, an increase of nearly 80 per cent.



Behind the numbers, the hub is making a difference to people's lives, linking up services such as the NHS with leisure and library services to benefit patient care. A cardiac rehabilitation programme means patients benefit from using the onsite leisure facilities with a purpose designed programme. Additional clinic rooms have meant more health services for both adults and children are now provided more locally, saving journeys to hospitals.

Children attending the speech and language sessions also benefit by being able to go straight to the library to choose books. The number of people signed up and regularly using their library card at Mildenhall compared to before the pandemic, has increased by nearly 80 per cent and the amount of books and other media its loans out has also gone up by more than 50 per cent.

Bury St Edmunds will be next for a much needed upgrade of its leisure facilities to be hosted as part of the Western Way development which is supported by the NHS. There are also plans with partners for hub facilities in Haverhill. This collaborative way of working is about putting the right solutions in place to meet the needs of the communities.





The **£1.8 million transformation at Newmarket Leisure Centre** was completed during the challenge of lockdown conditions in July 2020. The project was delivered via the UK Leisure Framework and remodelled the existing space to create new facilities including:

- new soft play facility to include a sensory room for a more inclusive offering
- new party rooms
- new café (Paddy & Scott's brand by Abbeycroft) with new kitchen
- gym extension on first floor
- new EGYM facility to attract a new market of users
- an additional first floor group exercise Studio
- remodelled gym changing facilities on first floor
- NHS Groups room on first floor
- meeting room on ground floor
- new reception and access control



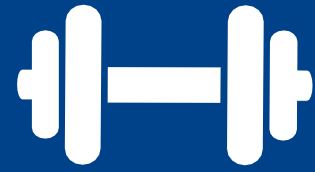
Photo by Ustigate Waterplay

A new **splash pad in Haverhill** opened in summer 2021, providing play opportunities for local children and families. The council invested £50,000, alongside £180,000 from Haverhill Town Council who are the lead organisation running the facility. It is a great example of us working with other partners but not taking a traditional role of leading when the better outcome is a more local solution.



The newly named **Brandon Leisure and Health Hub** was created with a £2 million investment from West Suffolk Council, reshaping the existing town leisure centre to upgrade fitness facilities and to enable NHS services to be introduced at the site.

This way of working has seen partners, such as the NHS, and other public services and councils working together with one goal. It has seen pooled funding and shared approaches to estates.



£45 million

total improvements to Mildenhall,
Brandon, Newmarket and Haverhill
leisure and health facilities



In the first year West Suffolk Council helped open the Clare Community Hub. This has brought community groups together with external organisations to support local residents. Examples of this include the delivery of a dementia project supporting local organisations to help those living with dementia within Clare and surrounding villages.



The successful **Moments exhibition at Moyses Hall Museum in Bury St Edmunds** saw 200,000 visitors, including 900 school students, and a boost of around £350,000 to the local economy. The exhibition included original works by international artists such as Banksy and attracted visitors from far and wide. By investing in our heritage and cultural facilities we lever greater benefits for all. A new exhibition will be coming to West Suffolk, which people can see in Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill and Newmarket.

Families and communities

In last year's budget (2021/22) we earmarked a further £1 million to be invested over the next three years in leisure asset management - including for this financial year nearly £100,000 in Mildenhall for the replacement of the pump track and renewal of the St Johns Close Multi Use Games Area. Work on the skatepark, which was designed with the users has now finished. The budget includes £758,000 of investments in renewing play areas and equipment across the whole of West Suffolk. This builds on initiatives such as the Haverhill splash pad, developing the new skatepark in Newmarket as well as Yellow Brick Road improvements.

Our families and community work has seen hundreds of thousands of pounds invested in Community Chest and Locality Budgets which directly support very local projects. You have played your part as local councillors in being champions for your communities to promote these organisations and find funding from the grants we have been able to make available.

Since 2019:



Organisations and charities across West Suffolk have been awarded a total of £2,030,845 in Community Chest funding helping them deliver vital local work and benefits. Just last year the council supported 122 community groups and sports club projects through the Community Restart fund and the Sports Club Restart programme, allocating over £207,305.63 of the £246,609 funding for Covid specific projects. This included £1,700 for Wickhambrook Parish Council to purchase outdoor equipment to support social distancing at community engagement events and £1,989 for Worlington Cricket Club to purchase additional equipment for junior players and for qualified coaches to adhere to COVID guidance.



When West Suffolk was first formed some 1,450 children took part in the Crucial Crew initiative which gives year six pupils the opportunity to learn valuable and potentially life-saving skills. Despite COVID restrictions we were able to invite more than 50 West Suffolk primary schools to participate in the first virtual Crucial Crew.



In collaboration with West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust, 816 referrals were made to Abbeycroft Leisure which has helped improve the health and wellbeing of local residents. Within the first 12 weeks, 61 per cent of those referred experienced an increase in their wellbeing. In addition, from week one to week 24, referrals averagely saw an overall increase in the number of minutes spent exercising, and a decrease in time spent sitting.



We have managed the holiday food and activity programme (HAF) in West Suffolk, funded by the Department for Education. The council has enabled more than 1,000 HAF spaces to be filled on activities, sports, and community Christmas events. More than 200 food parcels were supplied to eligible families across West Suffolk and 40 additional families attended Family Park Cooking days and also received a food parcel. These figures are likely to grow as children and their families have been taking part in more activities during this year's school holidays.



Since 2019 West Suffolk Council has, through councillor nominations, awarded £640,137.51 in Locality Budget funding. Locality Budget funding is available to community groups for projects or activities that the whole local community can enjoy. West Suffolk Council has a strong belief that families and communities are the bedrock of West Suffolk. Where they are thriving, we see successful places that are economically buoyant, healthy, and cohesive. But where they are struggling, we see a range of issues. In the last year councillors have also been encouraged to give locality funding to organisations and projects that help tackle the cost of living crisis.

We have also worked hard with partners in a holistic way to reduce rough sleeping. This has also included successfully encouraging people to give to charities where the funds will help most and carry out preventative work to help people stop becoming homeless in the first place. This is directly helping the most vulnerable as well as working with landlords.

We have felt the impact of significant global events in West Suffolk, particularly supporting people who have fled to the UK from conflict. We have welcomed people from Afghanistan and Ukraine as part of the government's refugee policies. We have worked with colleagues from across the public and voluntary sector to find accommodation, source essentials such as furniture and with the much-needed social support. Our community team and housing teams in particular have responded to requests for advice and practical support, often at short notice, to help people to seek shelter and settle into the country.

Since 2019:



5,044 households who were at risk of homelessness were provided with advice and support and rough sleeper numbers reduced from 36 in 2018 to nine. Some 370 empty homes were also brought back into use – 181 of those we achieved last year.



An innovative personalised healthcare service has been in place for one year in partnership with the West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group, health outreach and Sanctuary Housing for rough sleepers in supported accommodation. There has been an improvement in health outcomes for clients, opportunities for holistic support and reduced demand for emergency services.

Housing and development

We have been managing growth by consistently meeting Government targets for housing development in West Suffolk. Those authorities who do not meet these targets are put under closer scrutiny by Government and must show plans to make up any deficit. While it is important to meet these targets, we also continue to strive for the right balance, meeting the differing needs of our communities by having the right properties in the right places.

In addition, our developer Barley Homes has been hugely successful in building homes and selling them in two developments in Haverhill – bringing an initial dividend to the council of £200,000. This provides much needed affordable homes and an income for the council.

Over the last three years:



Westmill Place, off Manor Road in Haverhill, was the first development for Barley Homes with the second, Stonemill Park, close to the former Castle Hill School. Together the sites have brought forward 63 homes, including 30% affordable ones.



Two new bungalows were completed in Brandon as temporary accommodation for people with accessibility needs as well as four properties for social rent, all with financial support from the council.



Since the new Independent Living Service was introduced in December 2020, the number of Disabled Facilities Grants approved has increased by 101 per cent from 93 to 187 and the average time taken to complete a Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant from enquiry to works has reduced by 37 per cent.



Last year approximately £1.3 million was spent making disability adaptations to almost 200 homes through the Disabled Facilities Grant.



In the last four years, the council has granted 5,444 major, minor and other planning applications including for one of the country's largest greenhouses using waste heat from water station.



But our focus is not just on the here and now but also delivering a robust local plan for the future with strong engagement with our communities and stakeholders. Having a strong local plan means we, with communities, can manage growth and shape where residential, employment, leisure and public services can go as well as helping to protect or enhance our environment. Not having a local plan means unplanned development can be built. We have a good start with a five-year housing land supply and a record engagement on the new local plan which will be in place until 2040 and help guide planning.

Following the Issues and Options consultation on the new West Suffolk Local Plan in 2020, preparations were made during 2021 to 2022 for the Preferred Options consultation stage, which has now also been held. This provided a strong number of in-depth views that will now form part of the process.



The environment

The environment and the climate emergency have remained high on our agenda. Many of you took part in the taskforce and helped shape the comprehensive programme agreed by Cabinet with the aim of reaching carbon neutral by 2030. The budget we agreed earlier in the year was designed to help deliver on that vision.

In 2022 we joined the UK100 which is a network of highly ambitious local government organisations, which seeks to devise and implement plans for the transition to clean energy that are ambitious, cost effective and take the public and business with them.

We have already made great strides in the way our buildings work and use batteries for storage as well as solar. Indeed, our Solar for Business initiative where we help local companies install panels, reduce their bills, help the environment, and bring an income to the council, has been incredibly busy with orders and interest. We, of course, also have our own successful solar farm at Toggam which in last year generated 11,441 megawatt an hour (MWh) of electricity. From April 2023 the council will be selling Toggam electricity into a peer to peer network energy exchange that allows it to use the electricity to power the authority's own estate while also using surplus to provide income.

The electricity that is sold into the National Grid is enough to power around 3,205 homes and offset the carbon dioxide emissions from 1,457 cars. The value of the electricity generated from the site was worth £1.29 million for the year 2021-22.

In 2022 we agreed an investment of £9 million to be included in the budget which is anticipated to deliver a 31 per cent carbon saving on council operations by 2026, together with a financial return to the council of 2 per cent, after allowing for borrowing costs. **This fund is to be utilised across the following proposed projects:**



Council buildings: improve the energy efficiency and incorporate renewable energy (electricity and/or heat) into buildings



Electric vehicle (EV) fleet investment: replace small vehicles on fleet with EVs when replacement falls due



Expansion of the successful West Suffolk Solar for Business scheme which provides carbon and financial savings for companies and an income for the council.

We secured £1.43 million from the Government's Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme to help deliver a range of energy efficiency, decarbonisation and council initiatives – this included battery energy storage such as that we are using at Mildenhall Hub.

The overall value of the work being carried out is £1.8 million, with the council providing 20.5 per cent match funding to secure the grant. This is an investment which will deliver energy savings and when fully operational generate income and cost savings estimated at £80,000 per year across six council owned properties.

You can find out more at [West Suffolk Council Environmental Statement 2020-21](#)

Championing our communities

The creation of West Suffolk Council has strengthened our ability to champion our communities and businesses nationally while being close enough to continue to focus with them on their needs, creating and delivering local solutions.

This has already been recognised - in the Government's Levelling Up White Paper, published in February 2022, it was announced that Suffolk would be one of nine areas with whom Government would be working to develop a county deal. The way West Suffolk has been working across the whole Suffolk system and with partners means that we are at the table in the negotiations. This reflects many years of partnership working across the public sector in Suffolk, in which West Suffolk Council has played a major part. Work began in 2021 on how the council could ensure maximum benefit for West Suffolk residents from a county deal and the Shared Prosperity Fund.

Over the past four years West Suffolk Council has bid for and had grants from the Government of around £7.6 million.

The council has also secured nearly £2.7 million from two Government funds to further boost prosperity, the local economy and tackle the cost of living in West Suffolk.

This includes £1,943,467 allocated to West Suffolk through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), and £753,701 from the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF), bringing the total amount of investment to £2,697,168.

The funding will help meet Government and local aims in supporting economic, wellbeing and environmental prosperity – including support for businesses, heritage, rural enterprises, and initiatives to tackle cost of living challenges. It will provide investment, in addition to that which the council and partners are already providing, in improving local towns and high streets – including better access for people with disabilities.

Plans include a wide range of initiatives from helping look at moving the market in Newmarket to a new car park for Clare.

Community groups, sports and arts organisations, businesses, BIDS (Business Improvement Districts), and town councils will be able to bid for extra funding to support the aims of the funds and deliver local solutions.

In line with the Government’s profiling of the fund, the majority will be used in the second and third of the three years. It is also expected by Government that this funding will be used to invest in skills and business support in years two and three – representing a large investment in this area to further improve the local economy. The work of the rural taskforce meant that the council had policies and initiatives in place to take advantage of this funding opportunity.

Our voice has also been heard in Government during the pandemic as we lobbied for greater funding for businesses, market traders and business groups such as the BIDs that had been left out other grant streams.

Importantly the creation of West Suffolk Council has meant we have been able to robustly weather financial challenges that we have seen by securing savings and efficiencies. This continuation of prudent financial management and harmonisation of Council Tax has held us in good stead since the council’s inception. This has meant not only have we been able to continue to deliver high quality services, even in the most challenging times, but deliver on our vision for better health, economic and environmental outcomes.

High quality services

Our services continue to be high quality and award winning.



Our parks have continued to achieve national green flag status and played a crucial role in the health and wellbeing of our communities. That is why we are investing £1.3 million in our parks and heritage assets such as Moyse’s Hall and West Stow – including maintaining areas such as now award-winning Brandon County Park which we had taken ownership of from Suffolk County Council and a year later won its first nationally recognised Green Flag in 2019.



We introduced civil parking enforcement after public support to help improve safety, reduce pollution and traffic jams, grow the economy and make sure emergency services get through.



In this year’s budget we have agreed we will be investing more than £1 million on car park improvements across West Suffolk including new EV points, improvements to an existing multi-story car park in Bury St Edmunds and car parking in Newmarket as well as Clare.



Bins have been emptied more than twenty million times from local households since West Suffolk Council was created, their contents sent to the Energy from Waste facility in Great Blakenham. The crews received tremendous support from residents as they worked during Covid and a record heatwave. Government is expected to make new changes nationally to recycling and waste collection, known as the Resources and Waste Strategy (RAW). We have taken part in the national consultation and continue to lobby to make sure authorities get the best deal, and the funding to go with it.

Cost of living

West Suffolk Council are playing our role to help tackle the cost-of-living crisis.

Poverty affects 17 per cent of households in Suffolk. In West Suffolk, 3,000 households are in receipt of free school meals and there has been an increase in foodbank usage and Universal Credit in-work claims. This is an ever changing national and global issue and we are doing our bit on a range of levels from highly local to regional.

Our work to date has built on:

- our approach to families and communities
- our joint working with a range of partners, and
- the direct delivery of services, including the allocation of government funding support.

Our actions to support residents with the cost of living fall into four broad areas:



1. Allocating government support – such as funding and providing tailored support

- £150 Council Tax rebate A-D properties – administered through revenues and benefits service
- £150 to those in band E-H in receipt of Local Council Tax Support, exempt due to severe mental impairment or Disabled Band Reduction Scheme
- Council Tax rebate discretionary scheme targeted support to vulnerable residents.
- We have now administered the Government's Council Tax Rebate Grant of £9,340,200 to 100 per cent of the 62,268 West Suffolk households who have been identified as eligible for the core scheme to help them with their rising energy costs. In addition to this we paid out £268,190 to 9,169 households under the discretionary scheme.
- We created and used an online form, which enabled households not on direct debit to let us and Anglia Revenues Partnership know how to pay the grant into their bank accounts. So it could be done as quickly and efficiently as possible.
- Where a household had been awarded Council Tax rebate grant to their Council Tax account, and subsequently end up in credit, Anglia Revenues Partnership contacted residents on our behalf, to try again to get the money paid into their bank accounts so that it can help them pay for their energy costs this winter.
- West Suffolk Council also had £270,300 to administer discretionary grants to those who we and our partner organisations identify as vulnerable and likely to be the most impacted by rising energy prices and the increased cost of living. This will include residents in band E-H properties who for Council Tax purposes are considered to be 'severely mentally impaired' and those who receive a Disability Reduction or Local Council Tax Reduction.



2. Providing welfare support, advice and funding – such as household support fund and homelessness prevention.

We have been involved in:

Using Government's £5.1 million Household Support Fund allocated across Suffolk to provide support for food, energy and water, and other essentials, including:

- direct payments to those in receipt of free school meals during school holidays
- continued funding of foodbanks
- direct payments to SEND (Special educational needs and disability), care leavers and pensioners
- funding of the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme

Direct allocation of a range of housing and homelessness support intended to prevent or relieve homelessness - including:

- welfare advice officers – to minimise outgoing and maximise income
- administration of the discretionary housing payment. For example, residents impacted by benefit restrictions
- awarding of the housing element of the Household Support Fund
- administration of the homelessness prevention fund
- referring residents to the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme – awards funding for furniture, white goods, fuel vouchers, supermarket vouchers, food and contribution towards utilities



3. Working in partnership and enabling others to provide support – building on our families and community work.

- referring residents to Citizens Advice, Warmer Homes and other specialist services via the 'Warm Handover'
- referring residents to support grants available through the council Home Assistance Grant

We have continued to work with a range of partners across Suffolk as part of the Collaborative Communities Board – this means we can best maximise opportunities, reduce duplication, pool skills and resources so our residents get the best help they can. Including:

- poverty Strategy and Volunteering Strategy
- reducing health inequalities
- sharing data and targeting support – through Suffolk Office for Data Analytics
- joint communications and support for example LWAS (Local Welfare Assistance Scheme) and warm handover
- targeted funding using our families and communities approach
- locality budgets – supporting community groups post-Covid
- community chest – enabling organisations to provide direct support, increase in budget in 2022
- building capacity in our voluntary and community sector – helping food banks and a range of local providers, for example Reach, Newmarket Open Door, Gatehouse, Lightwave



4.

Enhancing health and wellbeing - including direct provision of leisure and open spaces as well as supporting food banks and other community providers.

- Providing a programme of free holiday activities for children in receipt of free schools meals or who are vulnerable in other ways
- Providing a leisure offer vital to support health and wellbeing – award winning open spaces, play parks and skateparks
- Concessionary services – discounted or free services and events we provide with partners, including initiatives such as free play events or Holiday Activities and Food Programme 2022
- Reducing social isolation - digital inclusion, befriending service, community transport, subsidised lunch clubs, coffee mornings, friendships clubs
- Social prescribing – enhancing the offer across the West to support residents' wellbeing and reduce demand on health services
- Enabling hubs across the districts to provide access to services – including the newly opened Mildenhall Hub

The future

Our first term has given us the building blocks and confidence to show we can achieve our vision for a healthier, greener and more prosperous West Suffolk:

- to continue to help our local economy grow
- to carry on breaking down barriers on how we work with partners and our communities
- to use our already excellent families and communities work to support local solutions and our louder voice to further champion our aims and vision

All while we are continuing to deliver high quality services.

We continue to face challenges such as tackling the cost of living, climate change, the financing of Local Government. But also, we have opportunities presented by county deal, levelling up, funding such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to name but a few.

We continue to have a role to play with our businesses, communities and partners, in tackling this and look at the way we work. We are continuing to strengthen and forge new partnerships from local groups to regional bodies, such as newly joining the UK100 national group to support economic growth and tackle climate change. Of course, we are working with individual towns, communities and areas to shape locally what the future looks like for them. Indeed, this is a continued evolution of the way we have been working differently to get the right local solution that puts communities at the heart of all we do.

We are all very mindful of the rise in the cost of living that our residents, businesses, and indeed public services are facing and how we play a part in helping tackle that. West Suffolk Council, like all public services, is also facing this challenge and how to deal with the increased costs to us and the effect on services due to the rise in demand.

West Suffolk has always been full of communities whose compassion and care for others shines through. And we have seen this, not only through the pandemic, but also with the tragic and monstrous events unfolding in Ukraine as well as the wider refugee crisis. West Suffolk, with our partners, has and will continue to be at the heart of the response to the complex challenges this brings.

Communities and businesses remain at the heart of West Suffolk Council and you and our staff have been the engine that has driven the delivery and made so much possible. This has rightly involved debate and that has led to better initiatives and outcomes.

We have faced challenges that we have never faced before and continue to do so. The creation of West Suffolk Council has meant not only have we been able to meet and surpass these challenges, but also carry on delivering vital initiatives that are, and will in the future, make a real difference to the lives of West Suffolk's residents.