



## Extraordinary Overview and Scrutiny Committee 13 May 2014

### Draft West Suffolk Annual Report 2013/14

#### 1. Summary and reasons for recommendation

- 1.1 The draft West Suffolk Annual Report highlights the key activities and developments that have been achieved over the financial year 2013-14, with regard to the priorities set out in the Forest Heath Strategic Plan 2012-16 and the St Edmundsbury Corporate Plan 2012-16. The draft report is written as a joint West Suffolk document for the first time.

#### 2. Recommendation

- 2.1 The Committee is invited to recommend the 2013/14 West Suffolk Annual Report to Cabinet.

#### Contact details

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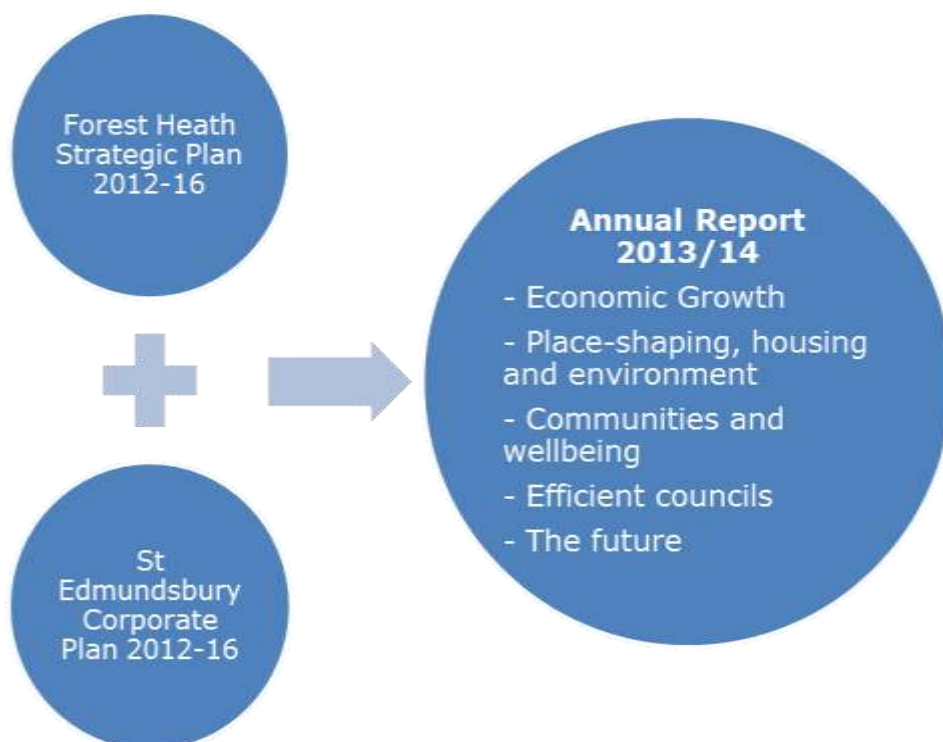
### 3. Corporate priorities

- 3.1 The Council's previous Corporate Plan for 2012-16 set out our priorities which were:
1. Working together for strong, healthy and diverse communities.
  2. Working together for prosperous and environmentally-responsible communities.
  3. Working together for an efficient council.
- 3.2 The draft Annual Report summarises the work completed during 2013/14 to achieve these priorities.

### 4. Key issues

#### Background

- 4.1 This is the first time that Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury Councils have reported jointly on the work to achieve their priorities, commitments/ objectives and underlying actions from their separate 2012-16 strategic and corporate plans<sup>1</sup>. The draft report reflects the fact that a great deal of the work our services carried out in the 2013/14 financial year was on behalf of both Councils and for the benefit of all residents, visitors and businesses in West Suffolk; while also allowing for the distinctive needs, activities and characters of the two councils' areas to be captured.
- 4.2 Whilst the framing of the two Councils' commitments/ objectives for 2012-16 were different (see **Appendix A**), the actions to achieve them were very similar. They have been grouped into topic areas and reported against in the draft chapters of the annual report as shown in the diagram below.



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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that the period reported on in the draft annual report predates the period covered by the joint West Suffolk Strategic Plan for 2014-16 which the Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered in January and February 2014.

4.3 The draft West Suffolk Annual Report is attached at **Appendix B** to this report. The final version of the report will be designed and include photographs to highlight our progress during the year. The draft report contains a number of case studies and examples from West Suffolk to illustrate the achievements described. These have been carefully drawn from a range of localities, urban vs rural locations, and service areas, in order to demonstrate the range of activities undertaken by the councils. In some cases, initiatives are focused on a specific locality and examples of these are included in the draft report.

## **5. Other options considered**

5.1 Both councils are required by their constitutions to produce an annual report. Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury could report separately on their work to achieve their priorities. However, this would not reflect some of the excellent work which has been delivered across the whole of West Suffolk. It would also miss an opportunity to show the continued development in joint working between members and officers of the Councils, and would take up more officer and Member time in the development and approval of the separate documents.

## **6. Community impact**

6.1 **Crime and disorder impact** *(including Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998)*

6.1.1 Not applicable. The document is a report on actions already undertaken, not future policy proposals

6.2 **Diversity and equality impact** *(including the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment)*

6.2.1 The Annual Report covers evidence to support the achievement of the equality objectives from the Corporate Plan.

6.3 **Sustainability impact** *(including completing a Sustainability Impact Assessment)*

6.3.1 Not applicable.

6.4 **Other impact** *(any other impacts affecting this report)*

6.4.1 None applicable.

**7. Consultation** *(what consultation has been undertaken, and what were the outcomes?)*

7.1 The Annual Report summarises progress to achieve the priorities in the 2012-16 Corporate Plan which was informed by feedback from residents, businesses and stakeholders.

**8. Financial and resource implications** *(including asset management implications)*

8.1 None. The Annual Report was compiled within existing resources.

**9. Risk/opportunity assessment** *(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)*

9.1 None applicable.

**10. Legal and policy implications**

10.1 None applicable.

**11. Ward(s) affected**

11.1 All

**12. Background papers**

12.1 Forest Heath District Council Strategic Plan 2012-16 and St Edmundsbury Borough Council Corporate Plan 2012-16. St Edmundsbury Annual Report 2012-13.

**13. Documents attached**

13.1 Appendix A: Previous priorities in 2012-16 Strategic and Corporate Plans

13.2 Appendix B: Draft West Suffolk Annual Report 2013-14

## Appendix A: Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury's previous priorities (2012-16)

In order to support their delivery, each of Forest Heath's strategic priorities were supported by an aim and three objectives.

Each of St Edmundsbury's corporate priorities were each supported by four commitments. These are detailed below:



<p><b>Priority 1:</b> Economic growth (Aim: A stronger local economy which is capable of growing): (a) create the right conditions for economic growth; (b) provide support to existing firms, work to retain key businesses and jobs and support new business start-ups; (c) attract inward investment and revitalising our high streets as a vibrant part of our towns.</p>	<p><b>Priority 2:</b> Housing (Aim: Meeting the district's housing needs): (a) provide adequate provision in our planning policy framework to meet current and future housing needs; (b) help manage the district's existing housing stock; (c) use our influence to bring empty homes back into use.</p>	<p><b>Priority 3:</b> Community Development (Aim: Stronger, more active communities): (a) increase the level and quality of community participation in decisions; (b) strengthen and support parish councils and community and voluntary groups across the district; (c) work with the community and partners to help meet the needs of Brandon residents.</p>	<p><b>Priority 4:</b> Efficient and effective council (Aim: Maintaining quality services). (a) ensure value for money</p>
<p><b>Priority 1:</b> Working together for strong, healthy and diverse communities: (a) increase the availability of low-cost homes; (b) reduce crime and the fear of crime; (c) improve life opportunities; (d) improve people's physical and mental health.</p>	<p><b>Priority 2:</b> Working together for a prosperous and environmentally responsible communities: (a) encourage inward investment and support local business development; (b) make the best use of community facilities; (c) Enhance and protect our environment and heritage; (d) support sustainable transport options.</p>		<p><b>Priority 3:</b> Working together for an efficient council: (a) create unified, coherent and accessible service delivery across West Suffolk; (b) continue to make efficiencies to meet our annual savings target; (c) develop staff and councillors' skills; (d) proactively target external funding and look to generate more income where appropriate.</p>





# West Suffolk

## Annual Report 2013/14

**West Suffolk - working together**

Forest Heath District Council  
[www.forest-heath.gov.uk](http://www.forest-heath.gov.uk)

St Edmundsbury Borough Council  
[www.stedmundsbury.gov.uk](http://www.stedmundsbury.gov.uk)

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## Foreword from the Leaders of the councils

This is the first time that Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury councils have produced a joint annual report and we hope that you will find this document both interesting and useful.

For a number of years our councils have worked together to deliver services such as waste management, tourism and housing as well as campaigning on issues which we felt were important for those of us who live and work in, and visit, West Suffolk. These set the background to the more formal partnership we now enjoy and which has seen, over the past year, a cost-effective single staffing structure working across our boundaries to serve people in each council area.

Both councils have had similar priorities in the past, but we expressed them differently. Forest Heath's priorities were known as 'objectives', for example, while St Edmundsbury called them 'commitments'. The end results however were so similar that we felt it was simple common sense to look at combining our annual reports into a single document setting out what we have achieved in West Suffolk over the past year, both together and as individual councils.

Working together as West Suffolk councils we have been able to achieve very significant savings while facing stringent cuts in our Government revenue support grant. And we continue to look for further shared savings as well as opportunities to act more commercially and increase our income. However we each, as individual councils with our own unique identities, never lose focus on what's important to our own residents, council tax and business rate payers. The beauty of our shared services partnership is that it means that together we can both better achieve the big savings we have to make, and have a bigger voice when it comes to influencing regional and national funding decisions; but we still have the ability and flexibility to concentrate on the grass roots issues within our own council boundaries.

While this annual report looks at what we have achieved in 2013/14, next year's report will focus on the joint priorities which councillors from both councils have worked on together and which set out, in the West Suffolk Strategic Plan, our shared ambitions for economic growth, families and communities, and housing.



Councillor John Griffiths  
Leader  
St Edmundsbury Borough Council



Councillor James Waters  
Leader  
Forest Heath District Council



<b>Economic growth 2013/14</b>
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<b>Forest Heath objectives for economic growth</b>	<b>St Edmundsbury commitments for economic growth</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create the right conditions for economic growth.</li> <li>• Provide support to existing firms, work to retain key businesses and jobs and support new business start-ups.</li> <li>• Attract inward investment.</li> <li>• Revitalise our high streets as a vibrant part of our towns.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage inward investment and support local business development.</li> <li>• Improve life opportunities.</li> </ul>

**1. Supporting economic growth across West Suffolk**

Increasing the opportunities for economic growth in West Suffolk is a top priority for Forest Heath District and St Edmundsbury Borough councils. In February 2014 the councils adopted a six point plan for jobs and growth in West Suffolk. This set out our shared ambition of engaging directly with businesses to create new jobs and the development of new and existing businesses.

The six-point plan sets out our action plan for future economic growth. The rest of this chapter describes the work we have done in 2013/14 towards the achievement of our growth objectives and commitments, listed above, across West Suffolk. Although the individual projects and schemes, such as the Newmarket Home of Horseracing or Haverhill Research Park appear to be specific to one council area they cannot, of course, be seen in isolation as people may choose to work in different locations to their homes. The creation of jobs and impact on our local economy can, and often does, apply across much of West Suffolk, regardless of where the development opportunities are actually sited which is why the councils have a joint focus on, and cooperate across, the whole area, not just within our own boundaries.

**1.1 Creating the right conditions for growth**

We continue to support the development of the Haverhill Research Park. This is an exciting project where the infrastructure is now in place to deliver new office, research and development and business space. Work has also started on the creation of the park amenities which include the delivery of 150 new homes being built by Taylor Wimpey and a new restaurant.

The planning application for the construction of the Bury St Edmunds eastern relief road at Junction 45 on the A14 at Rougham and associated works was approved by St Edmundsbury’s Development Control Committee in February 2014. Once this relief

road is constructed, it will unlock the 68 hectares of employment land on the Suffolk Business Park. The development of this land is expected to provide approximately 14,000 new jobs.

With the development of Haverhill Research Park progressing well, we continue to assist businesses to secure employment land and premises across West Suffolk. The Forest Heath Core Strategy aims to deliver a minimum of 7300 additional jobs in the district by 2026. Job growth will be achieved through the provision of employment land, as well as policies for tourism, leisure, retail and the rural economy. To support this growth a minimum of 16 hectares of additional employment land will be allocated up until 2026 with the primary locations for strategic employment growth in Newmarket, Mildenhall and Brandon. Employment sites will be identified in the site specific allocations issues and options public consultation which will take place later this year.

In February 2014 we commissioned SQW, a leading independent provider of research, analysis and advice in economic and social development, to examine the existing business support offer. This will include an assessment of additional innovation and incubation needs and looks to comprehensively understand the external and internal influences on the economic development landscape. The research will examine our proximity to Cambridge; the existing sectors in which we have a competitive advantage; the sectors we should target (if any) and the role that the councils should play in being either a direct provider or a facilitator of provision and the nature that this facilitation should take. The research will also look at broader considerations, for example the future direction of travel of the area's further and higher education institutions. The research will be completed by the summer 2014 and we look forward to reporting on, and taking forward, the results.

## **1.2 Maximise the potential of our councils' business properties**

The councils own an extensive portfolio of industrial and commercial properties. Any vacant council-owned business properties across West Suffolk continued to be widely promoted in 2013/14 through joint marketing initiatives. In April 2014, there were only 21 empty industrial and commercial units across West Suffolk; compared to January 2013, when there were 40.

## **1.3 Better broadband**

We are supporting the rollout of the 'Better Broadband for Suffolk' project. The first phase is now complete and over 13,000 premises across Suffolk are now able to order fibre broadband services. By Easter 2014, 25,000 premises will have benefited. Once the figure of 100,000 premises is reached in late 2015, around 90% of the county will have superfast fibre broadband.

The project's aspiration is to get close to 100% superfast coverage across Suffolk as soon as possible. The project has seven phases in total and the majority of the third phase, which commenced in April 2014 and is expected to finish in September 2014, is in West Suffolk.

## **2. Inward investment and local business development**

### **2.1 Partnership working to secure investment in West Suffolk**

In 2013/14 Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury councils worked closely with the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (NALEP) and the Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership (GCGP). In particular we supported their production of the Strategic Economic Plans (SEPs) and European Structural and Investment Funds 2014-20 Strategies. These are important documents since they form part of the LEPs' Growth Deal with Government and will lead to a share of the Government's Local Growth Fund. This fund is available for projects relating to skills, transport and infrastructure and is the only way that councils can access Government funds for such projects. Once the final SEPs are approved by Government, West Suffolk will be working closely with the LEPs and other partners to ensure that our area benefits from this Government and European funding.

We worked closely with Suffolk County Council over the past year to develop the 'Invest in Suffolk' brand. This brand involves a suite of marketing materials and a proactive, co-ordinated and effective inward investment service to support companies seeking to locate to, or expand in, Suffolk. We have also worked with the emerging 'Think Cambridge' brand, which places Greater Cambridge, including West Suffolk, at the top of the esteemed list of forward-thinking European city areas. In addition to this, we continue to work with UK Trade and Investment, the UK national government department that offers free support and independent advice to foreign companies looking to invest or locate in the UK.

### **2.2 Provide advice and support to our businesses**

The Forest Heath Small Business Grant scheme continued to operate and 12 new businesses throughout the district received support in 2013/14. A variety of businesses have been supported including a gardening services enterprise in Lakenheath, a photography studio in West Row, a nursery care business in Mildenhall, a food takeaway in Brandon and a translation services business in Newmarket.

In 2013/14, we continued to deliver successful events such as the West Suffolk Business Festival and the Two Counties Business Exhibition. Our Business Festival is currently the leading event of this kind in the eastern region and last year the two West Suffolk councils worked together with 28 partners to run 25 events with in excess of 1500 people attending over a ten day period.

In January 2014 we established the West Suffolk Business Forum which includes representatives from business support organisations across the area. The Forum enables West Suffolk businesses to speak with a unified voice on issues and topics that affect and benefit us all.

<b><i>Case study – No Toll Tax on Suffolk</i></b>
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We continue to lobby for improvements on behalf of West Suffolk businesses, for example, through opposing the Department for Transport's proposed toll road as part of the upgrading of the A14 in Cambridgeshire. In September 2013 the Suffolk Chamber of Commerce launched the campaign 'No Toll Tax on Suffolk' which we supported. This campaign highlighted the detrimental impact a toll would have on businesses in Suffolk. The campaign was a success. In December 2013 the Government announced that the plans for the toll have been axed and the upgrade will be paid by the national road infrastructure budget.

### **3. Promote our town centres and rural areas as great places in which to live, work and visit**

During 2013/14, we worked with Visit Suffolk to develop new strategic tourism initiatives, for example the new Visit Suffolk website ([www.visitsuffolk.com](http://www.visitsuffolk.com)) which went live in January 2014. The innovative site aims to inspire and inform new and returning visitors about what to see and do in our wonderful county. Visit Suffolk has also launched its 'Take me to Suffolk' campaign which started in January 2014 and ran for 16 weeks to promote Suffolk's off-peak seasons.

We are also working in partnership with Visit Suffolk to promote the tourism attractions in West Suffolk on various platforms and publications including Visit East Anglia, Visit England, Visit Cambridge, British Destinations, and Great Days Out in Cambridge and Beyond. This is in addition to promotion on council and partner websites.

#### **3.1 Enhancing our town centres**

ONE Haverhill is an independent partnership that brings organisations and resources together and supports residents to make the changes they want to see in their town. We are working in partnership with ONE Haverhill to develop a draft town centre plan for Haverhill as part of the Vision 2031 masterplan. In November 2013 planning officers attended a workshop in Haverhill Leisure Centre to discuss, with other representatives from the ONE Haverhill Board, the steps required to produce a draft document for consultation with residents.

We have also worked in partnership with Suffolk County Council and Brandon Town Council to support the Brandon Town Team (which includes shopkeepers, other businesses, voluntary sector and local residents) to revitalise the Brandon Town Centre. Projects over the past year have included the installation of hanging baskets in the main shopping streets, 'Spot the Easter Egg' town trail and a window dressing competition. There have also been improvements made to the Bury Road car park in Brandon as part of the regeneration of the Brandon Centre, which has brought a number of partners together under one roof to improve access to services.

In 2013/14 the Forest Heath Council Shop Front Improvement grant scheme, which offers grants of up to £500, supported nine independent retail outlets to refurbish the front of their shops.

There have been numerous events held over the past year including the Your Merry Mildenhall Christmas Evening and quiz throughout December 2013, support for the Newmarket Retailers' Association Christmas Family Day and quiz, Newmarket Town Council's Christmas Carnival Evening, The Guineas Food Festival summer 2013 and the Christmas Fayre in Brandon.

***Case study – Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre***

The Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre celebrated its tenth anniversary by opening early on the Thursday evening for an additional community event. Once again, the Fayre was well supported by the local community and included local schools taking part in a parade. The event attracted over 100,000 visitors and 180 coaches.

We have also continued to work with partners to deliver car parking initiatives in our towns to boost footfall, especially at quieter periods. A 'free from three' car parking scheme was delivered in partnership with OurBuryStEdmunds and is also on offer in Haverhill. In December 2013 the Haverhill scheme was complemented with additional free parking all day on the two weekends before Christmas.

Other initiatives and events organised in 2013/14 include a Business Improvement Seminar attended by representatives from Newmarket, Mildenhall and Brandon town centres; the opening of The Brandon Centre; delivering WorldHost training to Newmarket (in association with partners); funding the link between the Mildenhall ShopWatch radio scheme and the CCTV central control room and negotiating and agreeing developer contributions towards a branding and digital high street exercise for Newmarket Town Centre (in association with a group of private sector stakeholders).

***Case study – The Home of Horseracing project in Newmarket***

The Home of Horseracing project met its fundraising target of £15 million (a combination of private, public and Heritage Lottery funds) and work started on site in January 2014. The Heritage Centre will offer a world-class museum, art gallery and study centre celebrating the development of the thoroughbred horse and sporting art in Great Britain. It will include a working stable yard with a four-acre paddock for events involving horses, thereby vastly expanding its ability to attract specialist and non-specialist audiences alike. Located right in the heart of Newmarket, Forest Heath is managing the contract for the construction of the Heritage Centre. Once completed it will be run by the National Horseracing Museum, the British Sporting Art Trust and the Retraining of Racehorses charities. The centre will open to the public in early 2016.

**3.2 Markets**

In November 2013 we appointed a Market Development Officer to improve the vitality and increase the offer of our five market towns; Brandon, Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill, Mildenhall and Newmarket. We are planning projects such as promoting the markets to new stallholders and encouraging incubation stalls which is a way for retailers to test the reaction to their products on the market before investing in a shop. We are also delivering events including a local produce market in Haverhill; and events and entertainment as part of the 4<sup>th</sup> July celebrations in Mildenhall and in Newmarket on 31 May for the Guineas 40<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations.

In Bury St Edmunds, the largest street market in the area, stallholders were encouraged to take part in several events including Armed Forces Day, Love Your Local Market Day and the Street Food Festival. The market also joined the Bury Tourism Group and now has their own web page on the Visit Bury St Edmunds website [www.visit-burystedmunds.co.uk](http://www.visit-burystedmunds.co.uk) as well as the opportunity to network with other tourism providers.

#### **4. Improve the skills of the future workforce**

Working with young people and potential employers to support and develop skills needed in the workplace is an equality objective for Forest Heath and during 2013/14 we have worked in partnership with others to increase educational attainment and to improve the skills of the future workforce. We have been working with local schools and Suffolk County Council to deliver the county council's 'Raising the Bar' initiative, targeting the improvement of young people's attainment and aspirations across Suffolk. A pilot scheme teaching the skills and attitudes that are needed in today's employment market is being delivered in schools in Mildenhall and Haverhill, with support from employers in the classrooms.

##### **4.1 Apprenticeship schemes**

We continue to promote and support apprenticeship schemes both within the councils and the wider community. Across Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury councils we have 16 young apprentices (recruited to the apprenticeship posts) and 14 employees completing their apprenticeship training. The council has worked in partnership with West Suffolk College when recruiting apprentices and to provide work-based learning, which includes the apprenticeship qualification, work visits and examinations.

In March 2014 West Suffolk staff attended the Newmarket Jobs and Apprenticeship Fair, by invitation of Matthew Hancock MP. They provided information regarding job vacancies and future apprenticeship opportunities. The event provided an excellent chance to network with local businesses and promote the fact that we have an excellent track record of providing employment and training for young people.

We are also working in partnership with Suffolk County Council to deliver a successful internship programme as part of their 'Raising the Bar' initiative. In 2013/14 interns were employed in Human Resources and in Economic Growth and Development. We are currently working with Suffolk County Council to recruit three more graduate

interns for the summer 2014. The programme enables young people to develop the transferable skills they need in a busy working environment, and gives them opportunities to further develop a career in local government.

<b>Place-shaping, housing and environment 2013/14</b>
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<b>Forest Heath objectives for place-shaping, housing and environment</b>	<b>St Edmundsbury commitments for place-shaping, housing and environment</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide adequate provision in our planning policy framework to meet current and future housing needs.</li> <li>• Help manage the district’s housing stock.</li> <li>• Use our influence to bring empty homes back into use.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the availability of low cost homes.</li> <li>• Enhance and protect our environment and heritage.</li> <li>• Support sustainable transport options.</li> </ul>

## **5. West Suffolk’s place-shaping role**

West Suffolk has taken the lead in working with residents and other stakeholders to develop a vision for the future shape of our towns and rural areas. This has meant working on plans for future provision to balance housing, jobs, leisure and economic development that take account of current and future need and are sensitive to the natural environment. The economic growth components of this work are covered in the Economic Growth chapter: this chapter focuses mainly on the housing aspects of our place-shaping work.

In January 2014 we worked in partnership with the National Housing Federation to deliver a Housing and Economic Growth summit for West Suffolk. Representatives from housing organisations, Greater Cambridgeshire and Greater Peterborough LEP, New Anglia LEP and the Cambridgeshire Chamber of Commerce joined the debate on how a vibrant housing market can support growth and how partnership working can best achieve these aims.

### **5.1 Newmarket Vision**

We are working with the Newmarket residents and businesses to deliver a vision for the town which balances all aspects of its future growth and development. A vision for Newmarket was produced by the Prince’s Foundation for Building Communities and endorsed in July 2013 by Forest Heath District Council. We have committed to working jointly with Suffolk County Council, Newmarket Town Council, other relevant stakeholders and the local community to determine how the actions recommended by the Prince’s Foundation can be implemented. The following four delivery groups have been established and held initial meetings to start this work:

- community planning;
- town centre, retail, local economy and tourism;
- education; and
- traffic and highways.



## **5.2 Vision 2031**

The St Edmundsbury Vision 2031 documents have been through an extensive consultation exercise and were submitted to the Secretary of State in October 2013 for formal examination by the Planning Inspector. Vision 2031 is a comprehensive plan for Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill and rural areas to guide the overall direction of how and where the borough will grow and change. Once adopted, the documents will form part of the council's Local Plan, which establishes where development will take place across the borough over the next 20 years. The final vision documents are likely to be considered for adoption by members in the summer 2014.

As part of Vision 2031 a masterplan for approximately 900 homes in the Fornham All Saints area has been adopted. We are now working with developers and landowners to bring forward masterplans for the other strategic housing sites identified in the Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill and Rural Vision 2031 documents.

### ***Case study – Rural profiling project***

The Rural Profiling Project provides West Suffolk with the information we need to make informed choices about residential development and the affordability of housing in our rural areas. We are carrying out this piece of work in partnership with nine villages and aim to provide parish councils with data to allow them to make informed decisions primarily about housing need and how they address it. Data has been gathered in 2013/14 covering age profiles, household composition, tenure and size of properties, affordability of housing and demand for social housing. The profiling data is now in regular use by strategic housing officers to inform discussions on housing need across West Suffolk with planners, developers and parish councils.

The data is available here:

<http://atlas.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/Housing/WestSuffolk/atlas.html>

## **6. Work with developers and landowners to build affordable homes**

In autumn 2013 both councils adopted a Joint Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The document ensures that developers and other applicants for planning permission have a clear understanding of how much affordable housing will be required on their plot when considering the making of a planning application.

In June 2013, a joint partnership project between Forest Heath District Council, Worlington and Freckenham Parish Councils, Suffolk Housing and Icen Homes resulted in six new affordable homes being built in Worlington. The development was the outcome of a joint Affordable Needs Survey by Freckenham and Worlington parish councils which demonstrated a need for affordable homes in their villages. Each home has been designed and built with energy efficiency, water efficiency and compliance

with the building regulations relating to waste and materials to achieve the level three standard of the Code for Sustainable Homes.

Work has now started on a site which will see 18 affordable homes and a new community centre built in Mildenhall. The St Johns Close redevelopment has come about following the transfer of land, worth around £300,000, and a £445,000 grant from Forest Heath District Council to Orbit East, who received planning permission earlier this year. Orbit will provide 18 affordable rented homes on the site and there will also be two houses for market rent owned by Keystone Development Trust. The trust will use income from these homes to run the new community centre.

The Maltings on Mildenhall Road in Bury St Edmunds was derelict for 15 years and in September 2013 a £4 million redevelopment of the site was officially opened by housing minister Mark Prisk. St Edmundsbury worked with the Havebury Housing Partnership to deliver the development which saw the conversion of a former retail warehouse into 35 affordable homes. We are also working in partnership with Havebury Housing to deliver 12 affordable homes in Mildenhall by redeveloping a derelict building on Mill Street.

## **7. Bring empty properties back into use**

A West Suffolk Empty Homes Strategy was adopted in autumn 2013 which targets empty homes to encourage the property owners to bring homes back into use. We are now targeting homes that have been empty for longer than six months by contacting the owner to find out why the property is empty and to discuss plans for bringing it back into use. Empty homes are monitored by the West Suffolk councils, drawing on expertise from legal, environmental health, council tax and strategic housing officers, as well as local knowledge of ward councillors. We encourage owners of empty properties to consider renting as a solution, either through a private rental agency or a social landlord.

The 2013/14 council tax scheme supports the Empty Homes Strategy by implementing an additional 50% council tax charge for properties that are empty for longer than two years. A full impact review of the scheme will be undertaken in July 2014.

In September 2013 we took action to review our list of properties registered as long term empty on our council tax register. We commissioned Capacity Grid to carry out this piece of work and they identified 72 properties across West Suffolk that were no longer empty and had been brought back into use. Identifying these properties resulted in the generation of an additional £602,772 New Homes Bonus payment, over a six year period, for bringing empty properties back into use.

## **8. Social housing**

The West Suffolk Choice Based Letting Scheme, administered through HomeLink, continues to help our customers looking for social housing in the area. We are

required to consider the needs of applicants and make the best use of housing available whilst assisting applicants in deciding where they would like to live and to find a home that meets their needs.

## **9. Private rented housing**

West Suffolk Lettings Partnership continues to work with private rented sector landlords and letting agents across West Suffolk to support increased access for prospective tenants, including those on the social housing waiting list. During 2013/14 we worked with private landlords and lettings agents to successfully assist 45 households into private rented accommodation.

In March 2014 we invited private landlords and letting agents to a conference to discuss how they can help people in West Suffolk that are looking for a home. The conference was well attended and also offered landlords and letting agents the opportunity to network and learn from each others' experiences.

## **10. Supported housing for homeless people**

The creation of a single West Suffolk Housing Options Team means we are able to offer a more proactive approach to dealing promptly with homeless people. We have staff dedicated to specific geographical areas who have been working during 2013/14 to build on partnerships with other organisations in their locality. In Haverhill we have established a working group including the police to work together to assist rough sleepers to access accommodation and support.

In 2013/14 we also increased the availability of accommodation for homeless people in crisis situations, in line with the aspirations of the Department of Communities and Local Government's 'No Second Night Out' initiative.

### ***Case study – Suffolk Coordination Service***

In July 2013 we worked in partnership with Suffolk County Council to launch the Suffolk Coordination Service, offering access to short-term accommodation-based support for homeless people. Previously each of the 11 schemes in Suffolk had its own application form, meaning the applicant would have to complete at least six forms. The information gathered from the application form was not shared with other providers and not collated.

Following its launch, the Suffolk Coordination Service now offers the following through joint working with providers and support agencies:

- a single application form;
- joint information sharing agreement;
- a single referral support system allowing applicants' support needs to be matched to support providers;
- increased choice of accommodation as a consequence of a whole-Suffolk approach;
- a single source of data in relation to support needs and outcome; and

- collated information on demand and unmet need, which feeds into future development of provision.

The launch of the service has been successful and the team, based at West Suffolk House, has supported 110 customers in West Suffolk with their move into supported accommodation and 12 others were supported to obtain accommodation in other parts of the county. Further information on the service can be found here: [www.suffolkcoordinationservice.org](http://www.suffolkcoordinationservice.org)

## **11. Support people to make improvements to their homes**

### **11.1 Disabled facilities grants**

We continue to support people to improve their homes by providing grant funding for adaptations to allow disabled people to live independently or improvement grants to make their homes warm and safe. In 2013/14 we helped 178 households to make improvements which will improve their health, safety and quality of life. We also use a Suffolk-wide Home Improvement Agency that specialises in various services for vulnerable residents. In 2013/14 they dealt with over 6000 enquiries, with over 1500 completed jobs in West Suffolk.

### **11.2 Warmer homes**

Approximately 11% of households in West Suffolk are thought to be in fuel poverty and in response we have been active participants in the countywide fuel poverty programme, Suffolk Warm Homes Healthy People. The programme aims to help alleviate fuel poverty by bringing together a range of home-based services provided by public, voluntary and charitable organisations.

The programme originally ran for two years with Department of Health funding and was able to continue to deliver in 2013/14 with support from the newly formed Public Health Suffolk, funding from UK Power Networks and other partner support including The Suffolk Foundation. This year, the programme provided energy advice to over 230 vulnerable households in West Suffolk with 117 receiving financial support to pay for home energy costs.

### **11.3 Energy efficiency**

During 2013/14 we worked with the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership to secure funding from the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC). The fund helped to launch the Green Deal in Suffolk and we participated in a test of the Green Deal approach supported by Aran Services Ltd, a West Suffolk-based Green Deal provider and installer. The assessments provided householders with a valuable insight into the most cost-effective measures for improving their home energy efficiency.

In March 2014, the countywide partnership secured £3.5 million from the DECC Green Deal Communities Fund to support the delivery of the Suffolk Energy Action campaign. The campaign will support up to 500 households in West Suffolk (up to 2,000 across Suffolk) to make energy saving improvements to their homes such as

solid wall insulation, cavity wall insulation and replacement boilers. It will also enable local plumbing, heating and building businesses to gain accreditation to undertake this work, supporting the development of the local green economy and enabling local firms to benefit through the project from its outset. We will be actively promoting the energy efficiency programme to residents in West Suffolk.

## **12. Encourage businesses to reduce their water and energy use**

In 2013/14 we have supported seven businesses in West Suffolk to become more resource efficient through the Greener Business Grant. Improvements supported by the grant included wall and roof insulation, replacing windows and installing Building Management Systems. This investment is predicted to deliver lifetime business savings of £88,160 for the businesses and an annual CO2 reduction of 419 tonnes.

As part of the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership, we are able to access expert advice on behalf of small and medium sized business provided by our partner, Groundwork Suffolk. During the year, 39 businesses in West Suffolk received advice on how to cut costs and improve their environmental performance. Groundwork Suffolk identified over £184,000 of annual business savings through energy and water efficiency which could result in a CO2 reduction of 889 tonnes.

## **13. Reduce the level of environmental pollutants that impact on health**

We have a duty to monitor for specified air pollutants under Local Air Quality Management Regulations. Nitrogen Dioxide, associated with road transport, is monitored at 43 sites in West Suffolk using diffusion tubes at a number of locations. In 2012 Forest Heath adopted an action plan covering the town centre in Newmarket because levels of Nitrogen Dioxide exceeded the National Air Quality Objective. Levels recorded during 2013 have improved in Newmarket although two locations remained marginally above the objective. We continue to work with other key organisations including Suffolk County Council to deliver further improvements to meet the objective.

During 2013/14 progress was made to develop the charging infrastructure needed to support the deployment of low carbon and electric vehicles. The Suffolk Climate Change Partnership has been successful in gaining grant funding to supply and install rapid charging posts as part of a government programme. Rapid chargers enable longer journeys to be made, boosting drivers' confidence in switching to cleaner electric vehicles. This funding will be matched by private sector partners meaning the project will be delivered at no cost to the councils. Discussions are now under way to identify suitable locations in West Suffolk to host the charging points.

### ***Case Study – Fleet management***

In 2013/14 we were awarded the Motorvate Silver award for Carbon Reduction within our fleet operations. The Motorvate award is an annual independent calculation and

verification of the carbon footprint administered by the Energy Saving Trust and endorsed by the Department for Transport. It measures the total mileage for the grey fleet and company vehicles up to 3.5 tonnes and found a 13.9% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

As part of our statutory responsibilities, we dealt with 269 requests to investigate environmental pollution during 2013/14. These included complaints associated with land contamination and assessments of the potential impact of redevelopment.

We are also responsible for monitoring the quality of private drinking water supplies and where necessary ensuring that action is taken to ensure its fitness. During 2013/14, we carried out over 3,100 individual tests, of which 89 failed to meet the standards set out in the regulations. Remedial action was immediately taken.

## **14. Encourage less waste and more recycling in West Suffolk**

### **14.1 Working with local schools to encourage recycling**

We are keen to support and encourage positive behaviours across West Suffolk and continue to provide recycling presentations to a range of groups. Throughout 2013/14 we have worked alongside school children from a number of local schools.

In a separate initiative, in the summer 2013, we supported pupils at St Marys School, Mildenhall in the "Bag it bin it" campaign to raise awareness about, and to target, owners who let their dogs foul the area. We erected signs and a dog bin after a request from the school council.

### **14.2 'Plastics know your place' campaign**

As part of the Suffolk Waste Partnership, we have been supporting the 'Plastics know your place' campaign by liaising with supermarkets across West Suffolk to help spread the message about which plastics can be recycled and where. Colourful shelf labels were strategically placed around the stores to help remind shoppers which plastics can be recycled in their kerbside collection and which plastics should be taken to their local recycling centre.

The campaign has been hugely successful, with early results indicating that plastics, recycling has increased by up to 20% and there have been over 80,000 views of the Suffolk plastics video on YouTube since the campaign was launched.

### **14.3 Community litter picks**

We have also provided support to, and worked with, many community groups and organisations on a range of waste, recycling and litter activities. The 2013 Spring Clean campaign encouraged people to participate in local clean up events across the county to reduce litter and improve the local environment. It formed part of Suffolk County Council's 'Creating the Greenest County' initiative which aims to respond to climate change and enhance the natural and historic environment. In West Suffolk approximately 425 volunteers collected over 400 bags of rubbish.

As part of this initiative, in April 2013 the Bury St Edmunds Volunteer Police Cadets assisted with a community project to help clear-up a neglected area of Rougham Hill woods on the edge of the town. They were assisted by members of the Bury St Edmunds Safer Neighbourhood Team, borough councillors and local residents. Meanwhile, members of the USAF stationed at RAF Lakenheath organised a litter pick and with 30 volunteers they were able to collect 30 bags of rubbish in Lakenheath.

#### **14.4 Supporting other community events**

We have provided support to organise roadshows to promote plastics recycling and composting, and also participated at other community events such as America Recycles Day at RAF Mildenhall, Families Day at RAF Honington and the Horringer Middle School Community Day.

Two compost awareness events at the Rougham Hill Household Waste Recycling Centre and East Town Park in Haverhill involved compost giveaways and home composting demonstrations.

In January and February 2014 we worked with the 'Rubbish Friends' to promote community action on litter hotspots. The Rubbish Friends is a group of local women who spend their Friday mornings litter picking in Newmarket and surrounding villages. Every week they pick up to 15 bags of rubbish which is then collected by West Suffolk's waste team, who have also supplied them with litter-pickers, gloves and bin bags. The aim of the initiative is to encourage other small groups to apply to their Council for litter picking equipment and to go out regularly to help keep Suffolk clean.

<b>Communities and wellbeing 2013/14</b>
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<b>Forest Heath objectives for communities and wellbeing</b>	<b>St Edmundsbury commitments for communities and wellbeing</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the level and quality of community participation in decisions.</li> <li>• Strengthen and support parish councils and community and voluntary groups across the district.</li> <li>• Work with the community and partners to help meet the needs of Brandon residents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce crime and the fear of crime.</li> <li>• Improve life opportunities.</li> <li>• Improve people’s physical and mental health.</li> <li>• Make the best use of community facilities.</li> </ul>

**15. Work to support and strengthen communities across West Suffolk**

In December 2013 a West Suffolk strategy for Families and Communities was adopted by both councils and is being used as the framework for reshaping the relationship between the councils and our communities. It aims to foster resilience in local communities and will address the dependency culture which can build up when a council is seen as the first port of call for an issue. Providing support early, rather than when there is a crisis, is a preventative approach which is both better for the community and families and reduces the demand placed on public services.

To support this strategy, we have adopted a locality-based model of working, led by councillors and supported by staff. This approach has been reflected in the recent staff restructure which has created a Families and Communities team to be the first, but not the only, source of officer support to councillors working in their communities.

**15.1 Engage with community groups to build capacity and increase confidence in their communities**

We want to do more to support community and voluntary activity across West Suffolk and help empower communities that want to get on and do the things that will strengthen and grow their own communities.

In 2013/14 we held several parish and town conferences and forums across West Suffolk. The events provide an opportunity for us to update residents on the current and upcoming initiatives in West Suffolk, and they enable us to discuss and work through areas of difficulty together. These events have opened discussions regarding what parish and town councils can offer their residents and also addressed matters such as parish precepts, the need for neighbourhood plans and delivering superfast broadband. The Forest Heath Parish Forum now uses the Asset Based Community



Development principles as a way of solving community problems and there has been a noticeable increase in turnout since the format was changed.

Jubilee Park, on the former Clements Primary School site in Haverhill, opened in October 2013 after local residents got together to say how they wanted the site to be used. This has resulted in new open space, play park and allotments that are linked to the neighbourhood with a network of paths, as well as open parkland. The Jubilee Park has officially been designated as a Queen Elizabeth II Fields In Trust Site, part of a flagship UK-wide programme to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee and London Olympic and Paralympic Games, as well as the 2014 Commonwealth Games, by permanently protecting outdoor recreational spaces in the Jubilee Year.

Mildenhall Museum opened its doors in October 2013. The £1million development features new exhibition spaces, an area for community activities, contemporary exhibits and a unique setting and exhibit for the Lakenheath Warrior and his Horse. The museum is managed by over 60 volunteers and the project was led by them with support from Forest Heath District Council. The main funding for the project was from Forest Heath, Heritage Lottery Fund, Suffolk County Council and the Museum itself.

We work in partnership with the 'In Bloom groups' and have supported the following projects.

- Haverhill in Bloom: St Mary's Church, in Mill Lane, Haverhill, is having its churchyard revitalised in a joint effort by Haverhill in Bloom, St Edmundsbury and local primary school pupils. New lamps, fencing and printed artworks are going to be erected on the site. There will also be picture boards, designed by primary school children, of images depicting old photographs of Haverhill to brighten up the view. The project will be completed by spring 2015.
- Bury in Bloom wolf sculpture: A sculpture embodying the wolf from the legend of St Edmund, as depicted in a number of logos and crests belonging to organisations in the town, was erected on the Southgate Green roundabout in November 2013. The statue sits on one of the important gateways into Bury St Edmunds and signifies the heritage of Bury St Edmunds and the story of St Edmund. The Bury in Bloom project was funded by Bennett Homes, Bury Town Council, Our Bury St Edmunds, St Edmundsbury Borough Council and Suffolk County Councillor locality budgets.

## **15.2 Work with communities to develop new and retain existing assets in community ownership**

We are working with community groups across West Suffolk to explore options for owning and managing community facilities. Where communities own their own assets, this can allow them to access sources of finance that are unavailable to councils, improve buildings through re-investment of profits and develop valuable skills. The community assets owned by the West Suffolk councils are being reviewed and support is offered to interested parties regarding the development of business plans, implementing governance and other relevant matters.

Discussions have been held with the River of Life Church, and its charitable arm REACH, regarding the transfer of the Chalkstone Community Centre in Haverhill. The church submitted an application to Can Do Communities, a community development support service, to access pre-feasibility funding to work on the transfer. The Locality Officer for Haverhill is now working with the church. The project aims to maintain the centre as a community space for hire while also allowing the delivery of some of the REACH services on the Chalkstone estate.

We are supporting the Kentford and Kennett Parish Councils to develop a new community facility. In February 2014 a community lunch was held to bring residents of both villages together to input ideas about the future of a hall for the villages. The session helped capture feedback from the community regarding how they would use a facility and what contributions they could make to its running. This information will help the Village Hall group to work with the communities to decide on a location and enable both villages to own and manage the venue.

We are working with the Jubilee Park Allotment Association in Haverhill regarding a 25 year lease of the site. This follows the successful agreement in May 2013 with the Manor Road Allotment Association to lease the Manor Road allotment site in Haverhill for ten years. The lease provides the plot holders with a greater say in how the site is managed and the setting of rents.

We are also in negotiations with Little Buds Pre School regarding the future management of Studlands Park Community Centre in Newmarket. The first stage has been for the pre-school to take on a Licence to Occupy which has seen them become responsible for the operational management of the community centre. Following a £50,000 refurbishment of the facility last summer, terms are being drawn up and we are supporting Little Buds with business planning with the ultimate aim of them entering into a long term lease of the building.

Following on from the opening of the Brandon Centre in September 2013, Fledgelings Pre School now find themselves seeking alternative premises as Suffolk County Council look to close the old Community Centre. Working in partnership with Fledgelings and Can Do Communities, we are facilitating the transfer of a redundant youth centre in the town to establish a long term solution for the pre-school and early years provision in the town.

### **15.3 Strengthen and support community groups with grant and locality funding**

In 2013/14 we continued to support groups that are active within their communities with funding from locality budgets and community grants.

St Edmundsbury provided ONE Haverhill with £50,000 to be made available as community grants of up to £5000 to which groups can apply. The following are some examples of community grants administered in 2013/14 by ONE Haverhill.

- Haverhill Gymnastics Club – £5000 towards the funding of a new purpose-built gymnastics facility for Haverhill which will be run in partnership with Samuel Ward Academy.
- ONE Haverhill Youth Skills Project – £4500 for ONE Haverhill’s One Stop Shop youth hub to help with the costs of developing and promoting the facility.
- Catch 22, Suffolk Positive Futures – £4324 towards the cost of delivering sports sessions for young people aged ten to 19 at Haverhill Leisure Centre.
- CB9 Media Hub – £2490 towards a project to deliver Arts Award sessions to youngsters aged 12 to 25.
- Haverhill Town Council – £2470 towards a Games Jam Event for young people at the Arts Centre and a website for the project being developed by young people in the town.
- Centre Stage Company – £1000 towards a scenic projection system to deliver projected images and scenery for stage productions.
- Haverhill Cricket Club – £500 towards replacing the club’s 50 year old heavy roller required to provide a safe and quality pitch for all the club’s teams.

In March 2014 Forest Heath set up a commissioning budget specifically for organisations to submit bids to help people stay out of financial trouble rather than picking up the pieces when there’s a crisis. Suffolk West Citizens Advice Bureaux was successful in bidding for £20,000 from the budget and will use the funding to provide community-based financial training across Mildenhall and Brandon.

Throughout 2013/14 over 60 community projects have been supported with funding from the Forest Heath councillor locality budgets. Projects range from workshops for parents and kit for sports clubs through to capital projects such as play areas and community hall improvements. The following projects have received help through funding.

<b>Locality budget projects in 2013/14</b>	
• Extra-curricular school visits for Newmarket College.	• Gazeley Grow and Show community horticultural project.
• Development of a community space for Go Wild in Newmarket.	• Improved facilities at St James, Icklingham.
• The Bill Tutte Memorial, Newmarket.	• Community speed watch scheme in Tuddenham St Mary.
• Christmas outing for Newmarket Rainbow Cadets.	• Senior festive lunch in Red Lodge.
• Children’s Christmas at the Studlands Park Sports and Social Club.	• Support for the Red Lodge Turnpike community newsletter.
• Support for the Newmarket Kidszone visits and trips.	• Christmas Community activities for the Lakenheath Playing Fields Association.
• Equipment for the ‘Children’s Activities Newmarket’ school holiday play scheme.	• Musical instruments for the junior Lakenheath Silver Band.
• Support the development of a literacy area at the Little Buds Pre	• Red Cross first aid equipment for events.
	• Community outreach work for

### Locality budget projects in 2013/14

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>School.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legends of the Turf heritage trail.</li> <li>• Support for the Laureate School Community Library.</li> <li>• Brandon Carnival.</li> <li>• Play equipment for lunch and breakfast club at Brandon pre-school.</li> <li>• Improve street scene in Brandon.</li> <li>• New kit for Brandon Lads and Lasses.</li> <li>• Equipment and member recruitment for the Brandon Foto-Imaging Group.</li> <li>• Unity in Diversity.</li> <li>• Keystone development trust.</li> <li>• Support for Band Exchange.</li> <li>• Secured fencing for Brandon Allotment Association.</li> <li>• Led rides for the visually impaired at Mildenhall Cycling Club.</li> <li>• Coaching equipment for Mildenhall Athletic Football Club.</li> <li>• Coaching equipment for Mildenhall under 10's Football Club.</li> <li>• Prepare to cook classes for 6 to 15 year olds.</li> <li>• Equipment for the toddler group at Mildenhall Baptist Church.</li> <li>• Outdoor fitness equipment for the Outdoor Gym Beck Row Community Association.</li> <li>• New kitchen equipment for the West Row West Row Playing Field &amp; Village Hall Association.</li> <li>• Guest speakers at the University of the Third Age.</li> <li>• Development of a scout hut for the Newmarket Scouts.</li> <li>• Leeway community arts exhibition.</li> <li>• Visit to Bressingham for the First Newmarket Rainbows.</li> <li>• Upgrade to the Barton Mills Football Club changing rooms.</li> </ul> | <p>Creative Arts East.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvements to the Freckenham Village Hall.</li> <li>• Promotional materials for Credit Union.</li> <li>• Enhanced public open space for Men of Faith.</li> <li>• Forest Heath Sports Partnership development of young sports leaders.</li> <li>• Community litter pick for Dalham Village Hall Committee.</li> <li>• Coaching for Panthers Football Club.</li> <li>• Heaters for St Mary's Church in Newmarket.</li> <li>• Books for the Newmarket Festival Committee reading project.</li> <li>• 'Your Town' tourist guide for Newmarket Library.</li> <li>• Newmarket swimming club volunteer training.</li> <li>• Contribution towards the new mini bus for Brandon Seniors Club.</li> <li>• Brandon in Bloom volunteer planting</li> <li>• New practice nets for Mildenhall Cricket Club.</li> <li>• Contribution towards the new mini bus for the Voluntary Network.</li> <li>• New goals for The Eagle Football Club</li> <li>• After school club equipment for The Wacky Snacky Club.</li> <li>• Access improvements for Kentford Church.</li> <li>• The Newmarket Community Choir 'Song Box' project.</li> <li>• The Substance Misuse Youth project for the Matthew Project.</li> <li>• Newmarket Town Twinning Association 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations.</li> <li>• Breckland Crime Crackers youth project.</li> <li>• Mildenhall Flower Club community event.</li> </ul> |
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The locality budget scheme is being introduced in St Edmundsbury in 2014/15 and members will receive a budget of £2500 each to be used as grants for community groups.

In 2013/14 St Edmundsbury offered rural community grants to the following groups.

- Fornham All Saints Community Council (£1849 towards replacement windows).
- Pakenham Village Hall and Playing Field Association (£1000 towards improved storage facilities to ease us of hall hirers).
- Bradfield St George Village Hall (£626 for improvements to the façade to tackle damp).
- Hargrave Village Hall (£700 towards improved heating).
- Cavendish Cricket Club (£3020 towards replacement practice nets and wicket).

Four applications for grants between £4,000 and £10,000 have also been given to the following groups (subject to match funding being secured).

- Cowlinge Village Hall (£4260 towards a replacement floor).
- Great Barton Thanksgiving Fund (£5000 towards a new foyer and access to the Village Hall).
- Bardwell Playing Field Association (£8718 towards the expansion of the playing fields and creation of further parking).
- Barnham Parish Council (£7000 towards the cost of outdoor physical activity equipment for all ages).

## **16. Provide activities and support for young people in West Suffolk**

The West Suffolk Business Festival (see the Economic Growth section, above) isn't only aimed at local businesses and our partners; we also supported a young person's element known as 'Fresh Festival'. The event attracted over 400 young people and was attended by schools and colleges and featured over 40 local, interesting and creative businesses.

We continued to support the 'On the Spot' project which regularly engages with young people in Haverhill. The project attracts up to 60 young people a night and there is a new team of youth workers working on the project who are successfully engaging with young people. The project has secured a further three years of funding from Haverhill Town Council, West Suffolk Community Safety Partnership and St Edmundsbury.

We also organised a 2013 summer programme in Forest Heath that offered health improvement activities for young people with health messaging being delivered throughout the activity. Stories with healthy messages were told in the Newmarket Memorial Garden and Brandon Country Park. Stories included The Very Hungry Caterpillar and The Barnyard Dance, encouraging the children to eat fruit and vegetables and get up and moving.

### ***Case Study – Yew Tree Drive Play Area***

In February 2014 a new play area, designed by the pupils at a local school, opened on Yew Drive in Brandon. The pupils from Glade Primary School were asked what they would like to see at the park and had the chance to judge designs.

The park features modern integrated play equipment that fits in with the woodland surroundings. Children, from toddlers to young teenagers, will be able to climb, swing and play on the new equipment, which has been built using timber and other materials which blend into their wooded environment.

The scheme, funded by Forest Heath District Council, cost £53,000

Autumn 2013 also saw a fourth annual tour of Lullaby Concerts. The series of activities reached many young children, parents and carers, and early years practitioners. The essence of the project was about bringing an inspirational first experience of live orchestral music to young children and families, particularly in rural areas, whilst developing the skills of early years practitioners and parents to encourage the sustained use of music as a means of learning and play. In Forest Heath the workshops took place at three nursery settings in Beck Row, Lakenheath and Brandon with the concerts held at the Memorial Hall in Newmarket.

Supporting young people, especially those living in rural areas is an equality objective for St Edmundsbury and we have continued to work with young people in rural areas, through the WOS Up rural outreach programme which is now in its fifth year. The rural youth project has now delivered over 70 sessions in the rural areas engaging with over 800 young people. The WOS Up van is fitted out with sports equipment, laptops with free internet access and there are youth workers on hand to organise activities and to provide information on health and other issues. The feedback from young people using the service has been excellent.

In 2013/14 we delivered Crucial Crew events to over 1000 year six children in Mildenhall Stadium and West Suffolk College. The events teach valuable lessons in keeping safe and were delivered in partnership with the Forest Heath Crime Prevention Panel, Police, Suffolk County Council, Abbeycroft Leisure, Track off, Fire and Rescue Service, British Red Cross, the Women's Institute and West Suffolk Environmental Health team.

### ***Case Study – Bury St Edmunds skate park***

Work to rebuild a skatepark in Bury St Edmunds is well under way and is on target to complete by Easter 2014. This has been a huge undertaking for the Bury Skatepark Experience charity, supported by council staff, which raised funds of £250,000 from the following funders:

- St Edmundsbury Borough Council - £108,000;
- Biffa – Landfill Tax Credits - £50,000;
- Bury St Edmunds Town Council - £20,000;
- Bury Skate Park Experience (raised locally) - £12,000; and
- Havebury Housing Community Funding - £10,000.

## **17. Community Safety**

Both councils are partners of the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership and through successful applications to the partnership have had 14 projects commissioned. Here are some examples to give a flavour of partnership working across the area.

- An individual has been granted funding to establish a Freedom Programme in Brandon which is a support programme for victims of domestic abuse (a service identified as a gap within this area).
- St Mary's Primary School in Mildenhall, through its Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), has been granted funding for diversionary activities for communities in and around the school. The PTA has identified the school as a community asset and as such is developing a programme of diversionary activities during school holidays.
- 'Reduce the Strength' campaign. Following a successful pilot in Ipswich, this voluntary campaign was promoted by off licences in St Edmundsbury in February 2014. The campaign is being led by Suffolk Police with the support of St Edmundsbury, Suffolk County Council, NHS Suffolk and East of England Co-operative Society. The aim of the campaign is to promote responsible retailing, reduce alcohol related anti-social behaviour and reduce alcohol related harm.
- The Caring Dads programme focuses on helping men recognise attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours that support healthy and unhealthy father-child relationships, develop skills for interacting with children in healthy ways, and appreciate the impact on children of controlling, intimidating, abusive and neglectful actions including witnessing domestic violence. This 17 week programme supports families at an early stage with an aim of reducing demand on public services if unhealthy relationships are allowed to flourish. Eight facilitators will be trained to work in West Suffolk and programmes will be running from summer 2014.

The funding for the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership has changed following the election of a Police and Crime Commissioner for Suffolk. The Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership will be reviewing their way of working during 2014/15.

Our CCTV service continues to keep our towns safe and support police activities. We currently monitor a total of 138 cameras across St Edmundsbury, Forest Heath and in Stowmarket for Mid Suffolk District Council. In October 2013 the CCTV team was given an award for their support and assistance to the Suffolk Constabulary in Forest Heath. The service operates all year round and in 2013 the CCTV service dealt with over 2000 incidents in West Suffolk with over 200 of these related to serious offences.

## **Community safety case study**

In 2013 street drinking and issues associated with late night drinking were raised by the Newmarket community and adopted as a Safer Neighbourhood Team priority. A formal application to consult on a Designated Public Place Order (DPPO) for Newmarket High Street was received from the Town Council.

Evidence of issues was shown through comprehensive crime statistics and in partnership with the Newmarket Town Council consultation took place throughout December and January. The consultation results show that the community supports a DPPO for Newmarket and the Locality Officer for this area will now be progressing with the next stages of application.

## **18. Promote healthy living in West Suffolk**

### **18.1 Health and Wellbeing**

The Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board comprises councillors and staff from Suffolk County Council, local clinical commissioning groups, NHS England, HealthWatch, the police, the voluntary sector and district and borough councils. West Suffolk has a seat on the board and our portfolio holders with health and wellbeing responsibilities alternate the seat yearly to help ensure a voice for West Suffolk on local health issues. The Suffolk Health and Wellbeing board has four strategic outcomes.

**Outcome one:** Every child in Suffolk has the best start in life.

**Outcome two:** Suffolk residents have access to a healthy environment and take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing.

**Outcome three:** Older people in Suffolk have a good quality of life.

**Outcome four:** People in Suffolk have the opportunity to improve their mental health and wellbeing.

To support the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing outcomes, Forest Heath has a Health and Wellbeing Forum which St Edmundsbury and other local organisations attend. The forum has funded, with support from Forest Heath locality funding, the following in 2013/14.

- Leading Lives, Newmarket, to purchase tools and equipment to work on allotments at the New Cheveley Road site.
- Anglia Community Leisure to deliver Explore Outdoor in two schools within Forest Heath.
- Prepare to Cook, to offer free cooking taster sessions for children ages 6-12 years in Brandon and Mildenhall.

Supporting and implementing solutions for those that struggle to access council services is an equality objective for Forest Heath. In October 2013 council representatives attended the Suffolk Disability Involvement day to discuss with residents with a disability about the services which affect their everyday lives. The



event was hosted by Suffolk Joint Diversity Working Group in conjunction with Forest Heath, St Edmundsbury and other organisations and was a great success with over 150 people attending.

We have also worked with partners, Suffolk Community Healthcare, West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group and Age UK to develop a business case for the Otago project in Suffolk. The Otago project is a supported exercise programme designed to help increase the strength and balance of older people to prevent falls. The councils provide support to the project co-ordinator and any sessions held across West Suffolk.

Forest Heath supported Lark Children's Centre in Mildenhall to replicate the breastfeeding support offered in Brandon and further complemented by the Healthy Weaning Sessions from 16 weeks old. The first weaning session in Mildenhall was attended by over 20 parents.

### ***Case study - Type 2 diabetes awareness***

Working in partnership with agencies which support health, care and welfare of Brandon residents is an equality objective for Forest Heath. In the summer 2013 we commissioned Diabetes UK staff to complete diabetes risk assessments in Brandon and also in Haverhill. The community engagement team from the East of England Ambulance Service also joined in the events by offering blood pressure checks and finding out the public's opinion of the service.

The evaluation showed the following; during the Haverhill event, Diabetes UK risk assessed 22 people and referred 17 to their doctor, a referral rate of 77%. During the Brandon event they risk assessed 12 and referred nine to their doctor, a referral rate of 75%.

## **18.2 Encourage access to cultural, sporting and leisure facilities**

We have built on the success of the 'Out and About' brochure and website with the launch of [www.westsuffolkdiary.co.uk](http://www.westsuffolkdiary.co.uk) in February 2014. This new website gives details of events taking place across West Suffolk with a number of organisations and with it comes the additional benefit of being able to book tickets online for all events. There is also a central point for telephone sales and ticket enquiries which improves the experience of booking for events. The website is supported by a brochure and marketing, together with information posted on Facebook and Twitter.

Partners across West Suffolk, including professional arts organisations and local authority representatives, collaborated on a comprehensive programme of activities in the area with the aim of focusing on a quality holiday offer. The Families Arts Festival encouraged people to attend and participate in the arts as part of the autumn half term holiday. Thirty-five events and exhibitions were held across West Suffolk with an estimated 8000 attendees. The partners included Theatre Royal, Smiths Row, West Suffolk arts and heritage team, The Apex and St Edmundsbury Cathedral. The group was supported and funded by the Arts Council Bridge Organisation.

The Apex has continued to host a range of events and attracted world-class musicians and entertainers. The highlights from this financial year have included Bellowhead, The Proclaimers and guitarist John Williams. Visitor figures have also steadily increased for regular shows such as the Academy of Ancient Music. Three course meals on events nights are now available which will add to the customer enjoyment of their visit to The Apex. We are also expanding the use of The Apex by opening the upstairs bar areas to informal groups and clubs. A book club, bridge club and chess club now regularly meet there and we would like to further develop community use in the future.

Access to The Apex for community events and local and world-class music contributes to health and wellbeing, alongside other facilities in West Suffolk such as parks and open spaces, the theatre and art gallery. It also contributes significantly to the local economy through attracting people who support local businesses and the provision of jobs.

### ***Case study –Park Run***

Park Run is a national initiative which sees free, timed 5km runs organised across the country every Saturday morning. The event takes place in Brandon Country Park and Nowton Park with a large group of volunteers helping to organise and supervise an early morning run.

The Brandon Park Run received some funding from Forest Heath Council to buy timing equipment and attend first aid training. During 2013/14 the Brandon Park Run held 51 events with over 1700 people attending. St Edmundsbury supported Abbeycroft Leisure to form the Bury St Edmunds Park Run at Nowton Park. The first event was held in June 2013 and the event has been a success with over 4150 people attending the 42 events in 2013/14.

The volunteers also help to make the event fun by encouraging people to dress up at Christmas and Halloween. A great example of the community coming together to provide activities for fellow residents and visitors.

## Efficient councils 2013/14

<b>Forest Heath objectives for efficient councils</b>	<b>St Edmundsbury commitments for efficient councils</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure value for money.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create unified, coherent and accessible service delivery across West Suffolk.</li> <li>• Continue to make efficiencies to meet our annual savings target.</li> <li>• Develop staff and councillor skills.</li> <li>• Proactively target external funding and look to generate more income where appropriate.</li> </ul>

### **19. Changes to our finances**

Whilst we remain two councils, with two separate budgets, there are many similarities in our approach to meeting the financial challenges that we face. We are therefore working together to implement new financial models, build common strategies, and to share learning from one another in designing new approaches to public service delivery. We were pleased to be able to freeze council tax for 2013/14 in Forest Heath for the third consecutive year and St Edmundsbury for the fourth. We continue to make the savings through sound financial management and innovative use of funding whilst investing to the benefit of our communities.

We are delighted that in February 2014 our two portfolio holders for resources and performance were recognised for working together to save local tax payers millions of pounds. Councillors Stephen Edwards and David Ray were given a joint award for their outstanding contribution to financial performance by the Local Government Information Unit and CCLA, specialist investment management for charities, faith organisations and local authorities.

#### **19.1 Changes in the local government finance system**

April 2013 marked a new era in the way that local government is funded. The Government introduced the Business Rates Retention Scheme and the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme. It also gave new powers for councils to reduce the levels of council tax discount and exemptions for second homes and some classes of empty properties. We continue to receive a Revenue Support Grant (RSG) from the Government; however this funding continues to be reduced significantly with around a 48% reduction predicted over the next two financial years. We are shifting the focus from RSG funding to more locally incentivised streams such as the Suffolk pool for business rate retention and New Homes Bonus funding.

The 2012 Welfare Reform Act came into effect in April 2013, abolishing Council Tax Benefit (CTB) and replaced it with a requirement for local councils to create a Local Council Tax Reduction (LCTR) scheme. The new LCTR scheme is funded by the Government with a cash limited annual grant which is 10% less than previously received under the CTB scheme. In West Suffolk, the shortfall in funding is met in part from working age claimants, to incentivise employment; new changes to council tax exemptions on second homes and long term empty properties, which will encourage owners to bring empty properties back into use.

The Government's new scheme of Business Rate Retention was introduced to incentivise councils to drive economic growth, as local authorities now retain a share of the growth. Both West Suffolk councils joined the Suffolk Pool with five other district councils and Suffolk County Council. Pooling the business rates provides an incentive for Suffolk councils to collaborate to achieve growth in the region. This is being monitored closely to understand the risks and rewards as the scheme progresses.

The New Homes Bonus is paid each year for six years from 2011; the total allocation for Forest Heath is £1,679,000 and £757,000 for St Edmundsbury. It's based on the amount of extra council tax revenue raised for new-build homes, conversions and long-term empty homes brought back into use. There is also an extra payment for providing affordable homes. This grant has been earmarked by both councils as reserves, the use of which will be considered as part of delivering the sustainable joint Medium Term Financial Strategy and the delivery of the new 2014-16 Strategic Plan.

## **19.2 Local initiatives to attract external funding to support council budgets and deliver capital projects**

In April 2014 Forest Heath were awarded a £42,000 Government grant to contribute to the development of the Mildenhall HUB project. The funding was awarded following an application to the Transformation Challenge Award programme, administered by the Department of Communities and Local Government

During 2013/14 we were also given grant funding from the Creative Employment Programme which allows us to recruit two creative apprentices and one intern working within community based activities alongside our locality officers. West Suffolk continues to work across the area promoting apprenticeship schemes within our small business networks and at Job and Apprenticeship Fairs across the region.

Forest Heath District Council in partnership with Mid Suffolk District Council have secured a grant from the British Film Institute of £6,600 to engage a co-ordinator to expand the development of the project and engage more communities in screening films in their village halls

St Edmundsbury received a generous £40,000 donation from a local benefactor to revamp the water garden in the Abbey Gardens. The donation is being used to refresh

the area by replanting, installing new fencing, relining the pond, and remodel the shelters to provide a walk-through from the garden to the bowling green.

## **20. Reshape public service delivery in West Suffolk**

### **20.1 Shared services**

The completion of shared services delivered an additional £1.2 million saving across both councils in 2013/14 above what each council had achieved alone. The new single staff structure with a new single pay range and terms and conditions will also deliver year-on-year savings of £3.5 million.

In April 2013 a new pay and reward package was agreed with Unison to align staff from Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury. The employment package for all employees across both organisations included pay and grading, a new approach to job evaluation and pay protection, annual leave and hours of work, allowances, lease cars, sickness and other miscellaneous arrangements. It also included a commitment to pay the national living wage, as a minimum. The Unison ballot in April 2013 saw 91% voting in favour of acceptance despite the impact of a shorter pay range.

This began the implementation of a transformation to a new fully integrated staffing structure, the second phase of which began in July 2013. Post restructure all staff moved to a single agreed contract of employment with shared terms and conditions. By December 2013 we had successfully restructured two staff organisations and adopted in full the single pay and reward strategy.

Work is now underway to revise and review the staff performance management systems and produce a new Performance Review scheme which will drive our values and behaviours and manage staff performance. The new system will underpin the 'no boundaries' approach to our work, where skills can be recognised and used outside of an individual's service area when necessary, helping to increase the overall capacity of the organisation.

### **20.2 Streamlined service delivery**

#### **20.2.1 Customer access**

We didn't just work on sharing a staff structure, we also shared telephone, IT and customer access systems in 2013/14, giving us the flexibility to work at any location while residents can still contact their council on familiar numbers. In support of this work, our staff email addresses changed from the individual councils to '@westsuffolk'. One staff body means it doesn't matter which council employs us, we work across boundaries (service and geographic), and support councillors, residents and businesses from both council areas.

A new customer contact platform has been implemented and will be further developed to change the way our customers access council services with more focus on self-service through the use of our websites. We acknowledge that 'going online' is not possible for all customers and the new customer services team is now in full operation

providing frontline assistance on behalf of most services. Business Process Re-engineering has streamlined operations, enabling shared working while keeping individual identities.

We have also implemented a new joined-up approach to booking and marketing events. Events officers are now responsible for all events across our Leisure Culture and Communities team and are supported by a Web and Social Media Officer who will focus on the marketing of events. Staff in the team have been trained on Artifax, event management software which is now being used for all events across West Suffolk resulting in a more efficient event management process. This measure means that information only has to be inputted once, event attendees can be centrally monitored and there will be one point of contact for customers.

### ***Case study – car parking***

In January 2014 every council-run car park in St Edmundsbury achieved national accreditation through the Park Mark award for the second consecutive year. Within a year of taking on the management of Forest Heath car parks, West Suffolk Parking Services has achieved Park Mark status in Newmarket. More than £200,000 was spent on improving The Guineas multi-storey car park in Newmarket. The improvements were funded by section 106 money from Waitrose and the introduction of long stay parking on the top deck, better lighting, securing the car park at night, improved layout and better signage.

We have also introduced a clear guide to fines and appeals which has had a remarkable effect on compliance, with only 0.2 per cent of visits incurring a fine. We installed new signs clearly explaining how to display tickets and how to appeal if motorists were fined. This, coupled with the customer service role of our attendants, has reduced the number of excess charge notices, and the amount of negative publicity about car parking. As an additional service, introduced in Bury St Edmunds in the run-up to Christmas, the car parks team monitored available spaces and regularly Tweeted information to help customers choose where to park.

The changes we've made have been orchestrated by our Parking Services Manager, Cameron Findlay, who was the joint winner of Parking Person of the Year in 2013.

### ***Case study – Gold award for excellence in anti-fraud***

The Anglia Revenues Partnership, comprising the two West Suffolk councils, plus Breckland and East Cambridgeshire councils, was delighted to be announced as a winner of a prestigious Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation (IRRV) Performance awards.

The Awards Panel looked for organisations who could demonstrate they have excelled in the area of anti-fraud and they recognised the fraud team's innovative ways of working. The team says that its success is down to making the best use of resources, having highly trained and skilled officers and utilising new technology to identify

### **20.2.2 Shared policies and decision making – Strategic Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy**

During 2013/14, councillors across West Suffolk worked together on a new strategic plan for Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council. The plan sets out our shared vision and priorities for the next two years, as well as the actions that we plan to take over the next two years to help make that vision a reality. It includes both shared priorities and ambitions for the whole of West Suffolk, as well as allowing for doing things differently in different parts of West Suffolk to reflect each council's unique identity.

The development of the West Suffolk Strategic Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) was supported by joint cabinet planning meetings and the first joint meetings of the Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury Overview and Scrutiny Committees in January and February 2014.

Following the adoption of the West Suffolk Strategic Plan and MTFS we continue looking at where members can work together to deliver the West Suffolk strategic priorities. A West Suffolk Growth Joint Steering Group met for the first time in January 2014 and will advise both Cabinets on the delivery of their 'increased opportunities for economic growth' priority.

### **20.2.3 Shared procurement and financial management**

In line with our shared services agenda, a key focus over the last year was on aligning the Procurement Strategies and the Contract Procedure Rules of the two councils. New draft documents have been prepared and are due for consideration by members in the summer 2014. Both documents are in line with the latest European Procurement Directives and seek to get the right supplier and the best tender for the councils, whilst making the process of bidding for our contracts quicker, less costly, and less bureaucratic, enabling suppliers to compete more effectively. The new West Suffolk Procurement Strategy will also have a high focus on supporting West Suffolk businesses and small and medium enterprises within the context of public procurement regulations.

We have also procured Agresso, a new shared financial management system. A great deal of work has gone into developing a system which will deliver standard/ common systems and accounting structures across both councils in a more efficient and effective way, with enhanced financial and performance reporting to deliver improved levels of business support as well as the financial benefits of procuring and maintaining one shared system. The system went live on 1 April 2014.

During 2013/14, West Suffolk led on a collaborative procurement with three other Suffolk authorities for a banking service provider. The new single banking services provider across West Suffolk means we can now deliver standard and common

systems and processes in West Suffolk along with the benefits of reduced banking services costs for us and other local authorities in Suffolk.

### **20.3 West Suffolk offices**

We recognise and have committed to the principle that sharing our buildings with other services will deliver maximum benefits for service users and taxpayers. Haverhill House is shared with Suffolk County Council, the Citizens Advice Bureau, Three Counties Transport, Haverhill Association of Voluntary Organisations and Haverhill Volunteer Centre. West Suffolk House is shared with the East of England Local Government Association, HM Revenues and Customs, Suffolk County Council and from April 2014, Community Action Suffolk.

In April 2014 the Job Centre Plus Service from the Department for Work and Pensions began to provide their service from the Mildenhall Office, where West Suffolk staff already share the office space with Suffolk County Council social care staff and the local midwifery team. As well as being beneficial for the taxpayer, the shared offices initiative greatly assists the customer as they will now be able to access all benefits, employment and housing advice in one place.

Providing these services in the Mildenhall Office, along with Suffolk County Council's adult care team, is a key part of the long-term 'Mildenhall Hub' project ([www.mildenhallhub.info](http://www.mildenhallhub.info)). With our partners we have commissioned Concertus Consultants to prepare the business case for the Mildenhall Hub. The project proposes to link three councils, the police, education, leisure facilities and health providers all on one site.

#### ***Case study – Brandon Centre***

In September 2013 the Brandon Centre was officially opened. The £1.6million project, delivered in partnership with Suffolk County Council, refurbished the Old School Building in Brandon to create a one stop shop for community amenities. The Brandon Centre is home to Brandon Library, Forest Heath District Council and Brandon Safer Neighbourhood Team. There are also public meeting facilities which can be used by local people.

### **20.4 Reduce energy and water use in council buildings**

Solar panel systems are installed at ten public buildings across West Suffolk and during 2013/14 they returned a combined income from the Feed-In Tariff and energy saving £122,000 and helped to offset approximately 172 tonnes of CO2.

## **21. Develop staff and member skills**



## **21.1 Staff development**

Our staff development programme continues to provide employees with opportunities that aim to meet the organisational needs of both councils. The new performance review system will include learning and development opportunities for all staff with objectives that drive our values and improve service delivery for our customers. The online West Suffolk Learning Zone was introduced in June 2013 and provides staff with a selection of courses and resources designed to support them at work and in their personal development.

Twenty-two different training topics were delivered to staff in 2013/14. Amongst others, the range covered topics such as Microsoft Office 2010 training and Equality and diversity training. Where possible, we offer a variety of dates for each session to encourage maximum attendance – 435 staff attendances at training events were recorded in 2013/14.

We are also supporting staff to complete professional qualifications. There are currently 14 members of staff that are completing work-based learning qualifications and five employees successfully completed either a level 3 or level 5 certificate from the Institute of Leadership and Management in 2013/14.

## **21.2 Member development**

Member development requirements are based on Training Needs Analysis, self-assessment and consultation with senior management to identify development activities that meet national and local priorities. Training includes attendance at formal events or more specific learning, for example becoming a member of a panel, review group or work on a specific project. Members attend county training events and national conferences as well as internal events organised by the West Suffolk Learning and Development team. In 2013/14 a total of 22 events were held covering areas such as Development Control and Neighbourhood Working with 195 recorded attendances by members.

Three Front Line Councillor Discussion sessions were delivered in 2014 and they were well attended by members. The events were held in community venues across West Suffolk. The topics covered were 'The future, the plans and the money', 'Families and communities' and 'Developing sustainable growth. Feedback from the events was excellent with members saying they found: "It was useful to have such a mix of councillors from both authorities" and "Useful to see the different problems/ ideas experienced in different areas plus villages' versus towns."

Along with the work covered by our learning and development policy, councillors also benefit from receiving an induction pack which provides a formal programme of development activities for new members whether elected mid-term or at a scheduled election.

## The future

### West Suffolk Strategic Plan 2014-16 Medium Term Financial Strategy 2014-16

This report highlights some significant achievements during challenging times in West Suffolk during 2013/14 as we have continued to deliver services and work with our communities to promote growth and wellbeing.

In April 2014 Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury councils adopted our first formal set of shared ambitions. The West Suffolk Strategic Plan 2014-16 sets out our ambitions for the next two years, supported by a joint Medium Term Financial Strategy. The vision and priorities established by the West Suffolk Strategic Plan are shown on the next page and a set of more specific actions is contained in the document itself, available at [www.stedmundsbury.gov.uk/strategicplan](http://www.stedmundsbury.gov.uk/strategicplan) and [www.forest-heath.gov.uk/strategicplan](http://www.forest-heath.gov.uk/strategicplan).

Our Medium term Financial Strategy (available at [www.stedmundsbury.gov.uk/mtfs](http://www.stedmundsbury.gov.uk/mtfs) and [www.forest-heath.gov.uk/mtfs](http://www.forest-heath.gov.uk/mtfs)) sets out the following six themes which will govern the ways in which we will work over the next two years so as to achieve our vision and priorities whilst balancing the councils' individual budgets.

1. Aligning resources to both councils' new strategic plan and essential services.
2. Continuation of the shared service agenda and transformation of service delivery.
3. Behaving more commercially.
4. Considering new funding models (for example, acting as an investor).
5. Encouraging the use of digital forms for customer access.
6. Taking advantage of new forms of local government finance (for example, business rate retention).

We will report progress against our Strategic Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy throughout 2014-15 and in our next annual report in 2015.

## A new vision and priorities for West Suffolk 2014-2016

Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury Councils now have a joint Strategic Plan which sets out our vision, priorities and key actions for West Suffolk in 2014 -16

Our vision:

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

Our priorities:

To help us deliver our vision we have developed priorities. They provide direction for focusing our efforts and resources in those areas which are the biggest priorities for West Suffolk over the next two years.

### Priority 1 Increased opportunities for economic growth

We want to see:

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.

### 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.

### 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.