

District councillor's report October 2022

Cost of living

The government will continue to make announcements and we remain alert to the fact that these may involve input and action from the council. In the meantime, we are working with colleagues across Suffolk to support individuals as well as ensuring community and other groups are able to support and have help to meet their own costs. We have some external funding, via the Collaborative Communities Board, to help community groups and more may be on the way. We'll keep you up to date about this but in the meantime, a really useful source of advice is the cost of living page on our website. This links to sources of local and national support: [Cost of living \(westsuffolk.gov.uk\)](https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/cost-of-living). We remain committed to supporting our communities throughout this winter, including warm spaces, access to food and financial support.

Refugees

We continue to support Afghan refugees across West Suffolk. Some families have settled in homes and been supported by Suffolk Refugee Support and local community groups. The families who are staying in the bridging hotel in Bury St Edmunds have settled in well and children supported to go to school etc. As well as the Afghan community, we are ready to support the Ukrainian Refugees as part of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and the Family Scheme. Many Ukrainian Refugees are nearing the end of the initial six-month period of stay in the UK. Some will be remaining with their host families and others have been able to find their own accommodation. Other guests and hosts require additional support and we are working with the County Council, and others, to support families in the private rented sector. Whilst they are entitled to apply for social housing, via Home-Link, given the pressures on social housing, we are encouraging people to find alternatives where possible.

As well as supporting refugees with housing advice we are working closely with Community Action Suffolk, Suffolk Refugee Service and other partners to ensure community support is available to guests under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, we have seen education and skills workshops held in Bury St Edmunds over the summer and weekly support groups are starting to be established across the district.

Asylum seekers

The government has extended its asylum seeker dispersal scheme to all parts of the country. This means that asylum seekers will be placed in the West Suffolk area. Serco is contracted on behalf of the Home Office to find suitable accommodation, usually larger houses and in the private sector. Whilst councils, police and other agencies can provide views on where the accommodation should not be located, for example due to existing anti-social behaviour concerns, there is a need for a significant number of properties. Work will continue over the next few months with Serco and Suffolk County Council on this matter. We will ensure that support is available to asylum seekers and the wider community when accommodation has been identified.

Supporting voluntary and community sector to restart and recover

The Families and Communities Team has spent a good deal of time supporting organisations to get back up and running as Covid restrictions have reduced. We have distributed, with the support of Community Action Suffolk, nearly **£242,000 over the last 18 months as part of the** Community Restart Funding. The aim of the fund was to help groups with the things they needed to re-start safely. As part of

this fund nearly £99,000 was provided to sport clubs giving them the vital help they needed to continue.

Parish Conference

We are just finalising arrangements for the November Parish conference. It will go ahead on the 16 November opening at 5:45 for a 6pm start. We are continuing to hold them virtually, through Microsoft Teams as we have seen an increase in attendance and participation. The agenda is being confirmed but the three likely topics are Cost of living, Community Emergency planning and District elections.

Community Safety Partnership and anti-social behaviour

As part of our annual requirement to review the priorities of the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership, it was agreed in June this year to keep the remaining priorities of Criminal Exploitation, Hate Crime, Domestic Abuse, Modern Slavery, Anti-Social Behaviour and also adopted Fraud. The partnership is now undertaking a review of the action plan to ensure that all partners are engaged in working towards these priorities. One area that keeps the Families and Communities Team busy is anti-social behaviour, with hotspots being tackled across the district a focus for us and partners. We continue to work with our partners to ensure appropriate action is taken to combat on going issues, such as closure notices and overseeing community triggers.

COVID-19 Additional Relief Fund Phases Three and Four

These are the final phases, designed to distribute the last of West Suffolk's funding allocation from Government to those businesses who are eligible and who have applied for help.

As a reminder, West Suffolk was allocated £4,050,420 to provide Business Rate Relief to businesses who had been impacted by the pandemic but who had not qualified for help under previous COVID-19 rate relief schemes.

Phase One

Under phase one, the Council awarded £970,000 of rate relief, to 214 businesses who successfully applied for CARF between 22 February 2022 and 15 March 2022. This funding was to cover a portion of their business rates.

A second set of funding totalling more than £1.6 million was awarded to over 1200 West Suffolk businesses who didn't apply to CARF, but who according to Government data, are working in sectors that have been hardest hit by the pandemic.

Phase Two

These businesses were then invited to apply for further funding under phase two, to bring them into line with those businesses that applied in the first phase. Again, the funding awarded covered a portion of their total business rates.

The closure and paying out of the second phase of CARF has left West Suffolk with just over £1.4 million still to be distributed.

Phase Three

Under phase three, most of the remaining money is being distributed to all those businesses who have previously applied for CARF under phase one or phase two. The relief is being awarded in proportion to the estimated impacted of the pandemic on their business sector as set out in the Government data.

The relief is limited to a maximum of 100 per cent of the business rate charge for 2021/22.

Phase Four

This left us with just under £54,000 of CARF left. We have identified businesses who are in the manufacturing sector and who had previously successfully applied for CARF. This is the sector that Government data tells us has been hardest hit by the pandemic and so we have applied the remaining funding to their business rate accounts, to bring their bill for 2021/22 down to £0.

Anglia Revenues Partnership is writing to all businesses being awarded CARF in phase three and four to outline the additional relief given.

Abbey Gardens

The Abbey gardens was the fourth highest free visitor attraction in the UK in 2021 beaten only by Brighton Pier, the National Museum and the British Museum.

1,276,864 people passed through the gates of the gardens in 2021 with the gardens being the most visited in the East of England in 2021 with Clacton Pier in second place. Congratulations to the gardeners and all the volunteers for all their hard work.

Bury and Beyond website

We are coming up to the events leading up to Christmas with the one thousand years celebrations of the Abbey starting on the 17th November to the 20th November and the Christmas light switch on 17th November and then there are many events across the town being held up to Christmas. The Bury and beyond website has all the events listed.

www.christmasinburystedmunds.co.uk