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# Council



**Forest Heath**  
District Council

<b>Title of Report:</b>	<b>Leader's Statement</b>	
<b>Report No:</b>	<b>COU/FH/18/010</b>	
<b>Report to and date:</b>	<b>Council</b>	<b>25 April 2018</b>

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I would like to start by paying tribute to our dear friend and former colleague John McGhee. John as many of you will know, served on this council from 1999 through to the last election. He served the Market Ward for those 16 years and was our chairman in 2010/11, and was also our chairman of the Licensing Committee for a number of years. Although he didn't stand at the last election, many of us in this room will feel the loss of this kind hearted and popular friend. He will be sadly missed.

Looking to the future. We expect the order confirming the creation of the new West Suffolk council will be made in Parliament by the end of next month.

The ward boundary review, which is something that would have happened to us regardless of Single Council or not has progressed well. We had more than 80 responses to our own review. However, I want to emphasise that ultimately it is up to the Boundary Commission to make the final decision on our wards – not us. They will listen to both our own submissions and those of our residents and communities in equal measure. The Boundary Commission and the Ministry were, however, impressed with the progress made by both Councils and its Officers on this work.

You will of course have seen lots in the press about the Suffolk County Council unilateral local government review. It is still my belief that any such review should have involved the districts and borough councils in Suffolk from the outset and should not have employed a consultant who has a track record specialising in promoting the unitary model.

I'm sure you will share my view that we aren't councillors for ourselves or our own personal glory. Public Service isn't about what structure we have in place but how we look beyond boundaries and work together for the benefit of our residents – they are at the heart of what we do and why we exist.

We know that services at grass roots level is what is most important and we all need to look at how we work together to deliver more for less. We need innovation not reinvention and we need to be focused on what our communities need, not obsessing with what shape we look like.

Councillors and staff work for our residents and businesses. We already have one single set of staff across the two councils and by doing that we have been saving the taxpayer £4m a year. The creation of a West Suffolk council is a progressive step – having one leader and one cabinet instead of two, a single stronger voice nationally while retaining that close relationship to our communities that we have now. It has public, business and partner support including from Suffolk County Council. We aren't reinventing the wheel but we are driving forward with ambitions that both benefit and have been backed by our communities.

The Suffolk County Council local government review is not objective, it is a waste of time and money but most importantly we aren't convinced it will achieve the single most important thing which is better services for residents.

Rest assured that while we continue on our path to becoming a single council, our day to day work goes on. We continue to support our communities, deliver for our residents and businesses and to champion this special part of the world that is West Suffolk.

However, I think within our other work, there are grounds to be optimistic about the future for the residents and businesses we serve.

First of all I would like to highlight to you all that there will be a business event on 10<sup>th</sup> May where our local businesses including trades, caterers, cleaners, equipment suppliers and service facilities companies can find out more about how they can win some of the routine contracts to be awarded by the USAF at RAF Lakenheath. This will come ahead of the awarding of millions of dollars of contracts to be awarded as part of its expansion programme at RAF Lakenheath. The US Military want to employ local trades people to carry out the work and the employment opportunities in this area across all elements of the construction trade will be huge for years to come. We will of course update you with any news on RAF Mildenhall as and when we can.

We are of course carrying out a lot of work to help some of the most vulnerable in our communities. Earlier this year we announced the investment at Portland House which provides supported housing to young people. I am pleased to say that West Suffolk has followed that up with additional investment in temporary accommodation both in Bury St Edmunds and Newmarket. In Newmarket, we have purchased a building which provides not only a commercial income, but much needed affordable accommodation, particularly for single people. This is a real example of where we have combined our commercial outlook – to increase income – with our social commitment to our communities. In addition, we have also recruited two more outreach workers to the housing team. Helping people who are homeless and perhaps rough sleeping isn't as simple as finding them a room and a bed. Many need additional help in order to turn their lives around and to keep whatever accommodation they have been placed in. That is why one

of our new outreach workers specialises in getting people with drug and alcohol issues the support that they need. Of course the bulk of our work is about stopping people ending up on the streets in the first place and the fact that we assisted or prevented more than 500 households last year is a real credit to the housing team and illustrates the work that goes on everyday within our council.

On the other side of that same coin our rogue landlords policy here before you tonight, means that we can take tougher action against unscrupulous landlords who exploit their tenants and expose them to unsafe living conditions. We know that these dodgy landlords are in a minority but hopefully this policy will mean more people will report unsafe practices and word will get out to landlords themselves that these practices will not be tolerated.

Finally a couple of congratulations.

The RAF is celebrating its centenary. Although both local bases are used by our American cousins they still retain a RAF presence. Of course many airfields throughout West Suffolk were used by the RAF during World War Two, while many of us will either have, or will know people in our families, or our communities who have served in the RAF. I am sure you will join me in wishing the RAF a happy 100<sup>th</sup> birthday.

And congratulations to the National Heritage Centre for Horseracing and Sporting Art which is going from strength to strength. The Heritage Centre, which was a finalist in the Art Fund 2017 Museum of the Year, has further bolstered its credentials in the last few weeks, having become a National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) with the Arts Council. What this means in real terms is that it will receive a £220,000 revenue grant for the next four years as well as the wider support of the Arts Council. All of this can only help it grow in success and alongside it its wider role in our ambitions to help Newmarket town centre achieve its greater potential. Cabinet looks forward to hearing the findings of the special Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting that took place on 16 April to examine the future plans of the Heritage Centre.