



Forest Heath • St Edmundsbury

West Suffolk
working together

West Suffolk Strategic Plan 2014-16



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For more information about this document, or to request a copy in an alternative format, please email strategy.performance@westsuffolk.gov.uk or call 01638 719454

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FOREWORD FROM THE LEADERS OF THE COUNCILS

We are delighted to introduce the West Suffolk Strategic Plan for 2014-16, the first time that our two councils have come together in this way to set out our shared ambitions. The plan sets out what we aim to achieve together, with our partners, local businesses, communities and residents, over the next two years.

Times continue to be tough for local government and we need to become less dependent on funding from central government. This means councils will have to do things differently, our communities will need to become more self-reliant, and we will all have to work even harder. But by working together, by building on our strong track record, and by embracing new opportunities, councillors and staff will continue to play their part in helping the people we serve in West Suffolk to create the best possible future for themselves.

This document represents a major achievement for our councils and is a significant step in joining up service delivery in West Suffolk. We have already saved £3.5 million for council tax payers by creating a single staffing structure to support both councils. This is on top of savings each individual council has made, but is just the starting point since there remain huge financial challenges ahead.

A single plan for West Suffolk does not mean a one-size-fits-all approach. While sharing broad priorities and ambitions for our area, each council has its own unique identity and this joint plan allows for doing things differently in different parts of West Suffolk.

Councillors and staff have show tremendous commitment to working across our two councils finding ways of making the things we do more efficient, and learning from each other. We have a strong platform on which to build our new future, a lot of strengths and learning - not just from each other, but from our communities and businesses as well.

As Council Leaders, we are committed to making the most of the shared opportunities and strengths that acting together as West Suffolk gives us, at local, regional and national levels. While this plan retains our ability to act individually, we believe that together we can have a have a much greater voice and influence in the world around us, and we commend it to you.

Councillor John Griffiths
Leader
St Edmundsbury Borough Council

Councillor James Waters
Leader
Forest Heath District Council

Why a new, West Suffolk, strategic plan in 2014?

A great deal has changed since Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury councils published our most recent corporate and strategic plans in 2012. Whilst both councils remain independent organisations, with separate budget and decision making arrangements, we have made great progress in sharing the delivery of our services.

Shared services has become a reality

In 2012, the practical work of sharing services between our two councils had only recently begun. Apart from in a few specific areas, such as revenues and benefits and waste management, where joint working has a longer history, councillors and staff across West Suffolk were only just beginning to work together on a range shared projects. Separate plans for the two councils were therefore the most appropriate option, although both had a strong emphasis on joint working.

Joint working and sharing of services has now become a daily reality for both councils. And as it has developed, it has become apparent that in almost all areas there are shared West Suffolk priorities to work towards and joint benefits to be gained by delivering services differently while also cutting costs.

Working together at a series of planning meetings, Cabinet members at both councils took the view that a joint strategic plan should be developed to give clarity to the public and staff about what we would be doing over the next two years. The new plan would incorporate the commitments made by both councils in 2012, but also revisit them to take account of changes since that time.

A changing financial position

In 2012, the full implications of the new funding settlement between central and local government were only just emerging. Whereas now, it is clear that councils will in future rely more on sources of income such as business rates and the New Homes Bonus than on grants from central government. This change in approach has been built into the new plans set out in this document.

New partnerships with other bodies

Since the previous corporate and strategic plans were published, there have also been changes in the partnership working relationships with bodies outside the two councils. The Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board, the West Suffolk Partnership, the Local Enterprise Partnerships, the Suffolk Public Sector Leaders Group, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Suffolk and Community Action Suffolk have all become established, and have set their own work programmes and priorities.

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We have made sure the actions and projects in this document complement these partners' emerging agendas, as well as taking into account those of others such as the county council, parish and town councils, schools and colleges, housing providers, chambers of commerce, leisure trusts and many more.

Many of the priorities set out in this plan rely heavily on the work of other organisations, both existing and new, for their success, and so we have taken the opportunity to refresh our own plans in order to ensure we are working to support what others in Suffolk are aiming to achieve and that they are able to support us in achieving our vision and priorities.

In formulating our priorities, we have also continued to listen to our residents, businesses and communities to understand local issues, concerns and strengths. We have drawn on the major consultations we carried out in developing our separate corporate and strategic plans for 2012-16, as well as more recent discussions with residents and stakeholders through regular dialogue and special events such as our parish forums, business festival and listening events with customers and disability groups. We have used a range of views to feed into the priorities, actions and projects set out in the remainder of this document.

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About West Suffolk

NB A better quality map will be inserted here in the final version



The area of West Suffolk comprises the council areas of Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury, two predominantly rural districts in the heart of East Anglia. Well-connected with London, the rest of East Anglia and the Midlands, West Suffolk is a safe and comparatively prosperous place in which to live. It also has some beautiful and accessible countryside areas, including grassland, heath and forest.

Forest Heath has three main market towns, Newmarket, Mildenhall and Brandon; St Edmundsbury has two: Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill.

Bury St Edmunds, the largest settlement in West Suffolk, has been a prosperous town for centuries, with people drawn to its market and Georgian architecture, shops, leisure and cultural facilities.

Newmarket, the 'home of horseracing' has more racehorses, trainers, stable staff, stud farms and racing organisations in and around the town than anywhere else in the world, with racing accounting for a significant number of local jobs.

Haverhill, Mildenhall and Brandon expanded significantly in the 1970s due to the construction of new housing to accommodate families moving as part of the Greater London Council's expansion programme.

Today, West Suffolk has a thriving, diverse economy, embracing a number of business sectors. These include tourism, food and drink, life sciences and advanced manufacturing, including a number of businesses trading with the two major US Air Force bases in West Suffolk.

In all of West Suffolk's towns and our rural areas, many of our residents benefit from a good quality of life. However, some areas have suffered more than others from the impact of the economic downturn, and others are facing issues such as rural isolation, a lack of skills or qualifications amongst young people, an ageing population with some in need of more specialist housing or care, poverty or health deprivation.

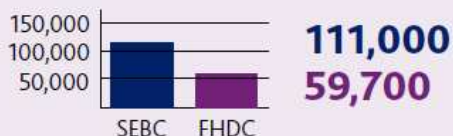
The charts on the following pages give a snapshot of the characteristics of West Suffolk. To see more statistics about life in West Suffolk, visit www.suffolkobservatory.info

Note: These stats and facts boxes will be distributed around the document and placed next to the relevant text, at design stage.

West Suffolk – Key Statistics

POPULATION

In 2011, the population of Forest Heath was 59,700 and St Edmundsbury was 111,000.



EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Educational attainment in SEBC was on a par with the England average for 5+ A*-C at GCSE in state schools in 2012. In FHDC, results were 9% below the England average.

POPULATION GROWTH

The population of both districts is growing rapidly. Between 2001 and 2011, the population increase was:



HOUSE PRICES

The ratio of median earnings to average house prices was above the national average in 2012.



ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

The proportion of economically active people aged 16-64 is high in West Suffolk.



AGEING POPULATION

West Suffolk has an ageing population. In 2011, 24.5% of the population were aged over 60, compared to an England average of 22.3%.



HOMELESSNESS

The number of people accepted as homeless and in priority need by west Suffolk has increased from 92 in 2009 to 222 in 2013

LIFE EXPECTANCY

Life expectancy in West Suffolk is above the average for England and Wales.

	FHDC	SEBC	E&W
M	80.1	81.3	78.9
F	83.9	84.5	82.9

RURAL LIFE

Approximately 42% of the population of West Suffolk live in rural locations and villages.



ECONOMIC SECTORS

In 2008, workers in Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury were employed in the following sectors:

	FHDC	SEBC	GB
Manufacturing	11.0	16.8	10.2
Construction	5.6	4.6	4.8
Services	78.5	75.9	83.5

Rates of pay in West Suffolk are as much as 21% below the average in the eastern region and 18% below the national average.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The 2011 census told us about the percentage of people who considered themselves to be in very good health.



QUALIFICATIONS

In 2012, the percentage of 16-64 year olds with NVQ level 1 and equivalent qualifications was:



COUNCIL GOVERNANCE

Since 2012, both Councils have been governed by a Cabinet model. Under Shared Services, more joint decision making arrangements and panels have emerged.

CONTROLLABLE SPEND 2012/13

Forest Heath: **£14 million**
St Edmundsbury: **£27 million**

This included:

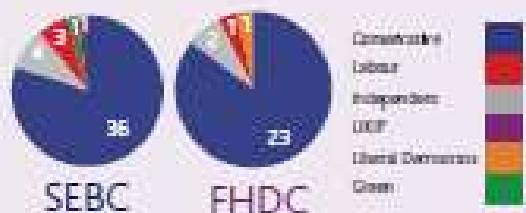
- employee costs
- transport costs
- premises costs
- supplies and services

ETHNICITY

Forest Heath is the most ethnically diverse district in Suffolk and has the smallest percentage of White (Eng/Welsh/Scot/NI) people.



COUNCIL POLITICAL MAKE UP



These figures will be checked in March 2014, to ensure latest position. On day of O&S paper circulation (10 Jan), the Haverhill East result came in which adds one UKIP seat to SEBC and removes on Conservative

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A vision and priorities for West Suffolk

Councillors and staff at Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury are committed to working together across West Suffolk to achieve a shared vision.

Our vision:

"Working together, Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury councils will support communities to create the best possible future for people in West Suffolk."

In practice, this will mean focusing our efforts and resources in those areas which are the biggest priorities for West Suffolk over the next two years.

Our priorities

Priority 1: Increased opportunities for economic growth

Priority 2: Resilient families and communities that are healthy and active

Priority 3: Homes for our communities

The following pages of this document explain in more detail what we want to see achieved in relation to each of these priorities over the next two years. Many of the areas covered relate to commitments made in other policy and strategy documents, for example, local plan documents, housing and economic development documents or locality specific plans.

More detail about how each of the priorities, projects and actions will be achieved will also be set out in business plans produced by each part of West Suffolk.

West Suffolk’s Priorities – in detail

Priority 1: Increased opportunities for economic growth	Priority 2: Resilient families and communities that are healthy and active	Priority 3: Homes for our communities
<p>We want to see:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. beneficial growth that enhances prosperity and quality of life; 2. existing businesses that are thriving and new businesses brought to the area; 3. people with the educational attainment and skills needed in our local economy; and 4. vibrant, attractive and clean high streets, village centres and markets. 	<p>We want to see:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. a thriving voluntary sector and active communities who take the initiative to help the most vulnerable; 2. people playing a greater role in determining the future of their communities; 3. improved wellbeing, physical and mental health; and 4. accessible countryside and green spaces. 	<p>We want to see:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. sufficient housing for current and future generations, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - more affordable homes; - improvements to existing housing; 2. new developments that are fit for the future, properly supported by infrastructure, and that build communities, not just housing; and 3. homes that are flexible for people’s changing needs.

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Achieving our priorities: West Suffolk's ways of working

Much of the activity to achieve our vision will be done through the work that our customers expect from us each day: for example, emptying the bins, looking after our car parks, checking up on food hygiene and running elections. More details about our plans in these areas can be found on our websites under each section of the council's business.

But some of the things we need to do are not part of the day-to-day services that we offer, and require specific actions to be taken. These projects or actions are set out on the following pages.

Over the next two years, we will be changing the way we go about all of our work, in response to developments in the future shape of local government as well as changes taking place in the communities that we serve.

For example, we will be **embedding more commercial behaviours in our organisation**, and in some cases, taking on new commercial opportunities.

We will also look at the way we work with our residents and communities to ensure we are **supporting them to help themselves**, rather than simply providing the same services in the same ways that we have always done. Our focus will be on prevention rather than cure.

In order to thrive, our communities need to be supported by strong local economies. As our priorities set out, **promoting local economic growth** and **making sure everyone has a safe and warm home to live in** will continue to be at the heart of our work.

All of these approaches will require **councillors and staff alike to learn new skills and ways of working**. They will also require us to build different relationships with a range of other groups and agencies, and most importantly, the families and communities who live in West Suffolk. Over the period of this plan, we will need to **maintain existing relationships** with other parts of the public sector, for example, Suffolk County Council, **and forge new relationships** that allow us to influence other areas of public policy, to provide support to groups who want to make changes to the places where they live, and to listen to our residents and respond to their views.

Alongside all of this, we will continue to offer our residents the **highest possible level of customer service**. In particular, over the next couple of years, we will improve the way in which customers can access our services, including online.

In everything we do, we will be guided by our **commitment to promoting equality and diversity**, by seeking to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advance equality of opportunity; and foster good relations between different people through all aspects of our work across West Suffolk.

Where appropriate, we will assess the impact of our policies and projects as they develop, in order to ensure they support our commitment to equality and

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diversity. We have also identified some particular areas within the priorities on page 10 where focused action is needed to improve equality of opportunity for people in West Suffolk. These are shown below.

Through the achievement of these **equality objectives for 2014-16**, we want to see:

1. People with the educational attainment and skills needed in our local economy.
2. A thriving voluntary sector and active communities who take the initiative to help the most vulnerable.
3. Improved physical and mental health and wellbeing.
4. Homes that are flexible to meet people's changing needs.

Projects and actions to achieve our priorities

Priority 1: Increased opportunities for economic growth

We want to see:

1. growth that enhances prosperity and quality of life;
2. existing businesses that are thriving and new businesses brought to the area;
3. people with the educational attainment and skills needed in our local economy; and
4. vibrant, attractive and clean high streets, village centres and markets.

Why is this a priority?

Economic growth is at the heart of our vision for West Suffolk. A strong local economy is essential to underpin all of our other ambitions to improve the quality of life for people in West Suffolk, including the most vulnerable. West Suffolk has a relatively strong economy, but like all parts of the UK, needs to continually renew itself to remain competitive, attracting new enterprise to the area, expanding into new sectors, and making sure the local economy offers employment opportunities.

Economic growth is not just an activity but a philosophy that will affect the decisions made across a wide range of the councils' business. More details about West Suffolk's plans for promoting economic growth can be found in the Six Point Plan for Growth and Jobs available at [insert weblink when available].

What will we do to achieve this priority?

- Engage with businesses, especially local ones, to improve access to procurement opportunities, helping them to export products and services and support business expansion.
- Create the right conditions for growth, ensuring sufficient employment land allocations, supporting incubation (growing small businesses), assisting in implementing broadband and digital connectivity, providing small loans or grants or signposting other support agencies.
- Work with partners to deliver improved transport connections, by ensuring we get our fair share of funding from the LEPs and through implementing a business rates discount pilot scheme.
- Promote West Suffolk by developing an investment brand, setting out our Unique Selling Point, marketing and hosting a business festival.

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- Create a brighter future for market towns through supporting town centre organisations, improving market provision, town centre regeneration projects and master planning.
- Build skills, attributes and employment opportunities through apprenticeship support, ensuring business skills needs are met. West Suffolk will demonstrate good practice, for example through taking on apprentices and offering work experience placements.
- Develop growth projects in key sectors of the economy including; tourism, food, drink, agriculture, life sciences, biotechnology, advanced manufacturing, financial services and digital and cultural creative industries.
- Create effective West Suffolk development management procedures, including an effective approach to planning enforcement.
- Develop waste infrastructure in West Suffolk through the Suffolk Waste Partnership.
- Promote energy and water efficiency measures to West Suffolk businesses.

For example:

As major employers, we have responded to the difficulties young people have 'getting a foot in the door' by setting up the West Suffolk Apprenticeship scheme. At present, we have eight apprentices working in our councils and a further 25 people who have come through the apprenticeship scheme. Many of these are progressing through their initial NVQ onto formal professional qualifications and many have found full time employment. We are pleased to report that the West Suffolk Apprenticeship Agreement is now being used by other organisations, and won the Sarah Swane Workforce Development and Equality Award 2012, from the East of England Regional Council.

Priority 2: Resilient families and communities that are healthy and active

We want to see:

1. a thriving voluntary sector and active communities who take the initiative to help the most vulnerable;
2. people playing a greater role in determining the future of their communities;
3. improved wellbeing, physical and mental health; and
4. accessible countryside and green spaces.

Why is this a priority?

Many of our residents face challenges on a daily basis associated with their economic, health, family or social situation. When these challenges become crises, it has become the usual practice that public bodies will step in and try to provide solutions. However, public sector staff and financial resources can no longer support this way of working so we need to help our communities to rely less on us and more on themselves. Working in partnership with Suffolk County Council, the West Suffolk councils are investing in a new approach over the next two years. This will focus on preventing crisis situations arising by building resilience within families and communities, instead of only being there to pick up the pieces when things go wrong. This preventative work will take a number of forms, as described below, but will in the main focus on working with residents to help them to support themselves and the people around them. More details about our plans are included in our forthcoming West Suffolk Families and Communities Strategy and our leisure and cultural strategies, available on our websites.

What will we do to achieve this priority?

- Work within our towns and villages to listen to local communities and to support them in developing their assets (both physical and social) to tackle local issues.
- Grow the capacity in our communities to help them to build on existing networks and, where appropriate, to branch out into new areas, for example, supporting money management advice services or helping new parents.
- Offer advice and support (including financial) to communities to take forward innovative projects that provide real and tangible improvements for local residents, including through community commissioning approaches.

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- Develop a specific approach to working with families that, where necessary, challenges existing approaches to working separately with children or adults.
- Provide advice and support to families to enable them to respond to the changes introduced as part of the Welfare Reform agenda.
- Assess the need for sports facilities across West Suffolk and promote future provision where needed
- Develop a strategy for the refurbishment or replacement of our leisure assets, including increasing capacity for future growth.
- Investigate the establishment of a Destination Management organisation to co-ordinate tourism-related activities.
- Support the work of the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board and the Healthy Ambitions project, particularly around childhood obesity and Type Two diabetes.
- Review our local community assets, including play provision.
- Take a more commercial approach to our leisure and cultural offer.

For example:

Jubilee Park, Haverhill, was a former school site. Part of the site was designated as allotments. The other half was set aside for a park, including a children's play area. The Council helped set up a steering group of local residents who worked with staff to design the new facilities and determine how they would be managed in the future. The creation of the new allotment site reduced the town's allotment waiting list by 50%. The new allotment holders were encouraged to form a management committee and as of 1 April 2014 that committee will lease the facility from the Council and manage it directly.

Following the staff restructure within West Suffolk, Housing Options Advisors now cover specific geographical areas and work closely with partners to prevent homelessness. By working in this new way, Homelessness Officers have been able reduce the numbers of households in Bed & Breakfast accommodation by over 50% and shorten the time it takes to assess homeless applications by over 10%. This is a better outcome for our residents and more cost-effective for the council.

Lakenheath introduced a Good Neighbour Scheme in 2006 after the need for one was identified through a village Health Check. The scheme is managed by 14 volunteers and aims to help individuals with health and mobility problems and their carers. This can be through help with shopping, jobs in the house and garden, or lifts to and from appointments. The group also hold three or four coffee mornings a year to give users of the scheme the opportunity to meet in an informal setting.

Priority 3: Homes for our communities

We want to see:

1. sufficient housing for current and future generations, including:
 - more affordable homes;
 - improvements to existing housing;
2. new developments that are fit for the future, properly supported by infrastructure, and that build communities, not just housing; and
3. homes that are flexible for people's changing needs.

Why is this a priority?

Maintaining a good supply of housing that meets people's changing needs is a top priority for West Suffolk. Good housing has close links to health and wellbeing so we need to ensure that people have access to housing in order to help them thrive. But as with many areas around the country, housing in West Suffolk is expensive, especially in the private rented sector, so we need to continue to try and secure more new developments in the area, or to revitalise empty properties, in order to improve affordability. However, we also need to learn the lessons from places where new development has not been properly supported by infrastructure such as schools, shops and roads, or has compromised on quality or adaptability. New development in West Suffolk needs to meet the needs of our residents now and into the future and to build new communities, not just houses. More detail about future developments in West Suffolk is available in our draft planning policies, available on the planning pages of our websites. We will say more about our plans for improving all aspects of West Suffolk's housing in our forthcoming Housing Strategy.

What will we do to achieve this priority?

Develop a place-shaping approach to planning, that is flexible and responsive and supports our strategic priorities, including:

- put in place up to date planning policies, including finalising the Core Strategy Single Issue Review (housing) and site allocations for Forest Heath, and Vision 2031 for St Edmundsbury.
- use the Major Projects Team to oversee development in West Suffolk
- use our lobbying and planning role to ensure new development contributes to infrastructure provision through our use of Community Infrastructure Levy and/or planning obligations (s106

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Bring about an increase in the supply of housing for current and future generations, including a mix of size and types of housing, and sufficient affordable housing to meet future needs through:

- using our policies and plans to support the numbers of new homes needed and ensure there is enough land on which to build them.
- identify and deliver new funding models for affordable housing.
- provide advice and support to owners of empty properties to bring homes back into use.
- ensure housing is recognised as a core part of other partners' agendas (e.g. Local Economic Partnerships and Health and Wellbeing Board).
- support private sector and registered providers to build new homes and improve existing ones.

Provide advice and support to vulnerable households to alleviate fuel poverty.

For example:

Housing supported by infrastructure

On the St Johns estate in Mildenhall Forest Heath District Council is working with Orbit Housing, the Homes and Communities Agency and Keystone Development Trust to deliver a mixed housing scheme including the development of 18 affordable housing units, a new community centre to replace an old centre which was no longer fit for purpose and two units for private rent. The rental income is being used to run the community centre. The council transferred the land at no cost and provided £445,000 to build the community centre. The total scheme will cost in excess of £2.7 million and will be completed by March 2015. In addition to providing the much needed houses and community centre it is hoped the scheme will also help to regenerate surrounding area.

Resourcing our priorities

Insert text about financial position once MTFS approved, plus charts of expenditure and income for 2014-16, once budget process finalised

Measuring our progress

We will use our performance management framework to track our progress through the life of the strategic plan. This framework covers monitoring the performance of individual members of staff; business plans for each area of the councils' business; budget monitoring; and regular reporting to the Joint Leadership Team (senior management) and the Performance, Audit and Scrutiny Committee (PASC).

Councillors on PASC will receive regular, publicly available, reports on progress in meeting the goals set out in this plan and our annual reports will give a fuller update of how we are getting on.

The West Suffolk councils will use this performance information to reflect on how we can continuously improve, and achieve even greater value for money for council tax payers.

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Links to partner organisations

www.stedmundsbury.gov.uk/partnercontacts
www.forest-heath.gov.uk/partnerorganisations