

Forest Heath & St Edmundsbury councils

**West Suffolk**  
working together

# Draft West Suffolk Annual Report 2015/2016

# Contents

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Foreword from the Leaders	3
Introduction	4
A vision and priorities for West Suffolk 2014-2016	5
Priority 1: Increased opportunities for economic growth	6
Priority 2: Resilient families and communities that are healthy and active	17
Priority 3: Homes for our communities	30
West Suffolk ways of working	36
The future	39

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## Foreword from the Leaders

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Our third joint annual report shows we've really got to grips with the opportunities that come through sharing services across Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury. We're making real progress in West Suffolk on our shared priorities, which allows us to focus our resources on jobs, homes and resilient communities, and respond to the financial challenges that continually come our way.

It's not easy, of course. There are times when we have had to take difficult decisions (for example introducing a charge to users of a garden waste collection service) but as councillors we are expected, and have a responsibility, to weigh up everything which has a potential impact on our communities and do what is in the best interest overall. We balance that 'best interest' which needs to take into account the whole of West Suffolk with a strong focus on working at very local levels to help communities support themselves. That is a resilience which is becoming more and more important as public resources continue to be inadequate to help everyone as much as we would like.

This annual report highlights just some of that work with our families and communities, such as supporting the new Kentford Parish Council with a range of projects or helping to bring together various local agencies and charities to provide services for homeless people at the Bury Drop In. We have changed the way we fund community groups as well, with our Community Chest making it simpler to apply for support. On the ground our councillors' own locality budgets are injecting money directly and carefully into local communities and the projects residents have identified as important.

To have strong and resilient communities we need to ensure the people living in them have good jobs and homes, which is why these continue to be our priorities. While we can't create jobs or build enough homes for everyone, we can help create the right conditions for them. So it was with a great sense of 'job well done' that this year we finally achieved the legal agreements which will see an eastern relief road built which in turn will deliver access to the Suffolk Business Park on the edge of Bury St Edmunds . . . which in turn will deliver hundreds of homes for the families of people who will fill thousands of new jobs over the next couple of decades. And it is with a great deal of determination that we are making sure the Government works with us to secure the best future at the RAF Mildenhall site for our communities when the USAF leaves. Meanwhile, on the homes front we now have the opportunity to have a direct impact on the number, type and location of local housing through our own innovative housing company, Barley Homes Group Ltd.

This report also looks at our wider work with partners across Suffolk, and indeed East Anglia, on issues such as devolution and transforming the way the public sector works together to deliver services. Last year we said the time when a council could work alone, or in the same old way, was long gone. Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury continue to prove that, in such financially challenging times, working together to deliver shared services in West Suffolk was the right decision in the best interests of people who live and work here. Next year could see even more fundamental changes for West Suffolk as we continue to lead the councils in creating a better place for our communities.



Councillor James Waters  
Leader  
Forest Heath District Council



Councillor John Griffiths  
Leader  
St Edmundsbury Borough Council

# Introduction

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Since 2012, when our first Joint Chief Executive joined us, there have been many changes to the ways in which each council works, either individually or – more usually – together. The past year has seen further changes, which are outlined in this report along with the progress that the West Suffolk partnership of councils has made in delivering our shared vision and priorities.

The vision and priorities set out in 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.westsuffolk.com/strategicplan](http://www.westsuffolk.com/strategicplan)**

# A vision and priorities for West Suffolk 2014-2016

Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury Councils 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.

Find out more at [www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/strategicplan](http://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/strategicplan)

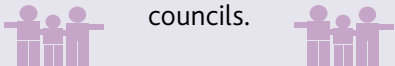
# Priority 1: Increased opportunities for economic growth

**We want to see:**

- beneficial growth that enhances prosperity and quality of life;
- existing businesses that are thriving and new businesses brought to the area;
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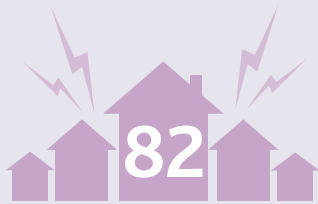
**35 of 53**

new apprentices over the last 5 years have gone on to secure full employment with the councils.



**338,460KWh**

of renewable energy were generated on council properties in 2015/16. This is equivalent to the amount of energy needed to power **82 average households.**



**75% of the 300 stalls**

at the 2015 Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre were local businesses based in the East of England.



We delivered **16** solar rent-a-roof schemes through our **Solar for Business** scheme during 2015/16.

We have invested

**£96,900**

in small businesses across West Suffolk since our **Small Business Grant** schemes began.

## Why was this a priority for 2015/16?

To achieve our ambitions and improve the quality of life of our residents, we depend on a thriving local economy. Though the economy in West Suffolk is strong we must continue to ensure that the infrastructure, homes, and skills are in place to enable the economic growth we need. Importantly, we must also consider the impact of economic growth on the essential services that we provide. By doing this we can prepare our services for future demand.

We can bring new business to the area, support the businesses already located here, expand into new sectors and ensure that there are employment opportunities for all our residents.

## What we have done to support this priority

### 1. Creating the right conditions for growth

Councils have an important role in making sure that the conditions are right for economic growth in the local area, even though growth is always subject to national and international influences. At West Suffolk, we create the conditions for growth through many means, including planning to ensure there is enough suitable land available for development, making strategic investments in commercial property, making grants available for the benefit of local businesses, and organising activities and events to foster connections in our thriving business communities.

On the following pages are a selection of the actions that we have taken to create the right conditions for growth in 2015/16:

## Case Study: Suffolk Business Park and the Eastern Relief Road

In February 2016, St Edmundsbury Borough Council successfully completed a series of complex negotiations to enable the Eastern Relief Road to be built on the outskirts of Bury St Edmunds. This was a great example of partnership-working in action, with the £15 million funding needed for the project being provided by the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (£10 million), St Edmundsbury Borough Council (£3 million) and Suffolk County Council (£2 million) funding the project together.

Building the road enables us to achieve our longstanding ambitions to bring jobs, housing, education and new leisure facilities to Bury St Edmunds and West Suffolk.

The road enables 500 new homes to be built and provides access to employment land allocated for Suffolk Business Park. The Suffolk Business Park has the potential to become one of the most significant employment areas in the Eastern Region and is expected to deliver an estimated 14,000 new jobs as well as £275 million of inward investment to the local area.

Delivering this substantial number of jobs and homes is going to take 25 years. However, we have taken a huge step towards achieving this by completing the necessary land negotiations so that work could start on the road in early March 2016.

### Enterprise Zones

In the Government's 2015 Autumn Statement it was announced that the Enterprise Zone programme would be extended so that it covers two sites in West Suffolk: Suffolk Business Park and Haverhill Research Park.

*St Edmundsbury Leader, Councillor John Griffiths and Portfolio Holder for Housing, Councillor Mrs Sara Mildmay-White at the site of the Eastern Relief Road*



Enterprise Zones will help to grow the local economy by attracting businesses by offering benefits including substantial business rates discounts. Local authorities have also been encouraged by the Government to explore how to simplify planning within specified areas, which we are currently exploring.

### Investing in our commercial property

In September 2015 Forest Heath voted to invest £537,000 in our commercial property portfolio in Brandon.

In 2012 the council bought the London Road site in Brandon to support Omar Park Homes Ltd who needed to secure the site following the previous landlord going into administration. This helped to protect 130 jobs, with the council renting the site to Omar on a 10-year lease which has resulted in stability for the company and a healthy return for the council.

Omar has enjoyed huge success with a 49 per cent sales growth in 2014/15 and it now employs 330 full time staff. The company has ambitious plans for the future which would see a further increase in sales and the creation of 100 new jobs in Brandon.

Our new investment in Omar this year is a 50 per cent contribution in the site's expansion which will support their growth as a business and a local employer.

### Small business grants

Since its introduction in 2011, the Forest Heath small business grant scheme has supported 64 start-up or new businesses. Since the launch of the scheme, a total of £61,000 has been invested in Forest Heath, helping support businesses with a collective turnover of around £2.1 million a year.

Building on this success the scheme was introduced in St Edmundsbury in 2014, using funding from developer contributions. The scheme enables new businesses, or those still within their first year, subject to criteria, to apply for a grant of up to £1500. So far in 2015/16, 13 grants totalling £19,450 have been awarded across West Suffolk. We have supported a wide variety of businesses including a record shop in Bury St Edmunds, a graphic designer in Haverhill, an engineering consultancy in Newmarket and a jewellery workshop in Lakenheath.



*Forest Heath Leader, Councillor James Waters, and Cabinet Member for Resources and Performance, Councillor Stephen Edwards, with representatives from Omar Homes.*



### Solar for Business

In June 2015 we launched our Solar for Business service which installs solar panels on local businesses, reducing their electricity bills and supplying the electricity grid with more energy from renewable sources.

Energy sales contracts have been signed with the host businesses so they receive discounted electricity, typically 30% cheaper than existing grid tariffs. This is projected to save the host businesses around £15,500 in year one and over the 20 year life of the project the saving is projected to be around £315,000.

This scheme also has an impact on our finances; during 2015/16 we invested £643,000 in solar panels for businesses which are projected to return an average annual income for the councils of £82,900. This represents an annual return on investment of more than 10%.



*The West Suffolk Business Festival*

### Bury St Edmunds and West Suffolk Business Festival

The West Suffolk councils jointly organise an annual business festival, which is in its sixth year. This year the festival was attended by around 1500



*Risbygate Sports Club in Bury St Edmunds is generating its own electricity from solar panels we installed. The solar panel installer here pictured with Pat Lewis, General Manager of the Club, Andrew Oswald, Environment Manager and Club President, Kelvin Morton.*

delegates who came to events across West Suffolk over ten days.

The festival was kicked off this year with the Menta trade fair at the Apex in Bury St Edmunds. Twenty-three events were hosted by a diverse group of organisations including New Anglia LEP, UK Trade and Investment and the Chartered Institute of Marketing. To celebrate the achievements of local businesses over the year the festival was capped off by the Bury Free Press Business Awards.

## 2. Skills and education

### Doing our bit as an employer

We are committed to doing our bit to ensure that everyone receives the training they need to make a success of their career. We employed eight new apprentices in 2015/16 and are proud that over the last 5 years we have supported 53 new apprentices, mostly young school-leavers, into the world of work. 35 of these have secured full employment with the council. Others have taken their valuable experience, skills and qualifications forward to the next stage in their career.

In addition to valuable on-the-job experience, our apprentices bring enthusiasm, talent, loyalty and new skills into our workforce and often turn into true ambassadors for the council. We work closely with Unison in supporting the apprenticeships, with Unison representatives acting as mentors and buddies to young people entering the workplace for the first time. They all also earn specialist professional qualifications, for example from AAT, a professional body for accounting technicians; Level 3 NVQs in Business Administration; or Level 3 Environmental Services.

We partner with West Suffolk College to support our apprenticeships in Business, Finance and Environmental Services. In addition we are working with Otley and Easton College to deliver an Advanced Apprenticeship in Horticulture. Through this work we are contributing towards one of our 2014-16 equality objectives to ensure West Suffolk has 'people with the educational attainment and skills needed in our local economy'.

Following the continuing success of our apprentices we will carry on developing innovative and valuable

apprenticeships again for 2016/17. We will recruit for seven apprentices in our Waste and Street Scene team and we are likely to recruit apprentices in Economic Development, Housing, ICT and Planning over the course of the year.

We are proud to hear, for example, from one of our apprentices:

**The apprenticeship gave me the opportunity to restart my career and focus on what I really wanted to do with my life. Working as an apprentice in Planning gave me a real understanding of what the councils do, who does what and how the organisation works.**

**Working in Property Services now I am really using my administrative skills, managing finances and dealing with utilities. Next week I am learning the new GIS system to do mapping – it's very new, but I am looking forward to it.**

*Suzanne Hunter, Administrative Assistant*

We have also been one of the leading partners in the Suffolk Internship Programme and offered paid internship opportunities to nine undergraduates last summer in areas as diverse as Policy, Housing, Families and Communities, Democratic Services, Legal and Economic Development. Some interns are subsequently employed by the council after graduation, which provides an excellent start to their careers.

We regularly support careers events and have launched our new apprentice webpages to showcase our successes and employer brand whilst attracting new recruits.

### 3. Thriving town centres

#### Market development

Throughout the year we organised a variety of special events to complement the regular markets in our thriving towns of Brandon, Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill, Mildenhall and Newmarket.

We work hard to encourage new businesses and entrepreneurs to try market trading and ensure a rich variety of traders for our towns into the future. For example, in April 2015 we introduced special pricing deals, so that businesses new to market trading could hire a pitch for as little as £10 a market day for four weeks.

We also incentivised new traders further by acquiring a market insurance policy that for the first time allowed us to cover new market traders. This reduced the cost of entry for new traders by removing the need for them to acquire their own insurance in the early stages of their trading career. This year we provided this type of cover to more than 20 traders.

We promoted the benefits of market trading to potential entrepreneurs through our links with external organisations such as West Suffolk College and Job Centre Plus.



*A shopping street in Mildenhall*

## Case study

One example of a young entrepreneur who we have helped to make a success of market trading is Charlie Cook. After winning the 'best stall' award at a Haverhill Youth Market, Charlie took advantage of our special pricing offers. He now continues to trade regularly at Haverhill market where he sells his handmade bags, cushions and purses. Charlie says: 'The market traders have been really friendly and helpful to me over the last year and I really enjoy trading on the market, although sometimes the weather does put me off!'



*Charlie Cook  
trading in Haverhill*

We organised special events including craft markets on five occasions in Haverhill and three occasions in Newmarket. The craft markets attracted between 12 and 18 local crafts providers in addition to the regular traders on market days. By introducing new traders the events extend the appeal of markets beyond the regular customer base.

We partnered with Market Square Group to provide beer festivals alongside regular markets in Brandon and Haverhill over the summer. We intend to repeat the beer festivals in 2016/17 due to their success.

To support the Newmarket Music Festival we arranged for young people to perform alongside

our regular street market. The festival is held every year in July, and is organised by local organisations including the town council and Newmarket Vision, which is a partnership of councils and local organisations.

We organised additional Sunday markets in Bury St Edmunds in December in the run-up to Christmas. The additional Sunday markets each attracted between 30 and 40 stalls with a mix of new and regular traders.

We participated in Love Your Market fortnight, and arranged offers and giveaways at our markets in May. Using promotions in the local press we made

sure the spotlight was on our local markets for a successful and busy two weeks, which included special youth markets, craft markets and treasure hunts.

Following on from our successes in 2015/16 we are looking to continue to deepen our partnerships to support our local markets. Plans have been made for business students from West Suffolk College to study the markets in Bury St Edmunds as part of their coursework next year. Conducting market research to better understand the impact that different stakeholder groups have on each other will provide an opportunity for the students to gain valuable experience, as well as providing useful insight for the council. This research will help us to make sure that our markets have a sustainable future.

### **Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre**

The Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre has developed from a modest event in 2004 to one of the largest and most successful Christmas Fayres in the country with over 120,000 people visiting the four-day event.

Visitors were attracted by around 300 stalls booked by the council, and another 40 stalls from around the world booked by an external provider. Over three-quarters of the council-booked stalls were local businesses based in the east of England. The nationally-famous fayre was also supported by local groups, including West Suffolk College and Community Action Suffolk, who collectively provided around 50 volunteers to help with the event.

The council committed in 2016 to providing the Fayre for at least the next three years, while looking at ways to measure its economic impact on the local area. The Fayre aims to provide a range of entertainments and shopping opportunities for our local communities as well as visitors to Bury St Edmunds and provides a boost for many local businesses.

### **Review of car parking**

In November 2015 the St Edmundsbury Overview and Scrutiny Committee received the final report of the car parking review group. The group made several key recommendations which were approved

by the Cabinet, including:

- that tariffs should remain competitive with similar towns;
- that the council should install two new electric car charging points in Haverhill, as well as two additional points in Bury St Edmunds;
- a shared introduction of new car parking machines with card readers and contactless payment facilities;
- to improve peak capacity in Bury St Edmunds town centre car parks by transferring some long stay provision to Ram Meadow from the town centre car parks at the weekend; and
- to identify additional car parking provision in Bury St Edmunds.

The group undertook extensive consultation with car parks users, key stakeholders and local businesses. In addition, specialist advice was sought from an independent consultant on existing and future capacity for the car parks across Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill.

In December 2015 the Forest Heath Cabinet also considered a review of car parking for the district. The review was undertaken because since the last one, in 2012, the profile of car parking had changed and future developments, particularly in Newmarket town centre which will include increased visitor numbers due to the opening of the Home of Horseracing, are on the horizon.

The review focused on helping to ensure that the district's car parks are managed so they have sufficient capacity for people's parking requirements, are equipped to meet future demand, provide a high quality service and are affordable. Cabinet approved a number of recommendations relating to charging in Newmarket and that a revised Traffic Regulation Order be prepared for public consultation. There were no proposals to introduce tariffs in Brandon, Lakenheath and Mildenhall.

It was noted that in future, regular reviews of capacity would be needed to monitor the impact of the Home of Horseracing, changes in the local economy of our market towns and housing growth across the district.

## 4. Vibrant and attractive high streets

### Shop front painting scheme

Since 2009 we have awarded over £19,000 to 38 shop owners to support them in revitalising their shop fronts across Brandon, Lakenheath, Mildenhall and Newmarket, helping to maintain and improve the vitality and vibrancy of those locations.

We have expanded the scheme across West Suffolk with St Edmundsbury offering the scheme for the first time in 2015. In 2015/16 alone we granted over £4800 to 12 independent local businesses across West Suffolk.

Since starting in the St Edmundsbury area the scheme has helped give a new lease of life to the shopfronts of popular local businesses such as Clare Farm Shop. Leanne Morris and Shara Browning, the business partners who own the Market Hill shop, love the difference their new shopfront has made.

**"This has made such a difference. The front is the first bit of the shop that our customers see and it is quite important that it looks good. We have recently invested in refurbishing the inside of the shop, and the new look shop front really completes the job. We have been here 16 years and have built up a good customer base during that time – and a lot of them have been commenting about how amazing the new shop front looks. They love it."**

*Leanne Morris, Co-owner, Clare Farm Shop*

### Newmarket Business Improvement District

Forest Heath has been supporting businesses in Newmarket to realise their ambition of establishing a Business Improvement District (BID). Throughout March 2016 businesses voted on whether to set up a BID. In April it was announced that the town's businesses had voted in favour of the proposal.

A BID is a mechanism which enables businesses in an area to get together to carry out projects and improvements in the town by using money raised themselves from a levy on their business rates. The Newmarket BID's five-year business plan sets out to raise £240,000 per year from levy payers in the BID area to be spent on marketing, events, business support and street scene improvements.

We provided support for this initiative by engaging with local businesses and contributing around £20,000 towards marketing costs to promote the initiative. We also provided practical support by taking responsibility for the ballot, we will be administering the collection of revenue through the Anglia Revenues Partnership and supporting the BID through its formation. Forest Heath will also be contributing to the BID through a levy on our own business rates for our properties within its boundary.

Now that businesses in the Newmarket BID area have voted in favour of the business plan, the BID will be established as an independent organisation which is governed by, and accountable to, the local businesses. It is expected that the BID will begin its work in June 2016.

### Bury St Edmunds Business Improvement District

The Our Bury St Edmunds BID was re-elected by local businesses for a second term commencing in April 2015. Known as 'Our Bury St Edmunds' it includes 446 businesses from across the town and a further 23 businesses that, although under no obligation, have chosen to contribute for the benefits of membership.

St Edmundsbury supported the BID by overseeing its ballot in its first term in 2009, and since 2010 the council has been represented on the board of the BID, where we work closely with local businesses on issues that are important to them. The BID does vital work to promote the town centre offer through marketing direct to the public through a visitor website and app. It also organises events such as the Bury St Edmunds Food and Drink Festival, the Christmas lights switch-on event, and the Whitsun Fayre.

This year the BID also organised the Bury St Edmunds Wolf Trail which involved commissioning 18 local artists to create 26 life-sized wolves. The trail generated a huge amount of interest and attracted people to the town centre. A number of the wolves were auctioned at a St Edmunds Day Dinner which was held at the Athenaeum in November and raised £10,000 for charities. The remaining wolves were auctioned at a separate auction which raised another £2,000 for charity.

### Haverhill town centre masterplan

St Edmundsbury worked together with ONE Haverhill to develop a masterplan for the Haverhill town centre. The masterplan was driven by a commitment from ourselves and ONE Haverhill to meet the current and future needs of the town and to ensure it is developed in an appropriate way. The masterplan was adopted in September 2015 following extensive consultation and engagement with local people.

Our future work to support delivery of the masterplan will be based on three key themes:

- how to travel around Haverhill, whether that be walking, cycling or by car;
- ensuring the appropriate development of the key strategic sites that have been identified around the town; and
- improving the appearance of the public realm, the area design quality and linkages around the area.

We demonstrated a proactive approach to realising the masterplan vision this year when we negotiated to take control of the former Co-op site on Jubilee Walk. This site is a key component of the major Jubilee Place development opportunity to better integrate different parts of the town centre. In the meantime the council found a short-term retail tenant to occupy the site until the plans for comprehensive redevelopment are ready to be implemented. In early 2016 Poundstretcher moved into the building, which had been empty since 2011.



*Haverhill Town Centre Masterplan: prepared on behalf of One Haverhill by David Lock Associates, September 2015*

### Street scene

Our local environment is important because it shapes and influences daily lives. Many of our areas are vibrant, clean and safe and we work hard alongside our communities to keep them this way. We know that in some cases the actions of a few people impact on the quality of the daily lives of many. From inconsiderate dog owners to those who drop litter or fly tip, our staff work hard to protect our environment but equally important our focus is on education, prevention and, if necessary, prosecution.

In 2015 we produced new dog fouling prevention signs which are now available for local communities to download from our website. In addition to this, more than 30 new combined litter and dog bins have been installed in Haverhill and Bury St Edmunds. A new dog fouling trial campaign in Wickhambrook successfully reduced the number of fouling incidents in the village.

In Kentford, we have been working with the local community and supported them with keeping their village an attractive place. This has involved helping ensuring that the community knows what they can do in terms of cutting back vegetation, cleaning signs, and clearing litter and flytipping. We have also supported them by collecting and disposing of the waste they have tidied up. Later this report describes how Kentford has embraced the Love Where You Live initiative.

We take seriously the problems caused by fly tipping, which is why we worked to secure three prosecutions for fly tipping offences, with penalties totalling £2327 in fines and costs. Additionally we removed 32 abandoned vehicles in West Suffolk.

## 5. Waste and recycling

Our waste and recycling services are relied on by residents and businesses and must be prepared to meet growth in future demand caused by the increased opportunities for economic growth that we are delivering. Our work to create sustainable and efficient services is evidenced by our initiatives to change services to meet new financial pressures, create more commercial opportunities (which are detailed below), and our work to create a new

operational hub for West Suffolk which is detailed in our ways of working section.

### Organic Waste

During 2015/16, we had to make a difficult decision about our organic waste service. Due to changes in funding arrangements we had to remove the free service and offer a new subscription for a garden waste collection service to those households. The combined impact of the funding removal was a potential increase in cost to the authorities of £498,000 a year to provide the organic waste scheme across West Suffolk from 2016/17.

After detailed debate and consideration, both councils decided that the most appropriate thing to do in terms of financial responsibility and quality of service to customers would be to charge for a garden waste service and provide it only to residents who chose to opt in to the scheme.

A full communications and marketing plan was created to publicise the scheme and explain how customers could opt in to the service. All residents were sent letters and by April 2016 our customer services team had handled almost 20,000 subscriptions for the service, with many more residents expected to subscribe over the coming months.

We set ourselves the target of reaching 30% take up of the new garden waste service across West Suffolk which we have now achieved.

### Commercial waste and street scene services

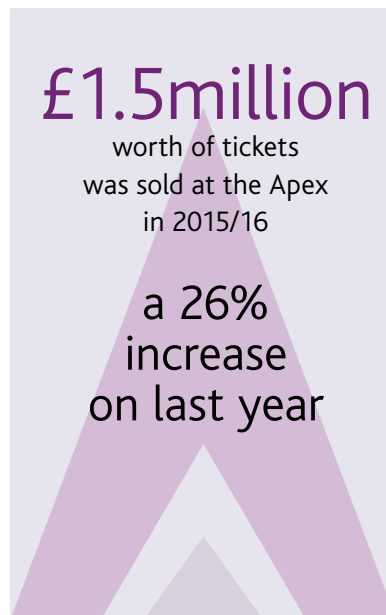
Our commercial services have had a successful year. We have seen growth in income generated from fleet services and waste collection due to increasing customer numbers and healthy repeat business. As part of our efforts to increase sustainability, around 2,000 tonnes of trade waste was recycled. As well as expanding our waste services, we have also taken a commercial approach by creating a tree service.



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

### We want to see:

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



### Why was this a priority for 2015/16?

Supporting families and communities to be resilient is a key component of West Suffolk's Strategic Plan. Though West Suffolk is generally a prosperous and attractive place there are areas and times in people's lives where individuals and families can experience challenges caused by deprivation, social upheaval, or poor health.

Our approach is to build resilience in families and communities and catch problems early or stop them from happening in the first place. Prioritising this approach to resilience can create health and wellbeing benefits for everyone involved and, as a way to run public services, is more sustainable (by which we mean a better way to manage financial, social and environmental risks).

### What we have done to support this priority

#### 1. Making connections in the community

The West Suffolk approach to supporting families and communities puts residents and councillors at the heart of making positive change. The councils play an empowering and enabling role by focusing on the strengths of communities and how these can be improved. The approach identifies people who act as connectors – active local residents with connections across and deep within communities. These connections and networks are the blood vessels of communities within which ideas, concerns, passion and interests flow in everyday conversation. These are the places where local solutions for the community are generated and nurtured. They also

help inform the most effective delivery – rather than cutting across them or distorting them as sometimes systems and formal services can do unintentionally. Ward councillors are equipped and encouraged to engage with their communities and connectors, to understand key local issues and use their influence to support the communities to provide local solutions where appropriate and possible.

Below is just a small selection of the work that our councillors and staff have done over the year to help our communities become more resilient, able to help themselves and each other. Much of the work detailed in this section contributes to our equality objective to ensure we have 'a thriving voluntary sector who take the initiative to help the most vulnerable'.



*St Edmundsbury Mayor, Councillor Patrick Chung at the Bury Drop In centre*

### Bury Drop In

The Bury Drop In, based in the Garland Street Baptist Church's ELVEN Centre, is a great example of what can happen when community groups and agencies are connected and work together.

Since opening in September 2015 the Bury Drop In has supported homeless people by providing a hot meal and safe place for them to have friendly introductions to the services available from the community and from the agencies who participate, including the councils' housing team. Guests of Bury Drop In have been able to seek help with issues as varied as mental and physical health, housing and benefits advice. The ambition is for guests to be able to access help so they can:

- become settled in suitable accommodation;
- manage their health, lives and relationships; and
- become able to work.

The Bury Drop In is supported by West Suffolk staff who connected the community groups with agencies and charities who now work together more effectively than they could alone.

The Drop In service has recently broadened in scope to include providing guests with food parcels, warm clothes and shelter.

More information is available on the Bury Drop In website: [www.burydropin.org](http://www.burydropin.org)

### Horringer Court, Bury St Edmunds

Community groups raised funding during 2015/16 to explore the feasibility of building a new community venue in the Horringer Court area. This year they made progress towards their goal with the help of St Edmundsbury. Horringer Court Community Church, Horringer Court Middle School and Horringer Court Residents' Association constituted themselves as Horringer Court Community Hub with input and support from staff and local councillors.

The group completed Project Planning Training through Community Action Suffolk and they are now finalising the application to the Charity Commission to establish themselves as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation.

A feasibility study of the proposed site and building has been completed. Our input over the past year saw a more robust plan come to fruition for the group. The next steps will involve developing the website to incorporate all the existing channels of communication within the community and starting to progress a fundraising plan.

### Love where you live

Love Where You Live is about capturing residents' pride in their local area and strengthening community links around a place.

One way that we help communities is by supporting the valuable work undertaken by volunteers to keep their local areas clean and safe by picking litter. The

councils can provide litter picking equipment, help advertise events through social media and will arrange to collect the bags of rubbish. Already more than 40 volunteers have signed up under the 2016 initiative to receive litter picking equipment.

There are now more than 110 volunteer litter pickers supported across West Suffolk carrying out regular litter picking. Over 2015/16, 2364 people in total took part in special community group litter picking events. These groups managed to collect 591 sacks of litter in the past year.

As well as litter picking, there are other ways that people can support Love Where You Live throughout 2016 and beyond, such as volunteering, getting involved in community groups or simply supporting town or village businesses by shopping locally.

In 2015/16 Forest Heath assisted the newly-formed parish council in Kentford with various village projects, as well as working with them on getting the community involved with litter and environmental



initiatives, providing support with maintenance, drawing up plans for the Old Village Hall and liaising with Suffolk County Council's Highways department regarding signs and infrastructure. As a result of these discussions a deal was reached where the community has 'adopted' some of the Highways infrastructure, working to maintain the village's appearance while the county council provides

resources such as paint. Kentford has been a powerful example of what can happen when a community is inspired to Love Where You Live.

In 2015 school children in Brandon celebrated why they Love Where they Live. Children from local schools drew their favourite things about the town as part of a competition to design eight signs that are now on display.

#### Studland Park Residents' Association

A community lunch held in late 2014 saw more than 130 residents from an estate in Newmarket come together to discuss a wide range of issues on the estate they considered important: speeding, car crime, anti-social behaviour and parking. The event



*School children with Councillor Reg Silvester in Brandon showing their Love Where You Live posters*

was funded by Forest Heath District and attended by Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Police and Community Action Suffolk.

The event enabled residents to come together to identify local solutions to some of the issues raised as well as connect local people who may not have previously had the opportunity to meet and discuss their area.

A number of people attending the community lunch expressed an interest in establishing a Residents' Association. With a couple of false starts, and local councillors playing an active and supporting role, the association was then involved in several examples of positive community action on the estate during 2015/16. A clean-up day, combined with an Easter egg hunt, was well attended and the group successfully engaged with a property developer to keep open space on the estate tidy. A significant impact has also been made in reducing speeding by drivers around the estate. Working in partnership with agencies and, most importantly, residents the association (supported by Forest Heath) is helping to build a sense of community and pride in the estate.

### **Whirlwinds and Snowflakes**

With support, guidance, and contacts from Forest Heath a Newmarket resident's idea to support children with English as an Additional Language set up a social enterprise called 'Whirlwinds and Snowflakes'. The aim of the social enterprise is to create an innovative approach to improving standards and opportunities for pre-school children with English as an additional language (EAL). For example, the project has led to the production of Dual Language Talking Books for young children who speak no, or very little, English due to them having a different home language. This initiative is going from strength to strength, with interest from around and beyond the county, and is providing early years staff with a great resource to engage EAL children and ensure they are 'school ready'. With a small grant from Forest Heath, the project enabled the purchase of books for local schools and pre-schools in and around Newmarket as well as developing staff training and an online peer support forum.

### **Newmarket Connects**

Forest Heath came together with two local social enterprises during 2015/16 to encourage connections between businesses and the voluntary and community sector in Newmarket. Informal monthly networking events gave attendees the opportunity to meet one another, build relationships and work together on projects. Bringing together business with community groups creates so many opportunities and benefits for both parties. At each meeting, people and organisations are encouraged to identify 'needs' and 'offers', helping businesses to match up with local community groups, including sharing skills and equipment.

Having run since May 2015, the events attract up to 50 people per month, are open to all and usually invite a guest speaker to talk on subjects such as business planning and use of social media.

### **Mildenhall Community Hot Steppers**

The skipping club at St John's Community Centre was established by a proactive parent from Mildenhall who wanted something positive for young people from the surrounding area to do. The club has more than 40 members and a number of volunteers from the town who meet on a weekly basis to provide skipping tuition, an opportunity to build relationships and provide a safe place for young people to meet. Support was given by Families and Communities staff, who gave advice with growing the club and making connections with agencies, and by local councillors who provided some funding through their locality budgets.

The club has continued to grow with the additional adult helpers now engaging with the young people. To showcase their talents the club have held a 'flash mob' session in Mildenhall town centre last summer and also a Christmas event in December, which also helped to raise funds for the club.

Not only are the young people gaining life skills and making new relationships, the adult volunteers are able to gain new skills and attend training for the club.

## Case study: Mildenhall Pirates Basketball Club

Over the last year the local basketball club grew beyond its focus on sport to involve and be part of their community. The club was able to achieve a huge amount with the help of only a very small grant of £1,200 from the Community Chest scheme. They are actively engaging young people from across the area and have made links with Suffolk Young Carers to provide support sessions for young people in Mildenhall.

Over the next 12 months the club hopes to establish basketball camps and work with more community groups.

### Rock Paper Scissors

This year Forest Heath worked in partnership with Dance East, the regional Dance Agency based in Ipswich, to support the annual large-scale community dance performance that offers opportunities to access high quality dance experience in rural Suffolk. The project seeks to increase engagement in dance by bringing people together, whilst contributing to physical, social and creative health, and supporting a healthy lifestyle.

Since January Newmarket Community Choir, Great Heath Primary School Mildenhall and St Christopher's Primary School, Red Lodge, have been working hard with a Dance East artist. They practised and produced a piece which was brought together with all the work from other districts to create an evening of dance, showcasing the talent of community groups and schools from across Suffolk.

**I've learnt how to do a rhythm in a flow and other people's dance moves. I've had a good time because I love dancing and I do it at home every day after school.**

*Joshua, age nine, St Christopher's School*

The workshops involved working with 11 community and school groups, around 180 participants, from the districts of Babergh, Mid Suffolk and Forest Heath which culminated in two public performances, at the Jerwood Dance House and then at the Apex in March 2016.

### Great Barton Good Neighbour scheme

The Good Neighbour scheme, which was launched in March 2016, was originally identified as an aspiration in the Great Barton Parish Plan. The Freedom church in Great Barton contacted the Families and Communities team to explore starting a Good Neighbour scheme in the village. The scheme exists to provide short-term practical support to any member of the community. The kind of help offered by the scheme is broad and among other things includes:

- befriending;
- form filling;
- help with pets;
- minor household repairs;
- occasional transport;
- one off garden tidying; and
- prescription collection.

Over the past year wider meetings have been held to recruit volunteers from the church and the Great Barton community and to advertise the scheme. Each volunteer will take turns to look after a bespoke mobile phone to which people can call if they need help. Their request will then be matched with the most suitable volunteer to provide that support.

Staff have supported the church group with project planning, consultation and recruitment meetings and provided standardised paperwork from Community Action Suffolk (CAS). After being connected with the Great Barton scheme, CAS assisted with putting them in contact with other Good Neighbour schemes to share good practice and advice about funding opportunities.

### Forest Heath Town and Parish Forum

The Forest Heath Town and Parish Forum continues to meet every two months and attendance continues to be high. Local communities, represented by their town and parish councils, set the agenda at these events; the forum is a key demonstration of the power of a community led approach. The forums give parish and town councils the opportunity to engage with the district as well as each other and to showcase what they are doing with their communities.

The forums continue to encourage lively debate and engage with a number of councillors, staff and agencies. This year the forums covered topics including planning, planning enforcement, talks by the police, education, pot holes, waste and the closure of RAF Mildenhall. As well as updates from public sector agencies there were a variety of community talks including from Music Builds Communities, local history clubs, Coffee Caravan and The Racing Centre.

### St Edmundsbury Parish Conference

The St Edmundsbury programme of parish events remains a useful and popular fixture for parish and town councils. St Edmundsbury's Parish Conference takes place twice a year and gives an opportunity to hear from councillors and staff, ask questions and network with other parish and town councils. A broad range of topics was covered in workshops this year which included the Love Where You Live initiative and Neighbourhood Planning.

In future, we will have a new format for the parish conferences. They will be replaced with a quarterly parish forum, following the same format as the Forest Heath parish forums. We will also hold an annual parish conference for the whole of West Suffolk.

### Sharing Parenting: Parenting Conference

Sharing Parenting is a local organisation which offers a range of parenting support programmes, training for professionals working with parents and creative resources.

Together with Forest Heath, and using Community Chest funding, the organisation held its first Parenting Conference in March 2016. The event brought more than 30 parents together to listen to guest speakers, take part in parenting workshops, engage with stakeholders and share/network with other parents. The event was very well received by attendees and they told us that the event was: 'excellent – great speakers', 'services like this are invaluable' the event has shown me 'how to be a better parent'.

## 2. Community funding

### Community Chest

Since April 2015 the West Suffolk Community Chest has been the main funding mechanism available to voluntary and community sector groups across West Suffolk.

The Community Chest simplified the councils' community funding mechanisms by replacing a range of different sources of available funding with one simple scheme. It means that now community groups are invited to apply for funding to do work that they think will bring benefits to local people and which help the councils achieve their priorities. Under this system the councils are also able to commission work that helps to meet the Families and Communities agenda.

Across both councils almost £90,000 was awarded to groups for 2015/16. Community Chest awards have so far included the following:

- £40,786 to Suffolk West Citizens Advice Bureau to:
  - i. support a six-month pilot scheme providing an outreach service to Lakenheath which will increase access to advice on benefits, debt and housing, as well as free access to an independent financial adviser;
  - i. expand the telephone service in St Edmundsbury and promote online services designed to help clients access information to

help themselves. This is particularly aimed at those who live in rural areas and can't access face-to-face services in local towns. The aim is that by offering telephone or online services, the CAB could provide earlier support in issues of debt, benefits, relationship breakdown and employment issues.

- £23,214 to Sharing Parenting to develop a comprehensive map of parenting support in Forest Heath, train parent support volunteers, run parenting workshops and a fathers' parenting course, and deliver a parenting conference. Overall the project aims to support the social, emotional and behavioural development of children in school.
- £5500 to the Suffolk Digital Cinema Network in Forest Heath to develop further, to attract new members and to run more family or cross-generational film events, all designed to help combat isolation and strengthen community bonds.
- £5000 to Unit Twenty Three to support the tour of a play in Forest Heath schools about social enterprise and workshops which will lead to the further development of the Young Carers network.
- £8902 to Catch 22, Suffolk Positive Futures for a project which will seek to reconnect young people to their local communities, while teaching them life skills and building their confidence – all through free weekly sport sessions in Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill.
- £5000 to Home-Start which supports families struggling with a range of issues from post-natal illness, isolation, the demands of young children, bereavement, or the challenges of raising children from multiple births. Home-Start volunteers will work with families to try to help them turn things around before they reach a crisis point.
- £1500 to the Suffolk Accident and Rescue Service in St Edmundsbury which provides local specialist critical care response in Suffolk.

Following the success of the new scheme in 2015/16 the councils have awarded a total of £382,722 to 16 organisations for 2016/17. Money has already been awarded for 2016/17 to a range of organisations such as:

- The Voluntary Network, which will use its grant to help provide a befriending scheme and a community car service;
- Suffolk Rape Crisis, who provide vital counselling and information services for survivors of rape and sexual violence; and
- Relate, an organisation that provides support and counselling for relationship and family issues.

### Locality budgets

A key part of our locality-based approach to community development is our locality budget scheme, where councillors each have an annual budget of £2500 that they can allocate to community groups and activities in their ward.

Locality budgets are designed to enable residents to take ownership of issues that they care about and to help councillors ensure that funding gets to the heart of these issues.

From beekeeping in Hepworth to basketball in Mildenhall, our councillors have been using their locality budgets to support what's important to the communities in their area.

In 2015/16 Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury councillors contributed more than £153,000 towards community initiatives and projects in their ward areas. A full list of projects funded by councillors can be found at: [www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/localitybudgets](http://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/localitybudgets)

### Rural Initiatives Grants

St Edmundsbury offers the Rural Initiatives Grant to match fund organisations for one-off specific capital projects in rural areas.

Horringer Community Council, Stanton Bowls Club and the Clare Country Park Trust are among the groups which have benefited from the Rural Initiatives Grant this year. During 2015/16 we approved £56,695 worth of grant to nine projects for purposes such as modernising community facilities, supporting local initiatives and helping groups to provide sporting and social activities.

### Smarter Funding: Better Outcomes conference

A Smarter Funding: Better Outcomes Conference was held at the Apex in Bury St Edmunds in July 2015. This was borne out of a recognition that the quality of grant applications to funders across Suffolk could be improved. The purpose of the conference was to raise awareness of the importance of focusing grant applications on the outcomes that will be achieved as a result of the funding.

This was a useful and productive event with 150 representatives from more than 100 organisations in attendance.

A number of presentations were made by representatives from partner organisations including: Stepping Out, who set the scene in relation to reducing local government funding and organisations' historic dependency on revenue grants; Southgate Community Centre provided a case study on ownership and management of the community centre which was transferred from the local authority; and the Early Intervention Foundation about evidencing early intervention work which was then supported by a case study from Home-Start.

Attendees then had the opportunity to ask questions of the panel of representatives from our partner organisations.

A number of key actions were agreed at the conference which included looking at current grant patterns across West Suffolk in terms of geographical distribution and theme. This work will help identify gaps in beneficiaries of funding with the aim of targeting support as appropriate.

### 3. Leisure and green spaces

#### Parks and green spaces

During 2015/16, we worked alongside local community groups to deliver new and improved play areas.

In June 2015 we opened a new play area on the Haverhill Recreation Ground with modern equipment for a broad age range of children from

toddlers to teens. The opening of the play area was celebrated with a community fun day organised by the Castle Partnership Academy Trust. Work on the Allington Walk play park in Haverhill was also completed in 2015/16.

Two further play areas were redeveloped in Newmarket. The Hodgkins Yard play area was modernised in consultation with local schools. The Lady Wolverton play area has also been redeveloped in consultation with local people. Both sites are now open and being used well.

The newly-refurbished AstroTurf at Haverhill Leisure Centre was opened in October following work to replace the worn pitch. The new pitch was a much needed resource for the town and is being used well by football and hockey clubs, as well as for private hire.

We secured funding from the Premier League and the FA Facilities Fund, together with some locality grant funding, to provide fencing around football pitches at Oakes Road and Tollgate Recreation Grounds in Bury St Edmunds. The fencing was requested following high incidences of dog fouling on the playing pitches which was a concern to users.

The Priors Estate play area in Bury St Edmunds has been redeveloped following consultation with the Priors Estate Community Association about the play provision they needed for the future. A much improved playing environment has been created with the play area and ball park now next to each other to make it easier for different groups to use. The scheme was funded by St Edmundsbury and also used s106 money (funding from legal agreements with developers) from the nearby Havebury Housing Partnership development of new homes. Improvements have also been made around the access and facilities at Nowton Pit play park in Bury St Edmunds.

#### West Suffolk Sports Facilities Assessment

West Suffolk councils received funding for a Sports Facilities Assessment which included consultation with local sports clubs and users. In February, the document was adopted by the councils and the evidence base behind it will inform the delivery





*Hodkins Yard play area in Newmarket*

of a more strategic approach to sport and leisure facilities in the future. A project team has been established to take this forward and the first workshop, which is working towards a sports and leisure strategy for West Suffolk, took place in March.

### **Arts and heritage**

During 2015/16, we introduced a number of initiatives to provide opportunities for increased engagement with our heritage collections and to promote them to a wider audience. From January 2016, behind the scenes tours were offered of the collection at West Stow on the last Thursday of every month. Advance bookings have so far been made for every tour with excellent feedback including a comment that 'the tour was most interesting and enjoyable'. In addition, the Gershom Parkington Gallery opened in August 2015 at Moyses Hall, allowing 90% of this outstanding collection of clocks to be on display.

A number of loans have been made from our collections to other museums including: the

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge; Gainsborough's House, Sudbury; The Bowe's Museum, Durham; and the Ancient House Museum, Thetford.

Our heritage work has continued to receive valuable support from eight volunteers who currently contribute approximately 20 hours a week. This also enables the volunteers to gain valuable skills and they have been involved in various projects including fine art and costume inventory, a small finds cataloguing project and improving the collections documentation.

Grant funding from the following external sources was secured during 2015/16:

- £23,300 capital grant from Arts Council England for security and environmental improvements at Moyses Hall;
- £1000 Collections Review grant from SHARE Museums East to contribute to ongoing cataloguing and repacking of West Stow Small Finds collection; and

- £18,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund Young Roots project to deconstruct the Sunken House in Anglo-Saxon Village.

In 2015, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the start of excavations at West Stow by Dr Stanley West. A number of the original diggers, including Dr West, returned to the site to celebrate this event and free entry was on offer to visitors on that day. The Heritage Service worked in partnership with the Suffolk Archaeological Unit and young people aged between 13 and 25 to record and dismantle the Sunken House (one of the original reconstructed houses) due to its condition. The records that were made will help continue the ongoing evaluation of the village. The project ended at Easter 2016 and the young people were on site to talk about their experience.

We have enjoyed an increase in visitor numbers at West Stow and Moyses Hall this year. From April 2015 to February 2016 visitor numbers at Moyses Hall increased by 34% from the same period in the previous year and at West Stow they increased by 25%. We also worked hard to increase school visits, which resulted in a significant rise in young visitors.

Produced by Orchestras Live and City of London Sinfonia in partnership with Forest Heath and four other local authorities, plus two Music Education Hubs, a programme of creative workshops, training sessions and public concerts was held across Suffolk and north east Essex. The programme delivered a series of interactive Lullaby Concerts designed specifically for young children and their parents or carers, particularly aiming to reach people in dispersed rural communities and hard-to-reach areas. The essence of the project was about bringing inspirational first experiences of live orchestral music to young children and families to encourage the sustained use of music as a means of learning and play.

Local young musicians were involved in the concerts, acting as inspirational role models for the young audiences and the skills of nursery practitioners were developed through music training days.

In 2015 Colourbox Pre-school and Little Buds Nursery, both in Newmarket, participated in the programme. Each nursery setting received three 30-minute workshops. In the final workshop they were joined by three musicians from the City of London Sinfonia, enabling the participants to see and hear orchestral instruments and make connections with the content of the subsequent orchestral concerts.

*Feedback from  
a happy young  
musician*



The two performances took place at Newmarket Memorial Hall in October 2015 with 195 children and 74 adults attending. After the performances Suffolk County Council provided instruments and tutors to enable children to have a go at playing an instrument themselves.

### **Bury in Bloom**

We have continued to support Bury in Bloom, the organisation that works hard to help maintain Bury St Edmunds as a beautiful town for the enjoyment of everyone. Bury in Bloom has had another successful year with projects including: Flowerheads for the Community, where adults and children were involved in workshops to create flowers that were displayed in the Abbey Gardens; replanting the beds near the multi-storey car park to keep what is one of the pedestrian routes into the town attractive; and working with children and young people in nurseries and schools to encourage an interest in green issues and growing your own food.

### **Home of Horseracing**

A great deal of work by and with our partners has continued in this year to prepare for the opening of the National Horseracing Museum in Newmarket, in Autumn 2016. At the time of writing this report it is close to completion. This work has seen the regeneration of a range of listed buildings right in the heart of Newmarket. The district council is the freeholder of the site which will be leased to the National Horseracing Museum on a 999 year lease who will manage the Heritage Centre.

The new National Heritage Centre for Horseracing and Sporting Art will be one of the region's leading tourist attractions. It is expected to bring 50,000 to 60,000 tourists visitors a year to the town and over £2 million a year to the local/regional economy.

Further information is available on the following website: [www.palacehousenewmarket.co.uk](http://www.palacehousenewmarket.co.uk)

### Skate parks and tracks

We are using automatic counters at the Bury St Edmunds skate park to help us understand the popularity of the site and when it is most used. It continues to be a facility that is enjoyed by young people from in and around the local area.

We are also pleased to report that refurbishment work at the Newmarket skate park has started in this year. This initiative has been led by young people who use the facility and the council is now offering practical support to help progress this project.

### BurySOUND 2016

The long-running BurySOUND music competition declared its 17th winner in March after another successful competition celebrating the area's thriving music scene. The competition saw 15 bands battle to be declared the best local act and culminated in an exciting final at the Apex.

## 4. A commercial approach to our leisure and culture offer

### The Apex

The Apex's reputation as a venue with excellent acoustics and a more intimate setting than other larger venues is continuing to develop.

During 2015/16 the venue welcomed household names including: Lulu, Nigel Kennedy, Elaine Paige, Russell Kane, Tim Vine, Sean Lock, Katherine Ryan, Josh Widdicombe, Mary Chapin Carpenter, Jasper Carrott, Jonathan Dimbleby, Michael Portillo and Midge Ure to name but a few.

The Apex has also become an important part of the community providing a meeting place for many different groups and clubs. Over the year, more of the building's rooms and performance spaces were

used for events such as Songbook Sundays jazz brunches, baby ballet, belly dancing, Pilates and yoga classes.

Total ticket sales for 2015/16 exceeded £1.5 million – a 26% increase on the previous financial year. The Apex also attracted more than 14,000 new bookers, compared to around 12,000 during 2014/15.

### Moyse's Hall

We are delighted with the popularity of the Lego Exhibition at Moyse's Hall, which ran between January and April 2016. In total 15,509 visitors, which includes 1,068 school children came to the museum specifically to see the exhibition. This was a 200% increase on school visitor numbers on the same period as last year. As well as fantastic visitor numbers we received very positive feedback about the museum with a number of school groups planning a return trip to visit the collections in the rest of the museum. The Lego workshops we ran were popular with hard to reach groups and this element will continue with workshops held in the museum and as part of an outreach programme.

## 5. Improving wellbeing and health

### Suffolk Heath and Wellbeing Board

The West Suffolk councils are members of the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board along with the county council, local clinical commissioning groups, NHS England, HealthWatch, the police, the voluntary sector and other district and borough councils. Although health outcomes for many people in Suffolk and West Suffolk are good, the board aims to help those groups and communities which experience poorer health and wellbeing than others.

As a partner on the board we have worked with colleagues to develop strategies which provide a steer on the work that partners should be delivering and supporting. The West Suffolk councils partnership is a lead partner for the delivery of the Suffolk Prevention Strategy.

It is an important time with changes to the health service and greater integration between health and social care. Borough and district councils have a key role to play in terms of improving people's health – warm, safe homes, well-planned and

connected communities, parks and open spaces and safe places to work and eat. It is important that we continue to contribute effectively to bodies such as the Health and Wellbeing Board to ensure that as much focus is given to prevention as to clinical interventions. This work contributes towards our equality objective to improve physical and mental health and wellbeing.

### Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership

The Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership (WSCSP) is made up of representatives from St Edmundsbury, Forest Heath, Mid Suffolk and Babergh Councils, Suffolk Police, Suffolk County Council, the Youth offending Service, Probation and the Clinical Commissioning Group. The partnership works with partners in the community to develop an understanding of local concerns, to support Safer Neighbourhood Teams, and to empower communities to address issues that are important to them. It does this by carrying out an annual assessment of crime in the area and producing an annual plan.

### The Strong and Safe Communities Group

This multi-agency group, chaired by the West Suffolk councils' Chief Executive, has identified four work streams to focus on:

- domestic abuse;
- sexual exploitation;
- cyber crime; and
- youth violence and gangs

Each work stream has a scoping process underway to determine the current data and intelligence situation, what action is being taken already, and what else might be required. The group reports quarterly to the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board, where the findings of each work stream will eventually be examined in detail.

### Supporting diverse communities

The Dementia Action Alliance (DAA) brings together organisations in a local area that are committed to transforming the lives of people with dementia and their carers. The Bury St Edmunds branch of the DAA is looking to make the town a dementia-friendly community which will be home to dementia-friendly organisations (DFOs). The DAA

has started work to achieve this through Dementia Friends awareness sessions for all customer-facing staff and volunteers at participating organisations; adopting and sharing guidance and best practice between other local DAA members; raising awareness through the local media; and meeting the needs of people with dementia and their carers in the Bury St Edmunds area.

A DAA Steering Group, of which we are a member, has been set up which is full of individuals that are committed to promoting this work and how organisations can become dementia-friendly. A webpage has been set up where organisations can upload their action plans on how they can become a DFO.

The West Suffolk councils are already taking the first steps towards becoming a DFO. A member of the Families and Communities team has trained to deliver the awareness sessions that will be rolled out to staff and community groups.

At a recent St Edmundsbury Parish Conference, we ran a Dementia Friendly Communities workshop which prompted great interest from the participants.

## 6. Communicating with our residents

### Customer services

Over the past year we have continued with the implementation of our target operating model for customer services, meaning that the team is able to handle queries about a range of services. This enables customers to have their questions answered at the first point of contact. Now more than 90% of queries are resolved at the first point of contact, saving valuable time for both residents and staff. This year the team began taking calls for the Apex box office as well as managing the contacts relating to the new garden waste service. The team also managed all the calls relating to the elections service and offered extended hours in the run up to, and on, election day.

The service coped well in the face of increasing demand, taking 150,000 phone calls during 2015/16, compared with 107,000 last year. In addition, we have talked face-to-face with 70,000 customers to council offices in West Suffolk.

Our online offer has increased and we have introduced online applications for residents' parking permits, as well the garden waste collection service, with approximately 60% of subscriptions being completed online.

To support these changes, we introduced a new corporate Customer Relationship Management system that can handle queries for all the various types of work that we do and allows us to connect online forms with back office systems. This makes it simpler for residents across West Suffolk to make use of the services we provide.

### **Social media conversations**

As part of channel shift, and acknowledging the decline in circulation of traditional news print media, the councils are proactively using social media to engage with residents. Information is tweeted to nearly 6000 Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury followers giving other Twitter users the opportunity to share the news with their own followers. Their comments and enquiries are monitored and answered by the Customer Service Team and communications officers.

Tweets also direct residents to fuller information posted on our Facebook pages, which is shared with a growing audience of more than 50 community Facebook groups. Some of these groups have membership levels in excess of 10,000 people (who may also share the status to their friends). This enables the councils to have conversations with residents, helping them understand what changes mean to them and the reasons behind them. The councils' social media practice is evolving quickly in response to customer expectation. For example, the Garden Waste Collection Scheme launch used social media proactively to explain the complex messages and to dispel myths, and used it reactively to respond to individual queries and concerns expressed solely by social media.

### **Find My Nearest**

We are committed to making it more straightforward for residents to be able to access information on council services and their local area by themselves. As part of this we introduced 'Find My Nearest' in May. This is an online service that shows residents a wealth of information

relevant to them including their local democratic arrangements, nearby planning issues and waste and recycling arrangements. It also shows information relating to partner public services including nearby schools, health providers and roadworks. Since being launched the number of users has gradually grown and from the beginning of 2016 the service has attracted on average 2900 separate users per month.

### **Community Governance Review**

We are currently in phase two of the Community Governance Review of parish electoral arrangements in St Edmundsbury which we agreed to carry out in response to new growth under Vision 2031. We also asked parishes if there were any other governance issues which needed to be examined elsewhere in the borough.

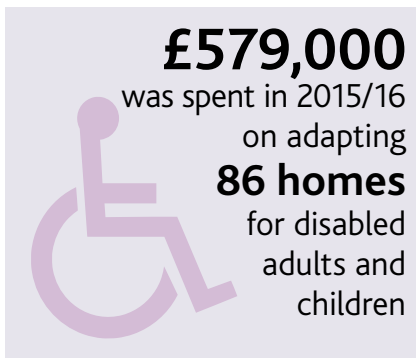
As a result there were over 20 issues with final recommendations that we formally consulted on as part of the Community Governance Reviews. The consultation ended in April 2016.

Final recommendations for any boundary or electoral changes will be agreed in summer 2016.

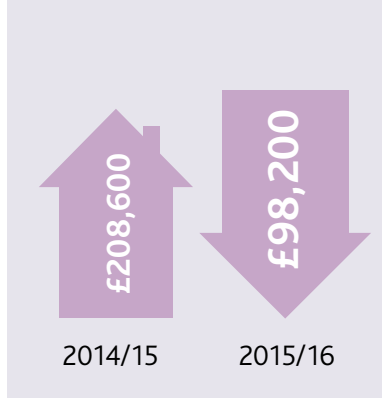
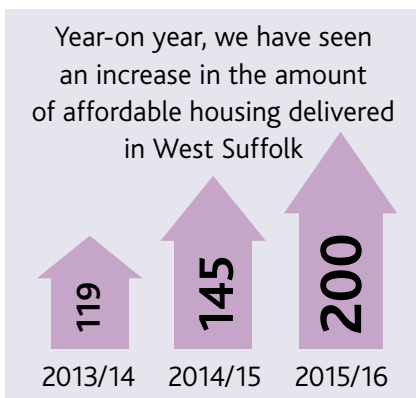
## Priority 3: Homes for our communities

### We want to see:

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



We reduced the amount of money spent on housing people in temporary accommodation in 2015/16, by finding more suitable accommodation solutions



### Why was this a priority for 2015/16?

Ensuring that people have an appropriate supply of housing is one of West Suffolk's three priorities because of its importance to our residents. Good housing has an important role in improving the wellbeing of people in our area, and it is vital in realising our ambitions for economic growth.

Because of this we work hard to ensure that there's a good range of options, across private sale, private rental, social, and affordable housing. Our housing work is underpinned by our role as a planning authority. In this role we are committed to ensuring

that new development is both appropriate to the area and complemented by sufficient infrastructure. By doing this we can ensure that new development isn't only about building houses; it's about building communities.

### What we have done to support this priority

Since adoption in October 2014, we have worked to deliver against the actions and targets in the West Suffolk Housing Strategy. Our progress against increasing the supply of new homes, making the best use of existing housing and providing specialist

housing and support, along with our progress against other actions to improve the housing situation in West Suffolk is detailed throughout this chapter.

## 1. Ensuring a sufficient supply of housing

### Forest Heath Local Plan

Forest Heath District Council is planning for the long-term growth to ensure that there is certainty in how and where our settlements will grow. Consultations on the Site Allocations Local Plan and the Single Issue Review (SIR) of Core Strategy Policy CS7 (Overall Housing Provision and Distribution) took place between August and October 2015. The purpose of this consultation document was to stimulate debate to identify the most appropriate sites for housing, employment and community and leisure use.

The responses to the consultation have helped inform a further document (out to public consultation between April and June 2016) which sets out the council's preferred strategy for the allocation of sites across the district. Following this, a final draft of the Site Allocations document will be prepared, which the council will submit to the Secretary of State for an independent planning examination. This final draft will be known as the Submission Document and when it is published in 2016 there will be another final opportunity for the public and stakeholders to comment.

### Vision 2031 Sites

We are delighted that negotiations around the Eastern Relief Road were concluded in February 2016. The access that this road will bring means that 500 homes are set to be built on the Vision 2031 site east of Moreton Hall. Full planning permission has been granted for the first phase of 100 homes, of which 30 will be classified as affordable. A further 400 homes have been granted outline planning permission.

### Bringing empty homes back into use

West Suffolk councils have taken a pro-active partnership approach to returning under-used empty homes back into use. We have worked with colleagues at Anglia Revenues Partnership to survey owners of empty homes, to both ensure that our

records are more accurate and also to enable us to prioritise those requiring further actions. We support owners in a number of ways, including the offer of a grant to enable repairs, while also targeting those properties where further enforcement may be required. The total number of empty homes was reduced by 803 and we brought 30 empty homes back into use by improving standards through staff interventions in 2015/16.

### Planning Improvement Plan

During 2015 our Development Management Service went through extensive internal and external reviews to help us to understand, with supporting evidence, some of the opportunities for improvement that exist across the service. The recommendations from the review have been collated into a Planning Improvement Plan which will be delivered over the coming months. In the meantime, our performance has improved which is evident through data in our balanced scorecard.

As part of the Planning Improvement Plan we will be providing more information online and offering customers the chance to self-serve through the use of our website and the planning portal website. We look forward to reporting on the success of the Planning Improvement Plan next year.

## 2. Housing that is suitable for our communities

### Supporting the adoption of neighbourhood plans

Neighbourhood plans are legally binding planning documents that give the local community a say in future development. We have been supporting Hargrave and Newmarket to produce their neighbourhood plans. Both areas settled on the geographical extent that their plan will eventually cover after we provided the resources to conduct consultations. The two neighbourhood areas were formally designated in late 2015.

We will continue to support both areas by assisting with future consultation, providing planning expertise and conducting the local referendum which will eventually decide whether or not the plans are formally adopted as legal planning documents.

## Case study: Design council

Preventing older persons' unplanned hospital admissions and ambulance call-outs is becoming an increasing priority both locally and nationally as the older population grows and the need for financial efficiencies intensifies. To help reduce unnecessary calls on services, the housing service at West Suffolk councils is leading a group, which includes partners from West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group, Suffolk County Council's Adults and Communities Service and Havebury Housing Partnership, to look at ways to reduce unnecessary ambulance call-outs and accident and emergency admissions amongst older people living in sheltered housing.

Data collected for the project show that across ten sheltered housing schemes, there are around 11 unplanned hospital admissions a month. The project is now seeking to co-ordinate day-to-day social support and social care and health preventative work to bring down this figure. With each acute hospital admission costing upwards of £1000 to the health service alone, halving this rate of unplanned admission would see an immediate annual saving of £66,000 to £100,000 with more savings to come as the approach is rolled out to other providers of sheltered housing accommodation in our area and the secondary benefits to other services are quantified.

Other work has included 'Human Centred Design' approach with the partners listed above which seeks to achieve: (a) a reduction in the time that older medically fit patients spend in hospital; and (b) achieve the best possible outcomes upon their return home. Positive outcomes of this work have included collaborative work amongst partners, information sharing and potential cost savings.

### 3. Identifying and delivering new funding models for affordable housing

#### Barley Homes (Group) Ltd

This year saw the establishment of Barley Homes (Group) Ltd which is a company limited by shares jointly owned by Suffolk County Council (50% of shares), Forest Heath District Council (25%) and St Edmundsbury Borough Council (25%). The purpose of the company is to develop houses across all tenures, for sale and private rent on a commercial basis, while also delivering much needed affordable homes. The company will also aim to provide specialist housing that the private sector does not currently deliver. The business case to establish the company was approved by the three councils in November 2015.

The housing company promises to be an innovative approach to help achieve both our housing and financial goals and is thought to be the country's first example of a county and district/borough jointly establishing a company to build homes.

Other housing companies in operation are wholly-owned by district or county councils; this is one of the first examples of a three-way partnership. Work has now begun on the development of the company's first five-year plan which will include specific details of sites to be developed in West Suffolk. It is hoped that the plan will be approved in late 2016, work can then progress on developing the first site.

#### Continue the supply of affordable housing

In partnership with registered housing providers we have maximised the delivery of affordable homes to help meet the needs of West Suffolk. Housing and planning services are continuing to ensure that new private developments contribute both affordable housing and contributions to key infrastructure.

A three-year high in new affordable housing delivery was achieved in 2015/16 when a total of 200 affordable houses were built, up from 119 in 2013/14 and 145 in 2014/15.



Of the 200 affordable homes delivered in 2015/16, 87 were built on registered provider-led developments consisting entirely of 100% affordable homes, with the remaining 113 affordable homes resulting from planning obligations fulfilled by private developers on mixed tenure schemes. In this case, the properties were sold on to registered providers.

We have continued to work with developers to ensure that we achieve 30% affordable housing on new developments.

### **Improving the quality of existing housing**

We continue to work with both owners and landlords in the private sector to ensure that homes are safe and suitable to live in. We have brought 50 homes up to the decent home standard for vulnerable owner-occupiers through our Housing Assistance Policy. In addition, we have brought 76 homes up to the Housing Act standard by ensuring that the landlord removes the serious hazards for their tenant(s).

A pro-active approach is now being taken to identify Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in our main towns. HMOs provide lower cost shared accommodation, but also pose a higher risk of fire and other concerns in the local community. We work closely with partners such as the Fire Service and the Police around making these properties safe, up to standard and to reduce the impact of anti-social behaviour and crime. We have recently targeted Newmarket, where we have been successful in identifying HMOs and they are being improved. We intend to carry out a similar survey in Haverhill, starting from May 2016.

### **Support through Disabled Facilities Grants**

We spent £579,000 on adapting 86 homes for disabled adults and children to meet their essential housing needs through a grant. We have worked with Suffolk partners to procure a new Home Improvement Agency (HIA) to deliver services for our most vulnerable and disabled residents under a new integrated approach, with the service going 'live' in May 2016.

The HIA will deliver the majority of the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) allocation that the councils

have been allocated through the Better Care Fund (BCF) for 2016/17.

The new HIA will build on work that has been taking place with partners, such as the Clinical Commissioning Group and Suffolk County Council Adult Care, to prevent hospital admissions and improving hospital discharge, further information is provided in the Design Council section on page 32. West Suffolk councils have an important role in this process. Our strategy and operational work aims to ensure that residents can live independently and safely in their homes. This work supported our equality objective of providing 'homes that are flexible to meet people's changing needs'.

### **Suffolk co-ordination service**

West Suffolk councils have continued to lead the county-wide Suffolk co-ordination service, with funding from Suffolk County Council secured until September 2016. This service helps to place local people into supported accommodation. Across West Suffolk in 2015, a total of 321 people were placed in supported accommodation from a total of 507 assessments.

## **4. Homelessness and temporary accommodation**

### **Temporary accommodation in Bury St Edmunds**

We are committed to reducing dependency on bed and breakfast accommodation, which may be unsuitable for an individual or a family's needs and is not a cost effective solution. To reduce the need to use bed and breakfast accommodation, St Edmundsbury purchased Abbots House in Bury St Edmunds, which is a former bed and breakfast. The property is being converted and will provide temporary accommodation for four families, two couples and one disabled person in housing need.

Along with the existing temporary accommodation we already have in Forest Heath and the purchase in 2015 of a house in Lake Avenue in Bury St Edmunds, we will be able to eliminate the need to use bed and breakfast accommodation (apart from emergencies) for people waiting to be permanently rehoused. This approach means we will be able to provide high quality temporary

accommodation for households in housing need as well as eventually saving more than £110,400 per annum in bed and breakfast accommodation. Our approach has already resulted in significant savings; in 2014/15, we spent £208,600 on bed and breakfast accommodation, compared with £98,200 in 2015/16.

It is clear that this strategy is working because at the end of 2015 there were two households in bed and breakfast, compared with 20 at the end of 2013.

### Homelessness

Our West Suffolk Homelessness Strategy was adopted by the West Suffolk councils at the beginning of 2015. Through this strategy we have committed to do more to combat homelessness and to make sure that those who are affected by homelessness receive timely advice and assistance. For example, this year we have facilitated additional accommodation and support across the area for victims of Domestic Abuse who would otherwise become homeless.

As a result of the emphasis to prevent homelessness the number of households where West Suffolk accepted a duty to rehouse fell from 240 in 2014/15 to 210 in 2015/16. The reduction in numbers shows that our homelessness strategy is working, but that there is still more that can be done to tackle homelessness.

We have been working with partners to establish a Young Persons' Action Group with the primary objective of developing a joined-up approach to preventing homelessness for young people and families, including appropriate interventions for relationship breakdown. Partnership working in this area will progress to complete a Suffolk-wide Action Plan and build on best practice from across Suffolk to ensure that effective interventions are aimed at assisting in times of relationship and family breakdown.

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

We continue to work in partnership with all the local authorities across Suffolk to deliver the Warm Homes Healthy People Project. During 2015/16 this partnership has successfully secured funding of £1.6 million from the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) First Time Central Heating Fund and £350,000 from the fuel poverty charity National Energy Action. This funding will be used to deliver a range of energy efficiency improvements into vulnerable households across Suffolk. Both schemes are now operational with the first boiler installation taking place in January 2016. We are pleased to report that through these two projects it is anticipated that 400 vulnerable households will benefit from warmer and cosier homes which will mean improved health and wellbeing for those households.

The Warm Homes Healthy People Project continues to deliver its core service of offering 'in the home' independent advice and support and onward referrals to the appropriate schemes. In 2015/16 17 in home surveys were carried out in Forest Heath, which lead to £616 being spent on loft insulation, £800 on boiler repairs and £2,843 to assist residents with heating fuel. 30 in home surveys were carried out in St Edmundsbury which lead to 8 boiler upgrades, 6 heating installations and £4,310 to assist residents with heating fuel.

During 2015/16, the DECC funded Green Deal Community fund continued to support the installation of external wall insulation, with grants of up to £6000 available to each property. This scheme will support an estimated 900 homes until it finishes in the summer of 2016, with many residents in West Suffolk feeling the benefits.

## Case Study: National Grid Energy Innovation Fund – Shepherds Grove Park, Stanton

A successful bid was submitted to the National Grid Energy Innovation fund to provide new gas central heating systems and external wall insulation (EWI) to park homes in Stanton. National Grid awarded the project £100,000 and they also funded the installation of 14 new gas connections and heating systems to homes with residents over the age of 70. The £100,000 has been primarily used to fund the installation of external wall insulation to 24 park home properties.

The site has 216 homes in total and all residents must be over 55 years old. Many are retired and spend considerable time at home, so being able to maintain a warm and affordable property is essential. Ten of the properties benefited from both a new gas central heating system and EWI and the improvement to the comfort levels in these properties is significant. Most of the homes who have had EWI installed comment that the thermostat has been turned down a few degrees and the home remains warmer longer once the heating is turned off.



*A Shepherds Grove Park in Stanton resident signs a new gas connection application form with National Grid Affordable Warmth.*

The 14 EWI measures where central heating was already installed should see lifetime CO<sub>2</sub> savings of 25 tonnes and financial savings of at least £237 per year. The 10 properties that had new gas central heating and EWI installed should benefit from savings of £402 per year and lifetime CO<sub>2</sub> savings of 64 tonnes.

# West Suffolk ways of working

## Why was this important to us in 2015/16?

The publication of our Strategic Plan in 2014 which set out our vision: 'Working together, Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury councils will support communities to create the best possible future for people in West Suffolk'. Since then we have made ambitious plans for how to achieve this. In order to achieve this vision we set out our priorities, around opportunities for economic growth; resilient, healthy and active families and communities; and homes for our communities. Working together to share the way we deliver services as two councils has saved taxpayers significant amounts of money and made us more efficient, but it is clear that to make our vision a reality we need to change the way we work to become even more flexible and effective.

By taking necessary steps to develop our organisation, West Suffolk's public estate, and our Councillors and staff, we can secure our ability to deliver on our priorities now and into the future.

## What we have done to support this

### 1. Developing our organisation

#### Transformation Challenge Award (TCA)

In 2014 public authorities in Suffolk were awarded £3.3 million of government funding for an ambitious programme of collaboration and integration that will reduce costs and improve services for local people.

A great deal of transformation work happens 'below the radar' but the benefits can be felt in the improved way that the organisations work together. In June 2015 we worked on a system-wide project to bring data together in support of the ONE Haverhill Board. We brought the insight of the West Suffolk councils, Suffolk County Council, and West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group into one report so that the Board could ensure that their priorities were informed by high-quality

data. A system-wide approach was also essential in securing Design Council support for our initiatives to reduce hospital admissions among residents of sheltered housing by putting people, not processes, at the heart of service design.

Suffolk already has a strong history of working closely together to achieve better and more efficient services. This is clearly demonstrated by the way that Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury have worked together to share services. The principle can also be seen in our approach to the public sector estate across the county and our ambitious shared legal service project. TCA funding allows us to take these and other efforts further, by unblocking the problems that were getting in the way and by building capacity and facilitating change.

#### Shared legal services

This project is setting up a shared legal service across four partner councils in Suffolk to build skills, capacity and resilience.

Work has been ongoing to scope the needs and deliverables based on a strong customer focus. It is clear that the case can be made for a more diverse and flexible pool of staff, with a wider range of modern legal skills and knowledge within the service. We will be commencing with the early stages of the service in Spring/Summer 2016.

These initial stages will entail a joining of the teams from Babergh, Forest Heath, Mid Suffolk and St Edmundsbury councils. Along with Babergh and Mid Suffolk we are also working with Ipswich, Suffolk Coastal and Waveney councils on a joint arrangement to procure a combined Case Management System which will further support modern and new ways of working.

We also recently employed two new trainee solicitors who we support through the early stages of their legal careers; welcome additions to the team. All the lawyers are instrumental in providing legal expertise to complex new projects through their roles as partners to our council business.

## 2. Developing the public sector estate in West Suffolk

### Operational Hub

The West Suffolk Operational Hub (WSOH) is a project to build a site containing vehicle workshops, depot, waste transfer station, household waste and recycling centre and associated facilities. The project is a partnership between the West Suffolk councils, responsible for collecting waste, and Suffolk County Council, responsible for disposing of it through recycling or the energy-from-waste facility in Great Blakenham.

By having these facilities on the same site we would increase efficiency, save taxpayers' money, cut our current environmental impact and future-proof waste management for West Suffolk's growing communities. By combining our facilities on a new single site we would also unlock valuable public sector land that could be used for development to create employment and deliver economic benefits.

During 2015/16 we conducted two consultations to seek residents' views on the operational hub. Most recently we sought views on the work we carried out on investigating various options, both for delivery (we concluded that a single site was the best option) and on a number of sites close to Bury St Edmunds. We asked people to look at our research and give us their views, including suggestions for alternative sites. Further information on the project, including the consultations and outcomes are on the WSOH webpage: [www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/WSOH](http://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/WSOH)

### One Public Estate

The West Suffolk councils and local partners successfully bid for funds from the Government's One Public Estate (OPE) programme which is designed to release the value of public sector assets. The bid was made by the councils, Suffolk County Council, Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough LEP, New Anglia LEP, and the West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group. On behalf of the partners, Forest Heath District Council received £230,000 to use mainly towards planning for the future of RAF Mildenhall.

Part of the project is also to create a One Public Estate Board of West Suffolk partners which will assist with information sharing and coordination of all public estate projects in the area, for example NHS estates strategies, the Bury St Edmunds magistrates' court closure and town centre masterplans. The Board will also keep an overview on the Mildenhall Hub project which will bring together public services to make them more accessible to the public whilst reducing the cost of public services to the taxpayer. As well as the immediate benefits, the Hub is also part of the bigger picture of how Mildenhall's infrastructure will adapt for the future as the needs of the town change and, as such, it will be built to include flexible and expandable accommodation. The relocation of public services to a Hub site will also enable the release of other publicly-owned sites for housing and growth.

### Bus station building

In October 2015 St Edmundsbury Borough Council approved investing £39,500 in the Bury St Edmunds bus station building to enable significant longer term savings. The building had been costing the council £250,000 every year to run. We have been able to make savings of £100,000 every year through changes to staffing.

The investment was used to configure the building into two parts – a waiting area with a lettable café kiosk and access to public toilets; and a large lettable area for rent. Though the provision of real-time information boards outside the building has unfortunately been delayed, Suffolk County Council has committed to installing the boards in the bus stands.

In addition to the savings already unlocked by staffing changes, the café kiosk and lettable area have created the potential for some income from commercial opportunities in the future.

### Verse Ltd joint venture

St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath, together with Suffolk County Council, have formed a joint venture company with Vertas Group Limited, a publicly-owned facilities management company.

The new joint venture company is called Verse Ltd and consolidates facilities management services across West Suffolk. This will result in efficiency savings of £40,000 per year.

In due course Verse will be able to offer their commercial services to other organisations and businesses and so generate revenue, helping to contribute to the cost of running vital public services.

### 3. Developing our people

#### Staff learning and development

We are committed to the development of our workforce and the learning of new skills, behaviours and competencies, as set out by the University of Birmingham in their 21st Century Public Servant report. New initiatives in 2015/16 included a series of three one-day sessions on commercial awareness, shared with partner councils. The corporate training programme was tailored to meet key organisational priorities and also included sessions on negotiating skills, project management, effective writing for business and handling difficult conversations. We continued to develop our coaching and mentoring offer and supported our future talent through Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) courses including coaching, mentoring, and management. We also supported mediation training and are now able to offer mediation in the workplace.

In 2015/16 some 200 members of staff attended training events including PREVENT awareness sessions (the identification and prevention of radicalisation).

In September 2015 we moved the West Suffolk corporate e-learning platform to a shared access portal with Suffolk County Council. This move was cost-effective and allowed us to access a much wider range of learning materials.

Twenty-six managers completed, or are in the process of completing, ILM qualifications at level 3 and level 5. This offer was made to staff based on assessment of their performance and potential (through the annual Performance and Development Review scheme). The courses are being delivered in partnership with borough, county and district

councils in Suffolk, thereby building support networks across the Suffolk system, sharing experiences and differences and enabling cost-effective delivery. We continue to work with the Suffolk Coaching and Mentoring Partnership, having a role on the Board, offering staff the opportunity to find a coach-mentor match and developing coaching capacity across the organisation.

The apprenticeship rolling programme saw 17 young apprentices working in the organisation across all service areas and six members of staff taking up level 2 and level 3 apprenticeships in customer services. The intern programme has also grown considerably with nine interns employed over the summer months in 2015 and very positive feedback received from them about their experience working for West Suffolk. The programme saw the interns delivering a range of projects which gave them the opportunity to experience real life work to support their future career paths.

#### Councillor learning and development

2015 was dominated by the delivery of the member induction programme, including a range of topics from equality and diversity to information communication technology training. Each member was allocated a staff 'buddy' to help them through the initial stages of induction. The programme started with an informal networking session with representatives from each of the services meeting and concluded with local government finance.

A new IT-based committee management system was implemented enabling full and secure access to committee papers online. Members were encouraged, through using new technology, to reduce reliance on paper-based information. Throughout the year ICT sessions have been delivered to groups of Members and on a one-to-one basis, to support the use of the system, and to enable internet access to minutes, agendas and reports. This work will continue to build confidence and support Members in their ward and committee roles.

## The future

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This year we have made considerable steps towards achieving our strategic priorities and we are always working to make sure we continue to do so in the future. The role and shape of local government is changing and we must make sure that not only are we taking advantage of the opportunities, but that we are ready for the challenges too.

### Devolution

A devolution deal for East Anglia was announced in the government's 2016 Budget covering councils in Cambridgeshire, Peterborough, Suffolk, and Norfolk. The deal is due to be ratified by each council in turn in early summer 2016. Covering areas such as jobs, transport, housebuilding, and health and social care the deal offers the opportunity for more decisions to be taken locally, rather than in Whitehall.

Under the proposed deal, £30 million of funding will be devolved each year over the next 30 years to support economic growth, the development of infrastructure and the creation of jobs. In addition, £175 million will be devolved over the next five years to support housebuilding across the region. The region would also gain control of around £50 million a year in adult skills funding.

### RAF Mildenhall and RAF Lakenheath

The USAF-occupied RAF Lakenheath and RAF Mildenhall airbases are both in the Forest Heath district but the impact of the approximately 8800 US personnel/staff and 1100 UK civilians employed by the airbases goes far wider into Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk. Over the next six years we will see substantial changes at both airbases with the withdrawal of USAF operations from RAF Mildenhall and the deployment of the F-35A aircraft at RAF Lakenheath.

In 2015/16 Forest Heath commissioned an impact study to assess the economic impact of the two airbases on West Suffolk and the surrounding areas. New Anglia LEP, Greater Cambridgeshire and Greater Peterborough LEP, Suffolk County Council and Breckland and East Cambridgeshire councils also helped to fund the economic impact study. The study revealed that the two airbases collectively

could currently be worth as much as £700 million a year to the West Suffolk, Breckland and East Cambridgeshire economies. This is after direct employment on-base and indirect employment associated with spending on and off-base is taken into account.

The impact study has helped us to work alongside our communities and local businesses to plan for the impact of changes across both airbases. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) and other government departments are currently considering the future of the RAF Mildenhall airbase as part of its Strategic Defence and Security Review, which is due to conclude in the summer 2016. We believe that the release of the RAF Mildenhall site is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to shape the future of Mildenhall and the surrounding areas. We are therefore working with the MOD to deliver a vision that attracts new businesses and creates employment and delivers appropriate housing.

During this year we have held a number of engagement sessions for residents, community representatives and businesses to discuss the changes at RAF Mildenhall, which will be vacated by US forces by 2022. Forest Heath recognised the importance of the public having a say in the future of the site and that this is kept at the heart of decision-making. The engagement sessions gave us the opportunity to harness a great deal of local interest in a future vision for Mildenhall, including discussions on the infrastructure needed to support possible uses for the site and concerns about the impact of the airbase closure on local people and the local economy.

We received some strong messages about what local people think should happen in the future and we're using that information to help inform our discussions with the MOD about what should happen to the site post 2022. We are currently awaiting a decision on how the land will be used in the future and we will share the latest developments on this as soon as we can.

## **RAF Barnham**

In January 2016 the Ministry of Defence confirmed that they would be withdrawing operations from RAF Barnham. The RAF Barnham site is heavily constrained by land-use planning restrictions and by its use as an operational military base. We are discussing with the MOD about the impact of the closure of RAF Barnham and its plans for bringing the land forward for development. When more information is known, St Edmundsbury Borough Council will ensure that local communities are informed and engaged in any future decision-making about potential options for the site.

## **Everything we do**

As well as tackling the major issues of tomorrow in the specific areas detailed above, we are laying plans for the future in all areas of our work. We will grow our commercial services and expand our apprenticeship schemes. We will continue to strengthen our partnerships to make sure that our markets, town centres and rural areas are as vibrant as they can be. We will support economic growth and housebuilding by implementing our Planning Improvement Plan, which will build capacity in our planning service. Even further, we will explore how to extend our pioneering Families and Communities approach into everything we do. We will continue to take a leading role in our communities, building resilience, creating connections, and delivering resources, such as funding, to support people to improve their own lives, and the lives of others around them, in their own local communities.



# West Suffolk

Cambridge

London









Forest Heath & St Edmundsbury councils

**West Suffolk**  
working together

