

# West Suffolk Annual Report 2017/2018

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June 2018

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## Foreword from the Leaders

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West Suffolk is a national success story and a UK leader in transforming how councils can deliver benefits that make a real difference to the people they serve.

This Annual Report is a small part of the great work Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council deliver day in, day out in West Suffolk.

At the heart of all we do are the needs and aspirations of the communities we serve and includes delivering high quality services while encouraging prosperity, good quality of life and a vibrant local economy. This means investing in initiatives that support our communities and businesses while working more closely with partners and residents.

This year we have either secured, embarked upon or invested millions of pounds in leisure facilities, the creation of new jobs, better education, open spaces and development of much needed homes. At the same time we have recycled thousands of tonnes of rubbish, supported businesses with our licensing and enforcement work, as well as kept our streets clean, making West Suffolk such a great place to live and grow a family or business.

Nationally, councils are facing tremendous challenges. This report and the decisions we have been making show we are meeting and exceeding those challenges while continuing to look to the future. Alongside growing our prosperity, we have been able to protect our services while many authorities nationally are reducing theirs. We have also been able to better support and work with our communities and organisations through our Families and Communities work – growing community networks and their self-sufficiency.

Our innovation and aspiration is not only reflected in this report but has also been recognised by Government. We are also pleased that both Councils this year adopted our new Strategic Framework as well as some of the policies that back up our ambition and vision, including our West Suffolk Growth Investment Strategy.

We have worked even more closely together as councils to look at what is the best way to continue to support our communities and manage growth for the benefit of our residents. The public, businesses and partners have backed our proposals to create a new West Suffolk Council which will give us a louder voice and better ability to drive prosperity, jobs and the economy. Within just a year we have had the full support of Government to make this a reality – the first proposal of its kind through Parliament.

This year has been another excellent one but there is always more we can do. We believe we are in a much better position to meet those future challenges.



Councillor James Waters  
Leader  
Forest Heath District Council



Councillor John Griffiths  
Leader  
St Edmundsbury Borough Council

# Introduction

The Annual Report presents the progress that West Suffolk councils have made in delivering our vision and priorities.

The vision and priorities that we worked towards during 2017-18 are set out in the West Suffolk Strategic Plan 2014-16 at: [www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/Council/Policies\\_Strategies\\_and\\_Plans/](http://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/Council/Policies_Strategies_and_Plans/)

A new Strategic Framework was published in December 2017 covering 2018-20. Progress towards the new Strategic Framework will be reported in Spring/Summer 2019.

The Annual Report describes our achievements in detail across all of our localities, whether towns or villages. Some of the work we have done impacts all of our residents and businesses, whereas other elements are focused on specific communities. In doing this, our aim is to respond to the specific assets, aspirations and needs of our different places and communities to ensure all of them are best placed to grow in prosperity and quality of life.

The table in Appendix 3 on page 58 provides an overview of how we have particularly supported our more rural communities and businesses in 2017/18, as well as highlighting key achievements in rural areas. Further details about the examples within the appendix can be found within the report.

Highlights across the whole of West Suffolk in 2017/18 are shown below:

- We are on our way to creating a new **West Suffolk Council** after receiving support from the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in February 2018 and the Grand Committee in the House of Lords and House of Commons in May.
- We are a step closer to delivering better school and leisure facilities for our growing population of residents in and around Mildenhall after the **Mildenhall Hub** was approved by Forest Heath District Council's Development Control Committee.
- We planned to invest **£1.5 million in sporting facilities in Haverhill** using the council's Leisure Investment Fund.
- We celebrated the first birthday of **Toggam Solar Farm** in August 2017. During the year, the solar farm generated 11,682MWh of electricity, bringing in £1.2 million of income and £308,000 net income.
- The Bury St Edmunds **Eastern Relief Road** officially opened in September 2017, unlocking a 68-hectare area for business development.
- We purchased the **former Post Office and DHL buildings in Bury St Edmunds** as part of our long term investment plan to help generate income and support the future delivery of public services.
- Our **legal service**, shared between four Suffolk councils (Babergh, Forest Heath, Mid Suffolk and St Edmundsbury) had a successful first year and came in on budget.
- We opened a **winter night shelter** from December to the end of March to help the most vulnerable when temperatures plummeted. We also **expanded our housing options team** to help meet the increased demand on the service due to changes brought about by the Homelessness Reduction Act.

## Our highlights in numbers

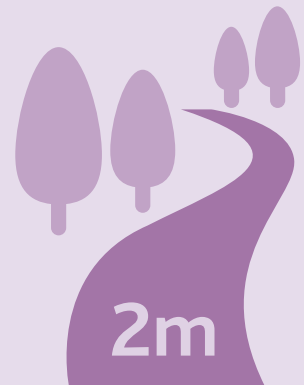
Last year we invested **£5.1m** in initiatives to bring jobs, support business and manage growth.



We helped deliver **254** much needed affordable homes



We helped support the health and wellbeing of our residents and visitors through our leisure centres, parks and cultural venues with over 2 million visits to West Suffolk's parks and **1.6 million visits to our leisure centres** in 2017-18



**23,500 tonnes**

We recycled **23,500 tonnes** of waste and emptied **4.2 million** bins



We provided support to local communities, voluntary groups, organisations and small businesses with over **£765,000** of grants

Despite an 81% reduction to our grants over the past 5 years we have continued to protect services and deliver annual savings of **£4m** a year



# A vision and priorities for West Suffolk 2017-2018

Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury Councils have a joint Strategic Plan which sets out our vision, priorities and key actions for West Suffolk in 2017 -18

## 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
- People with the educational attainment and skills needed to support business growth
- Vibrant, attractive and clean high streets, village centres and markets

## Why was this a priority for 2017/18?

Our first priority of economic growth underpins everything we do across West Suffolk. A thriving and diverse local economy helps support wider improvements in the quality of life for our residents. High levels of business and employment growth in a broad range of economic sectors can both support improvements to the quality of life of our residents and offer larger scale benefits for our communities.

This section of the annual report sets out our key achievements this year and it shows that we have continued our commitment to ensure that the infrastructure, homes, skills and opportunities exist to enable the economic growth for our communities. In this section we highlight our activities under the headings:

- Creating the right conditions for growth
- Skills and education
- Supporting our markets
- Creating prosperous places to live in, work in and visit

## Creating the right conditions for growth

### Setting the framework for future growth

- To ensure that we meet our priority for increased economic growth, we will continue to work with partners and use our influence, investment, and regulatory powers to deliver growth in West Suffolk's economy for the benefit of all our residents. This includes:

- lobbying for a better connected West Suffolk, in terms of transport and digital connectivity and promoting West Suffolk as a place to do business;
- developing our current and future local workforce through education, training and opportunities for all; and
- utilising the West Suffolk Investment Strategy to maximise the positive impact we have on our communities and businesses.

### Campaigning for the right infrastructure

- We have continued to campaign for fast, reliable and safe transport connections to and from West Suffolk, for example through joining the East West Rail Consortium and lobbying for more frequent train services from Cambridge to Ipswich, the dualling of the A1307 between Cambridge and Haverhill, and investment in key trunk road junctions.
- Working in partnership with Suffolk County Council and Suffolk Chamber's No More A14 Delays in Suffolk campaign, two funding bids were submitted to Highways England for much needed improvements to A14 junctions 37, 43, 44, and the A11 at Fiveways. A funding decision is expected in 2019.
- £400,000 from the Department of Transport will be used to install traffic signals on the approaches to the A11 Fiveways junction and address safety concerns on the A11 immediately to the south of Fiveways. We are pleased to report that traffic signals are due to be installed in 2018/19.



- We also continue to engage with Suffolk County Council on a number of infrastructure issues including potholes and other road repairs.

### Suffolk Business Park and the Eastern Relief Road

- We want to ensure we attract the right mix of businesses to safeguard the growth of our economy now and into the future.
- The Eastern Relief Road in Bury St Edmunds opened in September 2017 in the east of Bury St Edmunds, meaning we are a step closer to attracting inward investment and business growth. Crucially, the Eastern Relief Road opened up 68 hectares of employment land, a secondary school with leisure facility and land for 500 new homes.
- In January 2018, the first tree was planted on the business park to mark the beginning of the £175,000 landscaping contract at the site. This contract will include 1.25 miles of hedge, 500 saplings and 22,000 route shrubs planted on the 114-acre site.
- Further, Bury St Edmunds-based business Treatt plc began building a new 1-acre site at the business park.
- Once finished, the site will provide 2 million sq. ft. of commercial space and opportunities for logistic

services with commercial units ranging from 50,000 to 750,000 sq. ft. of business, distribution and industrial units. This will also include 37-acres which have Enterprise Zone status.

### RAF Mildenhall and RAF Lakenheath

- Redevelopment of RAF Mildenhall - Although the departure of the US Air Force from RAF Mildenhall has been delayed until 2024 (at the earliest), we have continued to work with partners to ensure we have an active role in refining the Vision for the site in preparation for the master planning process.
- Investment in RAF Lakenheath - The improvements to RAF Lakenheath infrastructure are scheduled to be completed in 2021 and we have continued to work alongside the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) who are leading this work. We have also engaged with skills partners to ensure we have a local workforce that can support the development and ensure its timely delivery, ensuring local businesses have the opportunity to benefit as part of the supply chain.
- Information regarding the USVF changes at RAF Mildenhall and RAF Lakenheath is available here: [www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/RAF\\_Lakenheath\\_and\\_Mildenhall](http://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/RAF_Lakenheath_and_Mildenhall)

*Daemmon Reeve, Chief Executive Officer of Treatt with St Edmundsbury leader John Griffiths and Hayley Mace of New Anglia LEP*





## Enterprise zones

- The Government's Enterprise Zone programme includes two sites in West Suffolk: Haverhill Research Park and 14 hectares of land at Suffolk Park (which is part of Suffolk Business Park), Bury St Edmunds. Enterprise Zones help to grow the local economy by offering benefits to businesses, such as a potential business rates discount.
- Haverhill Research Park is actively being marketed as part of the Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough's 'Cambridge Compass' Enterprise Zone. Similarly, Suffolk Park is being marketed by New Anglia within its 'Space to Innovate' Enterprise Zone.
- Treatt, one of the world's longest established solutions providers for the flavours and fragrances industry is the first tenant to sign up to the Enterprise Zone at Suffolk Park, Bury St Edmunds.
- Treatt, having been in Bury St Edmunds since the early 1970s, is consolidating its current operations in the town to a new Headquarter facility over 10 acres.

## Investing in our commercial property

- Across West Suffolk, we own over 350 industrial, commercial or retail units. We have experienced a growing demand for properties from businesses and during 2017-18, the Property Services team secured new leases in 11 properties across Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury, which are expected to generate a combined total annual rental income in excess of £120,000.
- We also have seven commercial properties under offer with new leases due to complete later this year which are expected to generate a further combined total annual rental income of £150,000.
- As well as the 350 commercial properties, the councils own approximately 400 operational properties and assets. From these we deliver key services, such as leisure centres, car parks and toilets. Mindful of our commitment to generate best value from our assets and support our investment in growth, including acquisitions, the councils are undertaking a strategic review of our approach to managing land and property assets. The aim is to develop a vision and a set of core values and priorities that contributes to the

achievement of corporate objectives over a period of between five and ten years in West Suffolk.

- The councils are also committed to the principles of localism and subsidiarity (as described in our 2018-2020 Strategic Framework), and will continue to explore with residents, local organisations and town and parish councils new ways of working to help empower communities make the most of their local assets. This includes supporting local targeted initiatives as well as helping those communities who wish to take on responsibility for local services or deliver health benefits.

## Small business grants

- The West Suffolk small business grants scheme enables new businesses or those still within their first year (subject to criteria) to apply for a grant of up to £1,500.
- In 2017/18, eight grants totalling £7,500 have been awarded across West Suffolk. We have supported a wide variety of businesses including an electric car technology business in Newmarket, a community singing company in Bury St Edmunds and a lamb charcuterie in Stoke-by-Clare.

## Greener businesses

- During 2017/18, 12 businesses received technical and financial support through the West Suffolk Greener Business Grant for energy efficiency improvements, with LED lighting being the most popular upgrade. The grant is part of the West Suffolk Community Energy Plan and helps local businesses and organisations reduce their energy use and save money and can be used for a wide variety of measures including insulation of buildings and replacing heat controls and lighting.
- Between them, the 12 businesses invested £34,081 into the energy efficiency improvements, which will result in total annual savings of £8,129 for all 12 businesses through their energy bills.
- The councils have also launched a new energy efficiency investment service as part of the West Suffolk Community Energy Plan, where we provide Energy Performance Contracts. The councils manage the procurement, installation

and financing and the business repays the councils financing through their energy savings. To date, three businesses have taken this opportunity to fund one biomass boiler and two LED lighting projects.

- One project involved a biomass boiler which was installed in the National Heritage Centre for Horseracing and Sporting Art museum in June 2017, with the aim of reducing its carbon dioxide emissions from heating by 90 per cent. The council invested just over £100,000 to buy and install the new 200 kilowatt wood chip burner. The savings mean that the museum will save around 10 per cent on its heating costs, while the council will recoup its investment.
- The scheme also supported DB Sheetmetals - a metal work manufacturing business in Haverhill - to be greener and save money.
- West Suffolk councils have also continued to look for suitable opportunities to invest in roof mounted solar Photovoltaics (PV) systems. A tender to install 800kWp of solar across 13 different sites in West Suffolk has been issued during this period. This will add significant generation capacity to our current portfolio of 27 sites.

## Supporting businesses in West Suffolk

- We continue to host the West Suffolk Business Festival, which ran for its seventh year in October 2017. The festival held events from: Menta, Visit Suffolk, West Suffolk College, iliffe media, Suffolk Chamber of Commerce, New Anglia Growth Hub and Signpost2Grow.
- The events provided delegates the opportunity to network, and learn more about upcoming issues that may affect them, such as funding, general data protection regulations, and tourism, and attracted businesses and organisations from all over Suffolk and Cambridge.
- The festival closed with the annual Bury Free Press Business Awards which recognise the best in West Suffolk businesses, attracting 100 entries, the highest number of nominations to date.
- West Suffolk councils sponsored the West Suffolk award for Innovation which was won by Herga Technology.
- In October, the council supported Local Flavours 2017; an annual event which celebrates East Anglia's food and drink industry. The event attracted more than 100 producers and more than 1,000 buyers.



*Councillor Lance Stanbury at the National Heritage Centre for Horseracing after the installation of the biomass boiler*

## Case Study: DB Sheetmetals

In February 2018, a specialist sheet metal company in Haverhill needed to replace old lighting to help with inspection and reduce costs but did not have the time or funding available to make the project happen.



By working with West Suffolk's Community Energy Programme, DB Sheetmetals were able to get technical and financial support from the council's Environmental Health team to help them reduce costs and save money on their energy bills. This enabled the company to undertake a site wide replacement of the old lighting with new energy efficient LED bulbs with minimal disruption. This has not only improved light levels for vital inspection work but has also saved energy, reduced bills by over £3,400 and reduced greenhouse gas emissions.

The council's innovative energy performance approach provided 100% finance of the project costs and mirrors the latest innovations in the energy efficiency industry. DB Sheetmetals are repaying the cost of the project monthly and the council's Community Energy programme, working closely with the installer IC Lighting, has provided a guarantee that the energy savings will repay the capital expenditure in 3.7 years.

Caroline Law from DB Sheetmetals, said: "Replacing this lighting was important for the business to help us modernise, provide a better service and reduce energy costs. But like most small businesses finding the finance and having the time to do this is difficult. The Council and its Community Energy Programme were able to project management the procurement and installation as well as helping us gain a grant from Business Energy Efficiency Anglia. This has meant we have been able to install the new LEDs and pay back the secured loan over time. Quite simply, it is unlikely the project would have happened without the Council's Environment and Energy Team support."

## Investment Strategy

- In 2017, we developed the West Suffolk Growth Investment Strategy which sets out how we are taking the lead in West Suffolk on managing and stimulating inclusive growth for our local communities, while directly benefitting the local, regional and UK economies. The strategy aims to make sure businesses, partners and investors know what opportunities there are from working with us. Our investment principles are as follows:
  - Investing in our place and people.
  - Acting commercially.
  - Collaborating to maximise benefit.
  - Using our powers and policies.
- Our priority across West Suffolk is to invest our resources wisely in a range of ways so that we can continue to support day to day services and initiatives that can spur on economic growth, as well as social, community and environmental benefits.

## External funding

West Suffolk councils have been successful in attracting external funding. Including grants we would expect, both councils received £44,392,000 in revenue and £1,932,470 in capital funding in 2017/18.

## Skills and education

### Local skills and education needs

- We recognise that recruitment in West Suffolk is challenging at the moment. We live in an area of relatively full employment and there is a strong pull from Cambridge within the local jobs market. This makes the need to grow our own talent through apprenticeships and other training schemes even more important.
- We have continued to support young people from West Suffolk College to find work placements in the local community. This has allowed young people to pursue opportunities they were not previously aware of and broaden their employment prospects.

- Further, we have been supporting those who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) in Newmarket by helping them to engage with the Prince's Trust Programme. The programme specialises in supporting unemployed 16-25 year olds by building skills through practical tasks and gaining a qualification on completion of the 12-week programme. We have developed relationships between the Prince's Trust and the Newmarket community, including the racing community. As a result of our involvement and liaison, the racing centre housed the programme for the majority of the 12 weeks. Out of the programme of ten people who started and finished, all but one are now in education and employment. The next course will be held in Newmarket in November and we will continue to encourage young people to engage with what the Prince's Trust has to offer.
- We have continued to offer advice and guidance to businesses about apprenticeships. In the past 11 months, we have referred businesses to West Suffolk College's apprenticeship team between 15 and 20 times.
- We also helped deliver four events alongside Suffolk Chamber of Commerce that looked at engaging with businesses to see how skills needs are best met. The events were held in Brandon, Clare, Newmarket and Haverhill and had speakers from West Suffolk College, the Greater Cambridge/Greater Peterborough Enterprise Partnership and New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership for Norfolk and Suffolk and other business support agencies.
- At the end of 2017, we also worked with the United States Air Force to help with the recruitment of civilian staff by connecting them with West Suffolk College and the wider community.
- 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'.

### Developing our staff

- Since April 2017, we have had 16 new apprentices start work at West Suffolk councils,



## Case Study: Internship programme

We are committed to developing and retaining talent in West Suffolk and providing opportunities for young people.

During the summer of 2017, West Suffolk councils ran, for the fourth successive year, its highly successful internship programme, welcoming eight new interns to work across the organisation.

The internship programme, which is part of the Suffolk wide Rising High Programme, is designed to encourage young people to take up careers in the public sector and provides paid opportunities for undergraduates to experience work in a local authority during their summer break from university.

During the 12 week work placement, our interns were given responsibility for aspects of work within the service where they were based. They were also given the opportunity to work on challenging projects, as well as a local community project in partnership with Sainsbury's called "Want What You Waste".



One of our interns described their experience:

*"Working here has exceeded any expectations I could have set and has been a really great experience. The work I have been given has made me realise that working in local government can be very stimulating."*

*"I would definitely recommend working in local government and particularly West Suffolk as it really feels like a local authority who has ambition and drive to grow and adapt to the times. Whilst working here everybody has been so friendly and welcoming and it really feels like the council is invested in you as an employee."*

We are proud to have three current employees who have previously worked with us on the programme.

including our first degree apprentice in Chartered Surveying.

- We currently have 32 apprentices working towards an apprenticeship qualification including seven members of staff who have chosen to take up a work-based apprenticeship in subjects such as team leadership, management and business improvement techniques.
- Four out of the five apprentices who completed their programmes this year have been offered employment with the organisation.
- The Planning service has continued to help address the national shortage of planning officers by supporting and developing talent across the service. This year, two members of staff completed their dissertations for their Town Planning Masters and our apprentice and previous intern were appointed as Planning Officers.

- Our Information and Communications Technology (ICT) team has also appointed two of their apprentices as full time members of staff.
- This demonstrates our commitment to investing and developing the skills of young people and retaining talent by providing developmental opportunities in West Suffolk.
- In the last five years we have employed 60 apprentices, of whom 26 have stayed with us in either permanent or temporary jobs.
- Of our current workforce, 49 started their careers as an apprentice with West Suffolk councils at some point in the past.

### Graduate programme, internships and work experience

- This year, 11 work experience students have spent time with us at the councils. We have also visited



*Residents enjoying the reinstated Clare market*

schools such as Thurston Community College, Haverhill Apprenticeship Fair and Newmarket Academy jobs and apprenticeship fair to talk about apprenticeships at their 'Next Steps' events.

- We are also excited to be involved in an innovative new Graduate programme with our public sector partners in Suffolk. The overall objective of the programme is to grow future leaders by creating a Suffolk system talent pool for future management and leadership roles. The graduates will be provided with a joined up public sector experience working not just in councils, but also the police and health sectors.
- In September 2017, the first cohort of 11 graduates joined the programme, with one based with us at West Suffolk. Each graduate has a six month placement. So far, we have hosted two graduates in the Policy Team, where they have been supporting a range of departments to deliver projects and develop a range of policies.
- During the summer of 2017, West Suffolk councils ran, for the fourth successive year, its highly successful internship programme, welcoming eight new interns to work across the organisation. The internship, which is part of the Suffolk-wide Rising High Programme, is designed to encourage young people to take up careers in the public sector and provides paid opportunities for undergraduates during their summer break from university. During the 12-week work placements, our interns were given responsibility for aspects of work within the service where they were based. They worked on challenging and worthwhile projects as well as a group community challenge called "Want What You Waste", where they worked with Sainsbury's to help reduce food waste across West Suffolk. Currently, three employees took part in an internship with us at some point in the past.

but it is also a good way to provide employment and opportunities to new businesses, as well as increasing footfall in our towns by attracting visitors and boosting the local economy.

- We have continued to work with Suffolk County Council to improve the offer of Newmarket market for local residents and businesses. With support from market traders and High Street partners, plans were unveiled for the move of the market to the High Street from its current location behind the Guineas. The project is still in progress and we hope there will be further developments throughout 2018.
- Haverhill market held its first community market in partnership with Castle Manor School in May 2017. Supported by our market development officer, pupils helped with the planning, organisation and promotion of the event. Teams of students organised their own stalls which included vegetables grown in school, homemade cakes and gifts made in art and design classes.
- A Christmas market was held in Queens Street as part of the Haverhill Family Christmas Weekend in early December. Stalls in Queens Street included food, drink and gifts and additional entertainment was provided on Saturday as part of the regular street market. Market traders reported an increase in footfall and visitors enjoyed the festive farm and carols by the Salvation Army.
- We had another successful year at the Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre with visitor numbers estimated at 130,000 with a 4.6% increase in footfall recorded on Abbeygate Street and 7.3% increase recorded at the Arc.
- A community arts project between St Edmundsbury market traders and students from St Benedict's Catholic School won a national award for Best Market Event in the Great British Market Awards held by the National Association of British Market Authorities. The project aimed to show the importance of the market to communities and businesses and was funded by Arts Council England and further supported by locality budget funding.
- Following calls from local residents and businesses, St Edmundsbury in partnership with Clare Town Council reinstated Clare market in August 2017 after an absence of 20 years. Businesses from Clare were offered stalls at reduced rates and a free stall was offered to local charities and community

## Supporting our markets

### Local markets

### Developing our markets

### Christmas markets

- Our commitment to develop the regular markets and introduce special events and additional markets has continued this year. We recognise the importance of a thriving market to local residents



groups to use on a monthly basis. The free community stall offer has been taken up by five local charities and groups which have raised money for local causes.

- The community of Clare came together to celebrate the countdown to Christmas at the first Clare Winter Festival from 24 November to 16 December. As part of the festival, a special Christmas market was held in December. The market was hailed a success with traders reporting good footfall and visitors saying they enjoyed the seasonal atmosphere.

## Creating prosperous places to live in, work in and visit

### Haverhill Masterplan

- We are continuing to work with the ONE Haverhill partnership on the implementation of the Haverhill town centre masterplan that was adopted in September 2015.
- The masterplan continues to be progressed through five workstreams:

- Workstream 1: Highways and movement – including delivery of highway improvements
- Workstream 2: Marketing – such as advertising Haverhill and specific sites
- Workstream 3: Site assembly – gaining control of sites, investing and influencing to bring sites forward
- Workstream 4: Development briefs – creating briefs from a planning perspective
- Workstream 5: Place management – for example, the town centre work delivered by the town and borough councils
- Some of the projects currently being realised through the delivery of the masterplan include our work on highways by continuing to work with Suffolk County Council to look at ways to improve accessibility to the town for all methods of transport.

### Bury St Edmunds Town Centre Masterplan

- The final version of the Bury St Edmunds Town Centre Masterplan was adopted at a meeting of full Council in December 2017. The council shared the top priorities of the masterplan shortly after.



- The aim of the masterplan is to attract investment, set the guidelines for the future growth and development of Bury St Edmunds town centre, and to provide a framework against which individual development proposals can be assessed when they come forward. The masterplan is also about recognising that growth in the town and the wider area is happening and the need to look at how we accommodate that, as well as changes in technology and changes in shopping patterns.
- Working with Peter Brett Associates and David Lock Associates and Bury St Edmunds residents, workers and visitors to the town, we explored how the masterplan could address a number of town centre issues such as traffic management (including parking), heritage conservation and accessibility.
- This work was led by a working group of partners including the Business Improvement District, Suffolk Chamber of Commerce in Bury St Edmunds, Bury market traders, the Bury Society, the Bury Town Trust, Bury St Edmunds Town Council, St Edmundsbury Borough Council and Suffolk County Council.
- Suffolk Mind and a range of organisations working with people with additional needs were also engaged in the process, to ensure mental and physical wellbeing and accessibility for all was at the heart of the masterplan. This included a tour of the town centre undertaken by people with a range of disabilities alongside councillors and officers, which identified some key issues to address as the masterplan is implemented.
- We recognised that co-producing the masterplan with our partners, local people and visitors would help to ensure that we can best shape town centre growth so that it works for people. We undertook 20 public engagement events, going to where a number of people are likely to be, including the market, supermarkets and the library. Our staff spoke to over 1,000 people and received over 8,000 comments about what needed to change and what should be protected and celebrated in the town centre. The masterplan was built on this feedback.
- Following adoption in December 2017, the masterplan is now part of our official planning guidance and work has begun to progress individual projects.

### **Newmarket Business Improvement District (BID)**

- The Newmarket Business Improvement District (BID) is now in its second year of operation after a successful first year and has been involved in a number of different schemes across the town. The events organised by the BID in 2017 were extremely busy, with a 1940's weekend, a town beach, sporting activities and Christmas events
- The BID has also successfully implemented town centre Wi-Fi along with Newmarket Vision, providing free Wi-Fi access to visitors of the town. The system also provides visitor analysis in the form of footfall counting in addition to movement data and return visitor information. 2018/19 will see the continuation of these events as the BID becomes more established in Newmarket.

More information about the BID is available at: <http://www.newmarketbid.com/>

### **Bury St Edmunds Business Improvement District (BID)**

- Bury St Edmunds BID (ourburystedmunds) has continued to be the voice of businesses in Bury St Edmunds town centre with St Edmundsbury Borough Council a member of its Board. During 2017/18, the BID organised a number of events including the Whitsun Fayre, Independents Week study, the Food and Drink Festival, the Festival of Sport, the Christmas Lights Switch On and the recently launched Ale Trail. These events were highly successful and served to raise the profile of the town and encourage more people to visit the area and the local businesses.
- More information about the BID is available at: <http://www.ourburystedmunds.com/index.php>

### **Bury St Edmunds and Beyond – Destination Management Organisation**

- Bury St Edmunds and Beyond is the new Destination Management Organisation (DMO), providing long-term strategic direction for tourism for Bury St Edmunds and the surrounding area. It was established in April 2017 by funding partners; St Edmundsbury Borough Council, Ourburystedmunds, Bury St Edmunds

Town Council, Bury In Bloom, St Edmundsbury Cathedral and Gough Hotels.

- The primary aim of the organisation is to increase tourism to the local area and encourage visitors from further afield to stay in the town. Bury St Edmunds and Beyond works closely with neighbouring organisations such as Discover Newmarket, All About Ipswich, The Suffolk Coast and Visit Suffolk.
- The DMO was launched to the public and the new branding unveiled in September 2017. Businesses with an interest in the visitor economy are now joining the organisation to boost their profile to potential visitors.
- In January 2018 Bury St Edmunds and Beyond along with neighbouring organisations started a joint marketing campaign, RAWSUFFOLK, aimed at under 35's to highlight the diverse range of activities that Suffolk has to offer.

### Street scene

- We take pride in our local area and know that living, working and visiting an attractive place can enhance wellbeing and improve the overall impression of an area. Alongside our local communities and invaluable support from volunteers, we work hard to ensure that our localities remain vibrant, clean and safe. Some highlights include:
  - Continuing to promote the highly successful **Love Where You Live** campaign and the webpage: [www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/lwyl/](http://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/lwyl/) – which provides a wealth of information for people who want to set up group or individual litter picks. Information is provided on equipment that is available, how to ensure litter is collected at the end of the pick, risk assessment information and tips for ensuring the litter pick is carried out safely.
  - In 2017/18, 769 people took part in 40 group litter picking events collecting 303 sacks of waste. A further 177 volunteers were estimated to have carried out 1133 hours of litter picking.
  - We successfully prosecuted eight cases for abandoned vehicles with fines and costs totalling £10,158. Further, 340 abandoned vehicles were investigated and 38 were collected.
- We dealt with 393 fly tipping incidents and issued three formal cautions and 22 Fixed Penalty Notices.
- In summer 2018, we will be installing 70 dog bag dispensers to supply free dog bags in a project working with the Swedish firm Tikspac, to help reduce incidents of dog fouling.
- A £31,810 grant was received from Sainsbury's as part of their national Waste Less, Save More campaign to promote food waste reduction. The trial involved the use of Fresh Pods in 7,000 homes in and around Bury St Edmunds in order to reduce food waste by increasing the life of fresh fruit and vegetables in the fridge and fruit bowl.
- We worked with Sybil Andrews Academy in Bury St Edmunds to organise a Halloween event with the aim of educating pupils about reducing food waste. The event was part of our Fresh Pod project funded by Sainsbury's Waste Less, Save More campaign. We spent the day using a smoothie bike and teaching the pupils about composting.
- We emptied approximately 4.95 million black bins over the year, collecting 36,402 tons of waste.
- We collected 11,138 tons of garden waste from brown bins and 11,487 tons of recycling from blue bins.
- We also swept up nearly 3,000 tons of rubbish from roads across West Suffolk.
- We are participating in a project in Brandon with the Suffolk Waste Partnership to increase the quantity of bottles recycled by informing residents of the location of bottle banks and putting information stickers on bins.
- Through the Suffolk Waste Partnership, we are part of the **Suffolk Fly-Tipping Action Group (STAG)**. We contribute to enforcement events, work with Vehicle and Operator Services Agency, the Environment Agency and police.
- We've achieved sign up of 39.3% across West Suffolk to our garden waste subscription service with 9,816 households paying for the service using direct debit.

### Improving car parks

- As in previous years, the councils' pay and display car parks have been independently inspected by the police and parking specialists. The inspection considers the level of safety, cleanliness, quality of signage, frequency of patrols and uniformed

attendants, and maintenance within our car parks. Both St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath car parks have again been recognised for their high quality of management with a Park Mark award.

- The Disabled Parking Accreditation is a new initiative by the charity Disabled Motoring UK (DMUK) and is managed by the British Parking Association (BPA). Car parks that achieve the DPA demonstrate to their customers that they are committed to creating high quality parking facilities for disabled people. All car parks managed by St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath were assessed in 2017 and passed with only Ram Meadow requiring some upgrading to create two new Blue Badge bays.
- A total of 25 machines now offer contactless card payments and Apple Pay in addition to coins and chip and pin facility. The machines across Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill now complement the pay by phone cashless payment system, RingGo. Contactless card payment machines were also rolled out across Newmarket Car Parks in spring 2018.
- In 2016, there were 106,918 transactions by credit card and 200,989 transactions recorded in 2017, representing an 88% rise.
- The pay by phone cashless payment system, RingGo, also continues to grow. In 2016 a total of 160,709 transactions were made on the system and increased to 208,267 in 2017 – an increase of 29.5%
- This highlights the shift in our customers embracing new technology and the convenience and trust in cashless payment and how we are responding to this by offering different payment platforms.
- There are now seven electric charging points available for electric/hybrid car users – four in Bury St Edmunds (Parkway Multi Storey and Ram Meadow car parks), two in Haverhill in Ehringshausen Way Car Park and one in the Guineas shopping centre in Newmarket. The electric charging points provide a source of electricity to enable a vehicle to be fully charged within three to four hours. Given the councils' commitment to the promotion of green energy, vehicles are not charged for parking but are required to pay a charge for the electricity.

## Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs)

- In last year's Annual Report, we talked about a number of changes to the way the councils and police can deal with anti-social behaviour. PSPOs are now in place in town centres in Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill, Newmarket and Brandon.
- In Bury St Edmunds, there are three restrictions as part of the order; anti-social behaviour relating to alcohol consumption, begging and dog fouling. In the remaining town centres, the restrictions include dog fouling and alcohol related anti-social behaviour. These came into force on 1 October 2017 and remain in place for a period of up to three years, after which they will be reviewed. The orders can be enforced by West Suffolk enforcement officers or Suffolk Police.
- The aim remains to work with communities to reduce incidents of dog fouling and to work with those who are begging by continuing to engage with them to ensure that they access relevant support services.

## Building control

Our Building Control Service has had another busy year dealing with a range of matters and we are exceeding a number of our performance targets. Some highlights from this year include:

- Dealing with 31 dangerous structures incidents, including out of hours, such as George Lampton Avenue Flats fire, Cycle King fire, cash machine robbery in Lakenheath and Barton Mills petrol station fire.
- Carrying out over 3,750 site inspections.
- Maintaining our market share.
- Registering 90% of applications within three days.
- Checking 75% of plans within ten working days and 94 % within 15 working days.
- Carrying out 100% of site inspections on the day of request.
- We also won a national award with Seamons Builders as best local builder for Cupola House for the work carried out to restore it following a fire. The Local Authority Building Control (LABC) Building Excellence Awards highlighted how this demonstrated what positive working relationships with local council building control teams delivers.

## Tree services

- In 2017, we successfully prosecuted a landowner for the unlawful removal of five trees within the Flempton conservation area. This meant we avoided having to serve a formal notice requiring replacements, at no cost to the council. Five new trees have now been planted at the Greyhound Inn. The replacement trees were stipulated by the council and they have now been planted as per our instructions. The trees planted are sufficiently youthful to enable them to adapt and grow into their new environment. Older, more mature trees would struggle with the upheaval of being moved to a new environment.
- We have now taken on tree work in Forest Heath North (Mildenhall, Brandon etc.) in November 2017 and will be undertaking work in the south of Forest Heath later this year.
- We are on track to exceed the budget income target of £40,000 in 2017/18.

## Supporting local business

- We have supported our food businesses to develop healthier eating options for their customers in West Suffolk, celebrating with them and publicising their success. This year, our Commercial Environmental Health Team has raised the bar in Suffolk by helping over 50 local businesses achieve the nationally recognised **Eat Out Eat Well Award**.
- Across Suffolk, there are now over 100 businesses who have achieved an Eat Out Eat Well Award.



## 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
- Accessible countryside and green spaces

### Why was this a priority for 2017/18?

We are actively supporting families and communities to create better links, become more self-sufficient and sustainable, and able to deal with the changing landscape in terms of, for example, an ageing population and reduced funding for public services.

We aim to help communities to prevent problems from developing or even better still, to stop them from happening in the first place by creating connections, providing assistance and working with our partners to provide a holistic approach to empowering communities.

This section covers our activities under the headings:

- 
- Making connections in the community
- Community funding
- Parks and green spaces
- Arts, heritage and leisure
- Improved health and wellbeing
- Communicating with our residents

### Making connections in the community

In line with our Families and Communities Strategy, the councils work with local communities to identify and implement initiatives that help communities become more resilient and able to care for themselves and preventing crises by

building a network of support. 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'.

### EPIC Dads

- Community Chest funding from Forest Heath District Council was granted in April 2016 for Epic Dads; a project based in Lakenheath that celebrates, supports and empowers fathers and male carers to be their best for their children and thrive in the role of being a dad.
- The project encourages connections and friendships so that everyone feels valued and supported. In the first year of being established, the project has run a number of successful groups.
- They have also held a social and support group for dads and male carers called 'Time out for Dads', along with family events and parenting courses aimed at male role models, which has successfully engaged over 70 people.
- An 'EPIC Tots' group is also held which provides those engaged with EPIC Dads an opportunity to meet other dads with younger children in the community. In future, we hope to expand the project into neighbouring areas.
- The Families and Communities team provided support for EPIC Dads to become a community interest company and helped expand the project into other areas of Forest Heath.

## Sharing Parenting

- Sharing Parenting link parents with a range of services and parenting support across Forest Heath as well as engage with service providers to ensure that parents can feel supported and informed.
- In 2017/18, Sharing Parenting received a community chest grant to continue the work they do with parents. By working closely with Families and Communities officers, this funding was used to employ two outreach workers with the main focus on normalising parenting support. The outreach workers have been working across Forest Heath since September 2017.
- Over the last six months, both workers have been working within our communities, talking to parents, signposting to support and attending a range of "meet and greet" activities for parents. This includes drop-ins at schools, pop up stalls within supermarkets and making links with preschools, schools and toddler groups.

## Exercise classes in Newmarket

- We have been networking to understand what is on offer for communities in Newmarket.
- We noticed how the Gracewell of Kentford care home, Newmarket Racing Centre, and Newmarket Day Centre were all running similar chair based exercise classes for older people but

they were not joined up and there was very little interaction between the groups.

- We brought the organisations together to discuss the similar sessions they were running and how they could be joined together.
- As a result of this, the Racing Centre agreed to provide a venue to expand the sessions run in the Day Centre and widen audience participation. Further, Abbeycroft provided funding for transport and a venue using Sports England funding, and instructors if required in the future.
- The council played a crucial role in bringing the organisations together to connect the older population with the exercise classes.

## The Shed, West Row

- In 2016, a team of community volunteers known as 'The Shed' identified a piece of overgrown land in West Row as having potential to be a community asset.
- In 2017, the volunteers worked hard to clear the area and turn the land into a community garden. The stable buildings were cleared with plans to turn it into a kitchen, meeting rooms and storage facilities. A number of social events for the community were also held and the kitchen garden was used to grow seasonal vegetables. Further events and enhancements to the project are scheduled for 2018.



*The community garden at The Shed, West Row*



- This project demonstrates how our residents play a vital role in determining the future of their communities by working together.
- The Families and Communities team also provide support in terms of locality budgets, providing funding advice, along with general support dependent on the needs of the group (for example, advertising).

### Home Start

- Non-profit organisation Home Start was successful in receiving Community Chest funding and, together with Families and Communities Officers, have rolled out this parental and family support programme across both our rural and urban communities in West Suffolk.
- The programme offers much needed support to families on a one to one basis or through a group setting. Volunteers are identified within the communities and are provided with extensive training to be able to provide much needed support within the family home.
- This service has continued to grow with support groups now found in Newmarket, Haverhill, Bury St Edmunds and Honington, with plans to be implemented in other areas in 2018-2019.

### Brandon Day Centre

- The Council supported the Brandon Day Centre through a stakeholder steering group and helped deliver different initiatives to cater to the needs of residents of Brandon. One project, Men's Sheds, works with West Suffolk College for adult education opportunities and allows students to get involved in community projects.
- In addition, the Council worked with Ward Members and the Town Council to bring in funding for two new mini buses; providing transport to those who need access to the day centre. This serves Brandon, Lakenheath and the surrounding rural villages. This enables those who want to use the day centre to come together, get active and enjoy a hot meal.

### St Nicholas Open House

- Open House operates in Brandon, Barrow, Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill and is supported

by Community Chest funding across St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath. The project is aimed at people facing long term and life threatening illnesses, their loved ones and carers or those struggling with bereavement.

- The drop-in sessions offer the chance to meet others facing similar situations in a comfortable and relaxing space. Information is delivered in a group environment where members hear about other people's experiences. The sessions are semi-structured and provide an educational element at each meeting and include topics such as symptom management, goal setting and planning for the future.
- It offers a gentle introduction to St Nicholas Hospice Care and the range of services available. If necessary, patients are sign posted to other Hospice services or to alternative services in the community. Attendees are also encouraged to organise their own meetings and to meet up outside of the. This might include a walking group or meeting up to have coffee or lunch.

### Newmarket Gymnastics Club

- Prior to summer 2017, Newmarket Gymnastics Club used the Sports Hall of the former Scaltback Middle School site in the town. The school building had been closed for five years and the hall was in disrepair. Concerns over the conditions of the building from Suffolk County Council led to the closure of the sports hall, leaving the gymnastic club without a venue.
- The Racing Centre in Newmarket offered to host the club, but needed time to prepare the building. The council played a vital role in getting approval for the eviction date to be extended, allowing the Racing Centre time to prepare the new venue for the 170 members of the gymnastics club.
- With support and facilitation from Forest Heath, the gymnastics club are now using the space twice a week at their normal time slots, reducing disruption to gymnasts.

### The Racing Centre

- We have been working with the Racing Centre in Newmarket to encourage the wider community to utilise the centre as a community hub so

that community groups can take advantage of facilities for events and meetings.

### Newmarket Interfaith Forum

- In 2017, Forest Heath has been working with representatives of the Muslim community in Newmarket to help further bring together the wider faith and non-faith communities.
- By working with the leaders of the Muslim community group, the council enabled the wider community to come together in January 2018 for the first Newmarket Muslims and West Suffolk Interfaith & Community Forum.
- Over 100 people attended the event and more work is being done to establish an Interfaith forum to support future gatherings. We have also supported the Muslim community by arranging alternative venues for Friday Prayers, when their place of worship is being used by another community group.
- By having these relationships and linking people together at the right time, a platform for integrated working and community cohesion is developed, ensuring our families and communities are resilient.
- We have also been working with the Bury Islamic Cultural Organisation to help find them an alternative home in Bury St Edmunds since their place of meeting and prayer became unavailable, and as part of the new West Suffolk Inter-Faith and Community Forum.

### St Olaves community space, Bury St Edmunds

- St Olaves Community Space was an exposed area of tarmac owned by St Edmundsbury Borough Council, with one bench, adjacent to a well-used local shopping precinct on a popular housing estate in Bury St Edmunds. The previous effort to improve the appearance of the area, which included a painted kite and sky design undertaken by the local middle school, had faded and the area was in need of further improvements.
- The local residents' association (HEART) took action and, with our help, some new designs were developed. These incorporated raised flower beds in the shape of a kite to honour the original design by the school, with a kite tail of block

seating, all within an attractive, hard-wearing bonded surface.

- We assisted HEART to make an application for funding to the Tesco Bags of Help grants scheme, which provided £8,000 of the cost. The remaining £6,452 was funded through Suffolk County Council's Locality Budget Scheme. We also liaised with local horticultural charity Bury in Bloom, who donated the plants for the scheme.
- Work began in early December 2017 and finished with a planting session involving children from nearby schools in January 2018 and a formal opening of the area by Bury St Edmunds MP Jo Churchill. St Edmundsbury has taken on the ongoing maintenance of the area and it is already well-used.
- This is a great example of partners from all sectors – public, private and voluntary – working together for the benefit of residents.

### Increasing youth provision

- By working with young people and increasing youth provision, we can help make a positive, sustainable difference, and prevent social isolation. The examples below show how our Families and Communities team have been engaging with young people in 2017/18:
  - **Newmarket and Brandon 'Teen Chill'** – In summer 2017, the council engaged with young people in Brandon and Newmarket to increase understanding of youth provision in the community. Around 80-100 young people in Newmarket were previously using a scheme run by Catch 22 called 'Positive Futures', but as a result of funding issues, the service came to an end in July 2017.
  - Following closure, surveys were completed with young people to find out what it is they are interested in and what types of schemes they would engage with. In Brandon, a series of events were held using the 'on the spot van'; a mobile youth centre from Haverhill, which was funded by localities and partnership budget from Suffolk County Council. At Teen Chill, young people can use games consoles, music speakers, WiFi and engage with the youth workers who support the sessions.

- Teen Chill will be launching in Brandon and Newmarket later this year.
- **Newmarket Skate Park** – Due to its old design, Newmarket Skate Park closed for a short period of time for maintenance in summer 2017. The closure led to an increase in skaters using industrial estates in Newmarket instead.
- As a result of the tensions in the community, the council met with them in October 2017 to discuss how to re-engage the skaters.
- To achieve this, we began working with 14 skaters from Newmarket Academy on a community project. With our support, the students are working towards developing the new design of the Skate Park and bringing together the skating community to discuss related issues such as the new location and fundraising ideas.
- **Suffolk Assembly of Youth (SAY)** – SAY is a platform for young people in Suffolk to make their voices heard and influence those who make decisions about services and support for young people. The council has been working with SAY to increase attendance among young people after discovering low participation. As a result, the engagement hub that runs SAY is now supporting young people in making further developments to the platform. The council played a crucial role in future direction of SAY, and encouraging the links with the young people across West Suffolk.
- **Haverhill Youth Action Group (YAG)** – The Youth Advisory Group in Haverhill are responsible for overseeing the delivery of Haverhill Town Council’s Youth Strategy that was adopted in March 2016. The group consists of professionals from across the public sector and also councillors. Young people are encouraged to get involved with the design and delivery stages of the individual projects developed by the group. A survey conducted with young people in 2015 by the charity YMCA highlighted activities for young people as a key area for development in Haverhill. The council has subsequently supported the delivery of the following projects in Haverhill:
  - A BMX Pump Track in Greenfields Way (discussed below)

- A social media project that will develop an online resource of information for young people, including activities
- Developing a range of participatory activities including a Spoken Word project and heats for the Bury Sound competition at the Haverhill Arts Centre
- Haverhill Pump Track – The council supported the development of a new BMX Pump Track in Greenfields Way in Haverhill by carrying out a consultation with the community where they could see the proposed plans for the track and provide feedback. 49 local residents attended and gave their views. The community-led project is the flagship project of the Haverhill South People’s Forum, in partnership with Haverhill Community Trust, which is the charitable arm of Haverhill Town Council. The planning application for the track will be submitted in spring 2018 and we look forward to updating you on the progress of the track in the next financial year.

- The free conference gave town and parish councils the opportunities to exchange information, share experiences and grow their knowledge by hearing from expert speakers and taking part in workshops.
- This year’s conference was themed around health, with speakers and workshops covering topics including ageing well, GP Patient Participation groups, Fit Villages and Onelife Suffolk services.
- In 2017/18, several Parish Forums were also held across West Suffolk. These events give parish and town councils the chance to discuss issues of importance to them. Topics in 2017/18 included Neighbourhood Planning, social media and the new General Data Protection Regulations.

### West Suffolk Parish Conference and Forums

- We held our second West Suffolk Town and Parish Conference for town and parish councils from across the area in November 2017.

### Leiston Community Centre transfer

- In July 2017, St Edmundsbury Borough Council formally transferred ownership of Leiston Community Centre to the Haverhill Community Trust; the charity which already manages the Haverhill Arts Centre on behalf of the people of Haverhill.
- The busy community centre located in Leiston Road on the Clements Estate has three main rooms, making it suitable for a range of different activities. It provides a venue for local community



*Councillor Robert Everitt at the transferring of ownership of Leiston Community Centre to the Haverhill Community Trust*



groups offering activities from martial arts and zumba to lunch groups and sequence dancing. The centre is also used for community meetings, birthdays and is the local polling station too.

- The councils believe that communities who run their own centres are able to better identify and meet the needs of their local community, enabling them to play a greater role in determining the future of their community.

### **Newbury Community Centre transfer**

- St Edmundsbury Borough Council has continued working with the Newbury Community Association, (NCA), Suffolk County Council, Havebury Housing Partnership and the local community to ensure the replacement of the Newbury Community Centre in Bury St Edmunds is designed by the community to meet their requirements.
- Turning 50 years old in 2018, the community centre has been an important facility for local residents since the Howard estate was built and it has been a priority to ensure its design is shaped by the people it serves.
- In 2017/18, partners have built on the view of the community expressed in the public consultations and are working towards a new combined development of much needed housing and a new community centre. The development received outline planning permission in late 2017 and a development contractor will be sought, with the delivery of the new centre at the heart of the specification.
- The project was also awarded £670,000 of Government funding and will be used to help with things like demolition costs. The grant, from the One Public Estate programme's Land Release Fund follows a joint bid for that amount from site owners Suffolk County Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council.
- Further local consultation and information sessions will be held as the development moves forward.

### **Carols on The Green, Flempton-cum-Hengrave**

- A community came together in December 2017 to enjoy Christmas carols in what is hoped will be the start of a series of village events.

- The event was organised by a local resident alongside Flempton-cum-Hengrave Parish Council and was backed by £440 of locality budget funding from St Edmundsbury Borough Council.
- It is hoped that Carols on the Green not only becomes an annual event, but also part of a series of events throughout the year that will bring residents of Flempton and Hengrave together to socialise and make new friends.

### **Studlands Park Residents Association, Newmarket**

- The Studlands Park residents association have been putting on a summer event for the last two years.
- The group has been building on the success of bringing not only the Studlands community together but having an open event for the wider community to attend.
- The event, supported by the council locality budget funding, looked at issues such as traffic calming and village signs for the estate, as well as raising awareness of and encouraging support of the various community groups serving the area.

## **Community funding**

### **Locality Budgets**

- Our locality-based approach is supported by our Locality Budget scheme, where councillors each have an annual budget of £2,500 that they can allocate to community-led activities in their ward. Locality Budgets help residents take ownership of issues that they care about and help councillors ensure that funding gets to the heart of their communities.
- In 2017/18 West Suffolk councillors contributed £164,369.86 towards initiatives and projects in their ward areas. From supporting a new Walking Netball initiative in Bury St Edmunds for people who want to play a gentler version of the sport to encouraging people to get creative with the Mildenhall Art Forum, and purchasing an indoor curling for Red Lodge Millennium Centre and

- establishing a group who can now, on a weekly basis, enjoy sport while within the centre.
- A full list of projects funded by councillors, together with information about how the scheme works can be found here: [www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/localitybudgets](http://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/localitybudgets)

### Community Chest

- The West Suffolk Community Chest gives voluntary and community sector groups the opportunity to apply for funding for projects and services which will bring benefits to local people and help West Suffolk councils achieve their priority of supporting families and strengthening communities. Community Chest funding forms a key part of our Families and Communities agenda.

- In total, £593,264 has been paid to voluntary groups and organisations across West Suffolk in 2017/18 to support their valuable work.
- Appendix 1 sets out the organisations that have received Community Chest funding across West Suffolk in 2017/18.

### Rural Initiatives Grant Scheme

- St Edmundsbury offers the Rural Initiatives Grant Scheme to match fund organisations for one-off specific capital projects in rural areas that contribute towards the councils' priorities.
- During 2017/18, £27,049 was committed towards five projects. One project included replacing the flooring in Ixworth Village Hall to enable more community activities. A grant was also used to improve kitchen facilities at Thurlow

## Case Study: Brandon Country Park

The 32 acre Brandon County Park sees around 175,000 visitors a year and is currently managed by Suffolk County Council with £20,000 funding provided by Forest Heath District Council.

With a range of walks and cycle ways the park is an important local facility. It also hosts a Parkrun every week and a regular programme of guided walks and events throughout the year.

Following Suffolk County Council's decision to transfer ownership of its parks and nature reserves to other organisations, Forest Heath District Council supported plans to secure the future of the park.

The district council sees parks as not only important to support the local environment and attract visitors to the area but as part of its investment in supporting communities keep healthy and active while improving wellbeing.

In recent years, the county council has invested in the site and made some significant improvements. These have included investing in the café (including additional space for café seating, a new purpose built kitchen and a new shop area) and achieving the Visit England's 'Quality Assured Visitor Attraction' award.

By working closely with the county council, we have secured the future of the country park for our local communities and visitors to the area. We understand how parks are not just important in protecting our local environment and wildlife but vital in improving health and wellbeing. It demonstrates how we are best placed to work with local communities and deliver services such as this. We are now developing a ten year plan and looking at the further opportunities it brings to improve the offer at this great park.

Sports Club to increase their community offer and widen the age range of participants.

- One of the grants was also used to install a new full central heating system in Ingham Church which meant that all of the activities that take place in the church can continue at full numbers throughout the entire year. St Bartholomew's Church is at the heart of Ingham and is the only building in the village that provides space for the community to come together.
- Not only does the church building service the older community it also provides space for 'Messy Church' which is a mothers and toddlers groups providing much needed support and connection for parents and young ones within the village.
- A full list of the organisations we have supported using the Rural Initiatives Grant Scheme can be found in Appendix 2.

## Parks and green spaces

We are proud of our parks and open spaces which have again been recognised at a national and local level. This would not be possible without the dedication of volunteers who spent some 7,000 hours working in our parks and green spaces during 2017/18.

### Achievements this year across West Suffolk include:

- We worked with Suffolk County Council to secure the future of Brandon Country Park. Previously the park had been managed by Suffolk County Council with some funding provided by Forest Heath District Council. Both councils had been in talks over the site following Suffolk County Council's decision to transfer ownership of its parks and nature reserves to another organisation. Following agreement by Forest Heath District Council's Cabinet in February, Forest Heath took over the ownership and running of the park. The council sees parks as not only important for supporting the local environment and attracting visitors to the area but as part of its investment in supporting communities keep healthy and active while supporting wellbeing.
- The Council began installing a new play area on the Studlands Estate in Newmarket which is expected to be finished by spring 2018.
- East Town Park, the Abbey Gardens, Nowton Park and West Stow country park all retained Green Flag awards in 2017. The international award tells the public that the spaces are beautifully maintained, with excellent visitor





facilities and that they boast the highest possible environmental standards.

- We were also successful in the Anglia in Bloom competition with our partner Bury in Bloom and received accolades for both Nowton Park and the Abbey Gardens, which means that Bury St Edmunds is through to the national finals later this year.
- We installed a green gym and relocated the play area at Heldhaw Road in Bury St Edmunds.
- We resurfaced and improved car parking facilities at Castle playing fields in Haverhill for Haverhill Rugby Club.
- We installed new play areas in: Howe Road - Haverhill, Severn Road - Bury St Edmunds, Oakes Road - Bury St Edmunds and Bedell Close - Bury St Edmunds.
- We received a £40,000 Heritage grant from Historic England for the production of our Conservation Plan. The heritage assessment will bring together all the information about the Abbey of St Edmund, and the Conservation Plan will then draw up a series of policies for heritage conservation and interpretation. The works will protect the whole Abbey of St Edmund area and will be completed in the next financial year.

## Arts, heritage and leisure

### Historic environment

- The first Bury St Edmunds Literature Festival was held in October 2017 and supported by locality budget funding. The festival was organised by a group of avid local readers who wanted literature to be among the cultural offerings in the town. The festival programme featured award-winning authors and was heralded as a great success.
- We achieved triple successes at the Museum of the Year Awards ceremony in October 2017 where we scooped key awards for three of West Suffolk's museums: National Heritage Centre for Horseracing and Sporting Art (Suffolk Museum of the Year), Moyse's Hall Museum (Family Friendly Award) and West Stow Anglo Saxon Village (Learning and Access Award).

### Museums

- We were successful in our application for an Arts Council Grant and received £108,000 from the Arts Council Resilience Funding Grant. The grant will be used to pursue various improvements to ensure our museums are more sustainable. So far, the funding has been used on a variety of key elements to improve learning outcomes for visitors. For example, new interpretation panels have been installed for all display cases, including professional research into key items and re-dating. New display cabinets have also been built bespoke to unique items.
- We have also started installing Info-active software in Moyse's Hall so that entire collections can be accessed along with details on various research data. This work will be completed by 2020. Staff and volunteers have also been given training in latest conservation techniques and identification. In addition, we have developed two new websites for West Stow and Moyse's Hall to improve online usage of the collections and sites.
- We are pleased to report that the box office income for West Stow Country Park is up 9% on last year and Moyse's Hall box office income is up by 4% compared to 2016/17.

### Events and tourism

- The Abbey of St Edmund Heritage Partnership announced that it is preparing to organise Millennium Celebrations in 2020. A steering group including representatives of Bury St Edmunds Town Council, West Suffolk College and local schools as well as several existing partners, have started discussing ideas and planning events. In March 2018, the first project which will create two new tennis courts was announced. It is anticipated that the new courts will be open for public use by the summer of 2019.
- The Bury Festival is working very closely with Bury St Edmunds and Beyond this year to increase the number of cultural tourists visiting Bury St Edmunds and West Suffolk. Some of the work includes target campaigns in the Home Counties and East Midlands.
- This year the festival will be working with an external promoter to put on a number of outdoor

shows in Nowton Park during the festival. Some of the shows include Jools Holland, UB40, Gilbert O'Sullivan and an Abba tribute show with fireworks. The capacity for each show is 4,000 people.

- We launched the What's on West Suffolk magazine in 2017, which has been very well received and has really helped to raise the profile of the leisure and culture offer in West Suffolk, as well as the work of the councils, including; The Apex, Moyses Hall Museum, West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village, the Bury Festival, the Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre, The Guildhall, National Horse Racing Museum in Newmarket, The Abbey of St Edmunds Heritage Partnership, Abbey Gardens, East Town Park and Nowton Park.

### Mildenhall Art Forum

- To celebrate 100 years of the High Street and Mill Street in Mildenhall, locality budget funding was used to host a number of workshops to document the history and teach new skills through mosaic art workshops. The project was led by the Mildenhall Art Forum after huge community interest was shown at the Mildenhall Showcase Event in September.
- 'Taster' workshops began in October 2017. These were for those living or working in the identified buildings to learn mosaic making skills using a 15cm square board and other interested local people were encouraged to participate.
- Five sessions were held in October 2017 with 43 people attending and in November, a further four workshops were held with 28 people attending.
- The project now involves nearly 50 people with the art work produced being featured in shop windows in Mildenhall town centre.

### Creative People and Places Programme

- **Market Place** – The Market Place project is part of the Creative People and Places programme. Creative People and Places is about people taking the lead in choosing, creating and taking part in art experiences in the places where they live.
- Market Place initially ran for three years from 2015 but received further funding from Arts Council England at the end of 2017 to help

develop Phase two, which will open in October 2018 and continue until 2021.

- The project aims to increase the number of people inspired by the arts and help develop skills, grow ambition and creativity in local communities.
- The project spans across seven market towns in Forest Heath and Fenland, including Brandon, Mildenhall and Newmarket. The vision is for the seven market towns to become centres of creativity and inspiration for their district.
- The council provided match funding for the project and assists with the development and management of the various events that are held.
- Talkin' Bout My Generation – Also part of the Creative People and Places Programme is Talkin' Bout My Generation; an arts project in Mildenhall and Brandon (and two towns in Fenland) aimed at encouraging those who were teenagers in the 1960's, 70's and 80's to share their memories of music and style from their youth.
- Some of the ways people can get involved is by hosting a memory café or providing music memorabilia for exhibitions. Forest Heath helped make the project possible by assisting with the application for Heritage Lottery funding, resulting in an award of £63,000 for the four participating towns. We also help with the development and management of the events.
- **Brandon Forum** – Market Place also established the Brandon Forum; an opportunity for local people with in an interest in the arts to showcase their talents. They work collaboratively to bring to life the talent in the town and provide entertainment to new audiences who wouldn't normally access the arts. They also work alongside professional artists to introduce new skills and up-skill residents to get people involved in celebrating the heritage of the place they live.

### The Apex

- The Apex's new mobile compatible website was launched in August 2017 following the culmination of many months of hard work between the Apex's Marketing, Communications and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) teams. Online ticket sales saw a 6% rise within three months following

the launch, taking the total amount of tickets sold via the Apex website to more than 70%.

- In 2017/18, the Apex presented 231 shows and sold 105,000 tickets, which is an increase of 6% on 2016/17.
- In 2017/18, the Apex box office took £2M, which is an 11% increase on 2016/17 and an increase of 27% since 2015/16.
- The Apex has also attracted 13,000 new customers in 2017/18, who purchased 29% of total ticket sales.

## Improved health and wellbeing

Working with Abbeycroft Leisure, we deliver sports and leisure services across West Suffolk. Abbeycroft undertakes outreach work that contributes to our priorities and is in line with the Promoting Physical Activity Framework that was adopted in July 2016.

Examples of projects that Abbeycroft has run in this year include:

- **Active Mums** (previously known as Monday Mums), operates in Bury St Edmunds and Newmarket and holds weekly sessions for pregnant women with a BMI of 30 or higher.

This is a partnership with the community midwives and aims to:

- develop understanding of fitness and healthy eating during pregnancy and beyond for mums-to-be
- improve body image and increase self-confidence in mums-to-be
- reduce obesity levels in adults and children in West Suffolk
- increase the number of active people in West Suffolk
- reduce costs to the National Health Service
- 2017/18 has seen 50 women benefit from the programme. A Buggies and Baby session also started in January, allowing parents to continue engaging in activity and their support networks. To date, 18 women have benefitted from taking part.
- **Teen Chill Out** has been operating in Haverhill for a number of years, with an average of 90 young people attending each month. The sessions are aimed at 11 – 16 year olds with the aim of reducing anti-social behaviour and to provide a safe and supportive environment. Newmarket launched Teen Chill Out in October 2017 and has seen an average of 60 – 70 young people attend each month. Early feedback from parents



*The official opening of Brandon Community Tennis Court*



suggests this activity is having a positive impact on the young people's lives.

- **Keep Active** is a lottery funded project awarded through the Community Sport Activation Fund supported by Sport England. Keep Active focuses on the engagement and activity provision for over 55's and 14-25 year olds in the Forest Heath community with the aim of increasing participation.
- Over 55's activities include walking football, walking netball, boccia, archery and with a walking football tournament taking place this year.
- The work with 14-25 year olds is run in partnership with Catch 22, and they deliver dance, fitness, and football and multi-sport sessions, with some of these being girls only.
- Overall, 2017/18 has seen 673 people access these activities with just over 5,000 attendances.

Bury St Edmunds has seen two new initiatives develop:

- A partnership with the **Children's Physio Services** from West Suffolk Community NHS sees children and young people attend six weekly sessions with the aim of overall mobility, strength and conditioning for young people with disabilities. Children aged between six and ten take part in mobility games and activities with a physio and sport development instructor whilst 11-16 year olds use the gym facilities supported by both physio and gym instructor, which has led to a number of young people continuing with teen fitness memberships.
- **Cancer Rehabilitation Swim** works in partnership with Macmillan, with referrals made from the hospital. The aim of these weekly sessions are to reduce isolation and increase recovery times. There are on average six people attending each session.

### Promoting physical activity

- The councils' Promoting Physical Activity Framework sets out our commitment to enable and encourage people to lead active lives, thereby increasing activity levels across West Suffolk. This will lead to improved health and wellbeing for our communities resulting in less reliance on health care services. The following examples demonstrate how we have met this commitment in 2017/18:

- We are pleased to report that we received planning permission for a new leisure centre, swimming pool and health centre at the proposed Mildenhall Hub site. The hub will create opportunities to improve health and wellbeing of local people by offering top class facilities and working with health providers to encourage more active lifestyles. More detail about the Mildenhall Hub is included later within this annual report.
- We committed to investing £1.5 million from our Leisure Investment Fund to increase sports facilities in Haverhill. The funding will increase the range of activities and sporting facilities and also reduce the management fee that the council pays its sports and leisure provider, Abbeycroft Leisure, towards the running costs of the Leisure Centre, eventually to zero. Work is planned to begin later in 2018 and we look forward to updating you on the progress of the project.
- We provided locality budget funding to assist with the refurbishment of the Brandon Community Tennis Court that opened in July 2017. The refurbishment of the tennis court will have a positive impact on the health



*We invested £1.5 million in leisure facilities in Haverhill in 2017/18*

- and wellbeing of those within the town and surrounding areas as participating in sport leads to healthier and more active lives.
- We also started a new parkrun in Puddlebrook Playing Fields in Haverhill by working in partnership with Suffolk County Council, Haverhill Town Council and Abbeycroft Leisure. 123 adults and children participated in the first parkrun that took place in March 2018, with 17 volunteers helping to make the event a success.
  - In Newmarket, we were proud to sponsor and host stage six of the OVO Tour of Britain. Stage six of Britain's premier road cycling race began in Newmarket and passed through Mildenhall and Bury St Edmunds and was a great way to encourage local residents to take up cycling and live a more active and healthy lifestyle.
  - Last year, we talked about the Breaking New Ground Partnership which delivers a range of exciting heritage and landscape projects in the heart of the Brecks, including Brandon and West

## Case Study: Haverhill LifeLink – one year on

In August 2017, the two year pilot for the Haverhill LifeLink project began. The project, run by St Edmundsbury Borough Council and ONE Haverhill Partnership, has already seen small successes, which can be demonstrated by the stories of the two participants below:

### Bob's story

Bob was visiting his GP on a frequent basis with feelings of depression and anxiety. He felt that things were out of his control and found himself becoming more and more anxious. His GP spoke to him about Haverhill LifeLink and explained how it could potentially help him. Although Bob felt anxious about meeting his co-ordinator the first time, he attended and talked through his current situation. Through this process, he identified what his goals and aspirations were. This proved useful for Bob as he was able to explore different coping methods for his anxiety and also provided him with someone he could turn to if he felt overwhelmed. After several appointments with LifeLink, Bob began implementing different coping mechanisms and found that his days were more structured. This made him feel much better about his life and gave him a clearer sense of how he could move forward to reach his goals. Bob is still engaging with the LifeLink project and is exploring his next goals around meeting new people and volunteering.

### John's story

John was referred by his GP to Haverhill LifeLink because he wanted to see what was available in the town to help with his feelings of boredom and low mood. After speaking to John to understand his situation, his LifeLink coordinator provided him with signposting to Citizens Advice so that he could get advice on benefits relating to his disability. LifeLink also introduced him to a lunch group that meets on a weekly basis. Due to John's disability, he struggled to get out and about so LifeLink organised community transport which allowed John to attend the weekly lunch group. John was delighted to feel part of his community and asked his coordinator what else he could do within the town. He now attends two community groups in Haverhill and is enjoying being more active within his community.

John said; "LifeLink has made a difference to my life because I have met new people, got out of the house and overall feel more positive. I feel brighter and more upbeat since starting Haverhill LifeLink."

Stow. This year, as part of the Brecks project, we plan to open a new long distance footpath between West Stow and Brandon Country Park. The Brecks Trail will link West Stow Country Park and Brandon Country Park with a 15-mile off-road route suitable for walking, cycling and horse riding. The path will pass through some of the Brecks most iconic landscape; alongside pine belts, past open heathlands and through forests.

- As reported in last year's annual report, we recognise that in Bury St Edmunds there is a need for clubs to grow and increase their capacity in order to progress and provide facilities that are needed for the future. We have been working with a number of local sports clubs looking at options for a shared sports facility in Bury St Edmunds. Following the feasibility work that was carried out during 2017, we are now building on options in terms of location, partners, scope of the facility and how it will benefit local clubs and the wider community.
- Detailed work is taking place to consider how this scheme could work and we will update further throughout the year.

### **Dementia Action Alliance (DAA)**

- The councils have continued to be part of the Dementia Action Alliance (DAA) to help meet the aim of becoming a Dementia Friendly Community (DFC).
- We now have two Dementia Action Alliances operating in west Suffolk; Bury St Edmunds DAA and Newmarket DAA. We have worked together with different voluntary, community and private organisations to establish these alliances.
- West Suffolk councils have also committed to becoming a Dementia Friendly Organisation and began rolling out Dementia Friends awareness sessions in April 2018. Dementia Friends sessions focus on what it is like to live with dementia and is used as an awareness raising tool. This enables individuals, businesses and the community to look at what they can do differently to accommodate the needs of someone living with dementia.
- Further details about our commitment can be found here: [www.dementiaaction.org.uk/members\\_and\\_action\\_plans/8182-west\\_suffolk\\_councils](http://www.dementiaaction.org.uk/members_and_action_plans/8182-west_suffolk_councils)

### **Social Prescribing Pilot in Haverhill – Life Links**

- In July 2017 we appointed two co-ordinators for Haverhill LifeLink; a social prescribing project run by ONE Haverhill and the Council. The two year pilot project aims to combat the high percentage of GP appointments which are for social needs, rather than medical and is for anyone aged 16 or above who lives in Haverhill or the surrounding villages.
- The focus is on early help and prevention, providing a person centred model of support for individuals who may be socially isolated, have low mood and anxiety, poor life skills or those managing long term conditions.
- Initial feedback from agencies, community groups and patients has been positive. Anecdotal feedback from users shows increased structure in everyday lives and improved wellbeing. Other positive impacts for participants include; better coping methods for anxiety, access to the right benefits through signposting, socialising with others through community groups and generally feeling more positive.
- We have started to collate quantitative data to evidence the positive impact the project has had on participants and the health care system. In addition we are currently working on a cost benefit analysis to evidence potential cost avoidance across the system moving forward.
- The key reasons for GPs to refer to LifeLink are social isolation, connectedness and low confidence.
- 57% of participants to date are claiming a working age benefit. We have therefore established a 'Moving Towards Work' scheme which has been funded by the Department for Work and Pensions and Suffolk County Council. This means that social prescribing will feature as part of an individual's journey into suitable and sustainable employment. We are currently in the early stages of this development.
- Further information about Haverhill LifeLink can be found here - [www.onehaverhill.co.uk/lifelink](http://www.onehaverhill.co.uk/lifelink)
- This work contributes towards our equality objective to improve physical and mental health and wellbeing.

## Innovative ways of working to meet the needs of an ageing population - Buurtzorg

- The councils are supporting a test and learn of an innovative model of care designed in the Netherlands known as Buurtzorg to help meet the increasing demands on our health and care system brought about by an ageing population.
- The project is in collaboration with the East of England Local Government Association, Suffolk County Council, West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group, West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust and Suffolk Community Healthcare.
- The model empowers individuals – in this case nurses – to deliver all the care that patients need. The nurses provide a holistic service, delivering both personal and health care to those in their charge, enabling nurses to focus on prevention and early intervention.
- The first Buurtzorg team was established in early autumn 2017 to help deliver the 12 month pilot. Funding of £200,000 has been secured from the Transformation Challenge Award, and 'match funding' of £50,000 has been agreed by each of four key stakeholders. A Memorandum of Understanding and project steering group has also been established to support the governance of the Test and Learn.
- Buurtzorg team members started work in Barrow in early 2018 and we have been supporting nurses by introducing them to the community and linking them to existing groups and activities.

## Communicating with our residents

### Customer services

- In 2017/18, the Customer Services team has continued to go from strength to strength, fully embedding new practices following the adoption of a number of service areas into the main work of the team over the past few years.
- The focus in the past year has been on identifying opportunities for further improvement in relation to providing front line advice and support to customers. One of

the ways of achieving this has been to appoint Service Champions to work with the service areas supported by the Customer Services team. Service Champions work with the service areas to identify improvement opportunities relating to process and procedures.

- A recent review of the activities of the team revealed that between 2013/14 (when the team was first put together) and 2016/17 phone calls have reduced by 17% and face to face volumes have reduced by 60% as online contact options have increased. This demonstrates success against the aims we set out to achieve when the team was initially set up 5 years ago, in terms of improvements for customers and how we manage day-to-day enquiries.
- The team has been instrumental in the partnership working with the Department of Work and Pensions, overseeing the relocation of Haverhill Job Centre Plus into Haverhill House. This is a very positive development in advance of the Universal Credit roll out for the Forest Heath area in late 2017.
- Universal Credit was successfully implemented in the St Edmundsbury area in October 2017, with the Council leading the partnership arrangements put in place to ensure a smooth roll out of the initiative. Universal Credit continues to be successfully delivered and received in the St Edmundsbury area.

### Online Success

- The team continues to work with Information and Communications Technology (ICT) colleagues to identify and develop improved online functions for customers.
- The UK trend shows that customers tend to prefer dealing with organisations who have a significant online presence for example, Amazon, and Councils across the country are learning the lessons from this way of working. At West Suffolk, we are actively looking into opportunities to take advantage of technology that has been designed with the customer in mind, looking ahead to when we replace our current Customer Relationship Management system.
- Customers are now familiar with using a number of online forms which have been designed to make reporting, paying and applying as easy as possible.



## Social media conversations

- West Suffolk councils have improved the use of social media, introducing more use of engaging and targeted materials such as films, infographics and advertising which has seen a 76% rise in Facebook followers and 44% in likes over the year. The councils are proactively using a range of social media platforms, including Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and Facebook to engage with residents and businesses. This has also included live streaming on social media channels various events, including Development Control Committee and the Mayor Making. Information is tweeted to over 8,000 followers (an annual rise of 17%) giving other Twitter users the opportunity to share the news with their own followers. Comments on both Facebook and Twitter and enquiries are monitored and answered by the Customer Service Team and Communications officers.
- Tweets are also used to direct residents to more information posted on our website as part of supporting the use of online engagement and channel shift. Frontline staff have also been piloting posting onto the councils' social media channels. The communications teams meanwhile have used Facebook to engage with a growing audience of nearly 60 community Facebook groups. Some of these groups have membership levels in excess of 18,000 people. Not only is there the potential for these individuals to share the councils' status with friends, but even more importantly this offers the councils the opportunity to have direct conversations with residents, explain changes in more detail, expanding on the reasons that have led to them and politely correcting residents on statements that are misinformed or untrue.
- A particular success has been the use of social media to support and engage with our communities during and following a fire in Newmarket and Bury St Edmunds as well as the work we have been doing over the winter with people who are homeless. This has seen us not only being used to put out information but to connect residents and local groups to provide donations for those involved. In addition to traditional methods of communications, social

media was used in engaging with communities and businesses around the proposals for a new West Suffolk Council. This included the use of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram as well as a Facebook Advert. Posts were also shared in 45 local Facebook Group pages across west Suffolk which have a combined membership of 71,000 members. Over the campaign the councils' messages had a reach of 67,000 through Facebook and 39,000 impressions through Twitter.

- We also worked with Newmarket Community Choir to record a song to celebrate the success of our Forest Heath solar farm in a fun, engaging and informative way. The song was promoted and shared on Facebook, YouTube and Twitter and was reported on by ITV Anglia. A similar approach was used with The Voice Squad in Bury St Edmunds to celebrate the Local Government Association's #OurDay in November, informing residents about the diverse everyday work that West Suffolk councils carry out on behalf of its residents and businesses. This was again promoted via Facebook, Youtube and Twitter. Both campaigns received national praise.

## Priority 3: Homes for our communities

### We want to see:

- Sufficient housing for current and future generations, including:
  - More affordable homes
  - Improvements to existing housing
- New developments that are fit for the future, properly supported by infrastructure, and that build communities, not just housing
- Homes that are flexible for people's changing needs

### Why was this a priority for 2017/18?

Our third priority is to ensure that we have an appropriate and sufficient supply of housing for our communities. Not only are we working hard to raise the standard of housing in the private rented sector and bring empty homes back into use, but we have also established a company to build homes, in partnership with Suffolk County Council. We know that good housing can play an important role in improving the health and wellbeing of people in our area, and it is vital to realising our ambitions for economic growth. We have seen a significant change in Government legislation and policy on housing in 2017/18 including the Housing White Paper, the Homelessness Reduction Act and further welfare reform, all of which have significant implications for how we plan for, deliver and continuously improve the availability and affordability of housing in West Suffolk.

This section covers our activities under the headings:

- Ensuring a sufficient supply of housing, including affordable housing
- Improving the quality of existing housing
- Reducing homelessness and supporting vulnerable households

### Ensuring a sufficient supply of housing, including affordable housing

#### Forest Heath Local Plan and St Edmundsbury Borough Council Vision 2031

- The local plan sets out the long-term planning and land use policies for an area. We use our planning policy framework to ensure appropriate business, housing and infrastructure development across the area.
- The Forest Heath Local Plan is at an advanced stage in preparation. The Single Issue Review and Site Allocations Local Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State in March 2017. The examination hearings were held in September and October 2017. The council is now carrying out a consultation on the main modifications proposed by Inspectors. Following this, Inspectors will consider the comments received and reopen the hearings before writing their report on the Plan's soundness.
- St Edmundsbury has a complete and up to date Local Plan. The Vision 2031 suite of documents allocates 11,480 homes for the period 2012 – 2031.
- Between 2012 and March 2017, 1,655 dwellings have been completed across Forest Heath and 1,613 dwellings across St Edmundsbury.

## Neighbourhood plan

- A neighbourhood plan is a community led framework for guiding the future development, regeneration and conservation of an area. Neighbourhood plans have a different status to other community led plans. Subject to a few basic conditions, they will become legally binding and will become part of the development plan for the area.
- Neighbourhood plans are currently in preparation for Newmarket, Great Barton, Hargrave, Ixworth and Ixworth Thorpe, Exning and Barningham.

## Barley Homes (Group) Ltd

- West Suffolk is continuing to move forward in partnership with Suffolk County Council on bringing forward a number of housing development schemes through Barley Homes, the councils' jointly owned housing company. Throughout 2017, Barley Homes worked to deliver the sites included in its first business plan. Plans are in place for the delivery of three of the sites included in the business plan. Challenges remain around the increasing costs of construction and viability of sites.

## Increasing the supply of affordable housing

- We continue to work with a number of registered providers and private developers to secure the delivery of 254 much needed new affordable homes, an increase of 112 homes from the 142 delivered in 2016/17 and the highest number achieved over the past ten years. Through achieving this number, we have also been able to deliver West Suffolk's policy of building 30% affordable housing on all new housing developments.

## Space standards for new housing

- In response to concerns over the size of some new properties being built in West Suffolk, the councils approved a technical guidance note setting out the minimum space standards that it would expect housing developers to build. While these requirements cannot be enforced at

present, it is intended in due course to introduce a policy in the Local Plan when it is revised.

- We have continued to promote our Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding register for those interested in building their own home and are now beginning to identify suitable plots of land.

## Improving the quality of existing housing

### Bringing empty homes back into use

- We have continued to take a pro-active approach to addressing the challenge of empty homes in West Suffolk.
- We are pleased to report that we have reduced the number of empty homes by 50% across West Suffolk since implementing our Housing Strategy in 2014. These homes contribute to increasing the supply of housing in the area. We are seeking to make further progress through partnership working under a new Housing Strategy to be considered by councillors later this year.

### Improving standards in the private rented sector

- Though we recognise that most landlords in West Suffolk provide good standard accommodation, the Housing and Planning Act gives councils new powers to take action against those landlords who are unscrupulous.
- The councils consulted and engaged earlier this year on the new enforcement rules in the Act, and a policy that gives the options to impose civil penalty fines, rent repayment orders and banning orders for non-compliance with certain housing offences, as an alternative to taking a prosecution for the very worst rogue landlords. We are now enforcing the sanctions under our new Civil Sanctions policy.
- In 2016/17 we began a three year fire safety initiative to protect tenants from fires in flats above commercial premises. This is now an established Suffolk-wide programme in which councils and the Fire and Rescue Service work in partnership to ensure decent and safe living standards. Throughout 2018 we undertook a

number of Impact Days where we inspected flats and remedied any hazards identified. In 2017/18, Impact Days were carried out in Clare, Newmarket and Lakenheath.

- We have exceeded our targets and brought up to standard 111 homes in the private rented sector.
- We currently have 215 Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) on our inspection programme, the majority of which are up to standard, but many are not managed or maintained particularly well. The risk rated inspection programme means that HMOs may be inspected every six months if they are considered

high risk. In 2018/19, we will be bringing in extended licensing for 300 more HMOs.

- Works are also progressing to provide an online service for the HMO licence applications.

## Case Study: Rogue landlords

Private landlords are an important provider of housing for local people. The Public Health and Housing team work proactively to support landlords to improve the standard of privately rented accommodation and to raise awareness of the expected standard with tenants, so they too can work with their landlords. There are however a small minority of irresponsible rogue landlords who knowingly rent out accommodation that is unlicensed, substandard and/or unsafe and for whom the current sanctions are not a sufficient deterrent.

Following a decision at Joint Cabinet in January 2018, West Suffolk councils began taking the first steps to adopting new powers to combat rogue landlords under new powers in the Housing and Planning Act 2016. A new policy is therefore required for us to make use some of the new powers.

The focus of the new policy is on tackling and dealing with the very worst private landlords, and deterring any rogue landlords from starting to operate in west Suffolk, while working with those that wish to grow the sector through much needed, better quality housing.

Consultation on the new enforcement routes was carried out in early 2018. Some of the enforcement routes include the option of civil penalty fines, rent repayment orders and banning orders for non-compliance with certain Housing Act 2004 offences, as an alternative to taking a prosecution for the very worst landlords.

Wherever possible, West Suffolk councils take a staged approach to enforcement to ensure solutions are initially sought through advice, co-operation and agreement. The new legislation provides a streamlined alternative to prosecution, albeit with same level of evidence and an appeals process in place, which is designed to deal with cash for rent landlords working outside of the law.

The new policy will help us protect tenants and compliant landlords by targeting the small minority of rogue landlords for whom previous enforcement has not been effective. The aim is to drive up standards in the private rented sector and improve the quality of existing housing for our residents.

## Reducing homelessness and supporting vulnerable households

### Homelessness

- Through the West Suffolk Homelessness Strategy, we have committed to do more to combat homelessness and to ensure that those affected by homelessness receive timely advice and assistance.
- During 2017/18, we:
  - accepted 241 homeless cases (139 in St Edmundsbury and 102 in Forest Heath) compared with 238 in 2016/17. The most common reason for homelessness across West Suffolk is termination of a tenancy in the private rented sector. This emphasises the importance of early intervention, something that is even more crucial with the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act from April 2018;
  - spent £221,406.89 on bed and breakfast accommodation, however the councils reimbursed £181,318.45 through Housing Benefits claims, making the net total spend **£40,088.44**. This is compared with £86,677 in 2016/17;
  - opened a night shelter in partnership with Havebury Housing in December 2017 which caters for up to 16 rough sleepers across West Suffolk. The councils recruited specialist care staff which allowed Northgate Lodge to open every night during the winter until the end of March. Rough sleepers were able to access shower facilities and engage with support services. We also opened a temporary winter night shelter in Bury St Edmunds prior to the opening of the Havebury-run shelter to provide a bed for rough sleepers when the temperature fell below freezing for a number of consecutive nights in December. The centre was run by members of staff across both councils, as well as volunteers from the Bury Drop-In Centre and other partners;
  - coordinated Christmas hamper donations from schools, pupils, businesses, organisations and individuals to homeless families in temporary accommodation; and

- increased the provision of temporary accommodation by funding additional units in Newmarket (Open Door) and in Bury St Edmunds (YMCA and Home Group).

### Rough Sleeper Prevention and Support Officer

- Our Rough Sleeper Prevention and Support Officer joined the councils in May 2017 for a two year period following a successful bid for Government funding. Since appointment, he has been successful in building relationships and gaining the trust of those sleeping on the streets, which in turn has led to more rough sleepers engaging with support. The worker covers Forest Heath District Council, St Edmundsbury Borough Council, Mid Suffolk District Council and Babergh District Council.
- They have now engaged with 89 rough sleepers across St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath and provided 97 accommodation solutions. You will notice that the number of solutions is greater than the number of rough sleepers. This is because the individual may access more than one service provider during their engagement with the outreach service therefore more than one solution may apply. Some of the solutions include; drug and alcohol rehabilitation, supported housing, emergency accommodation and private rented accommodation. This gives an indication of the range of issues associated with rough sleeping.
- Due to the success of the post in engaging with rough sleepers and demand exceeding expectations, the councils have agreed to make the post permanent across West Suffolk only, and have recruited another outreach worker using government funding. Suffolk Public Health has also agreed to fund a Drug and Alcohol Outreach worker for the area. This means that as of May 2018, we have three outreach worker posts supporting the most vulnerable in the area.
- To increase the support to vulnerable people in Newmarket, including rough sleepers, the council has been working with a wider group of partners to develop a working strategy to address homelessness in Newmarket. We look forward to reporting on the progress of this next year.



## Supporting vulnerable households

- We have continued to work with our partners to support 800 disabled and vulnerable people in their homes through various funding schemes, such as the Disabled Facilities Grant and by providing adaptations, minor aids and equipment.
- By working closely with our partners, we have helped prevent hospital admissions and assisted with the smooth running of hospital discharges.
- We have also been supporting young families with children, low income couples and older people who are living in the private rented sector to maintain their homes and improve the quality

## Case Study: How we are trying to help the homeless

Although we strive to resolve individuals' situations when they approach our housing options team, there are inevitably some who require additional support and find themselves sleeping rough through no fault of their own. We understand that there are a range of issues that come with rough sleeping, such as drug and alcohol abuse and mental and physical health problems.

The councils have continued to assist those most vulnerable people and accommodate those in need. In 2017/18, we have worked with Havebury Housing Partnership to open a winter night shelter to provide a bed for people sleeping on our streets during the coldest months.

The night shelter opened in December 2017 in part of Northgate Lodge in Bury St Edmunds and can cater for up to 16 rough sleepers from across West Suffolk. People are accommodated at the centre by referral to the housing team, although the council continues to assist rough sleepers through referrals from the Bury Drop-In Centre and through our Prevention and Support Worker speaking to people sleeping rough on the streets. The centre offers additional facilities and the chance for people to engage with various support services.

We also opened a temporary winter night shelter in Bury St Edmunds prior to the opening of Northgate Lodge to provide a bed for rough sleepers when the temperature fell below freezing for a number of consecutive nights in December. The emergency night shelter was run by volunteers from West Suffolk councils, the Church and The Bury Drop-In.

The increase of street homelessness is a stark reality, and we are keen to work with our partners to address this challenge. Last year, we also appointed a rough sleeper prevention and support officer who works to encourage people across West Suffolk away from a life sleeping on the streets. Successes reported by our outreach worker include people who have been chronically homeless coming forward for help and engaging with services.

The councils continue to make use of over 100 units of temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfast, hotels and hostels, all the while trying to help people to find more settled homes. We also work with partners who are specialists in mental health and wellbeing, as well as substance misuse.

We are committed to working with our partners to provide accommodation and support for those most in need to help break the cycle of rough sleeping.

of their accommodation through our Home Assistance Grants.

- Our Environmental Health and Public Health and Housing teams have been working together to support some of the most vulnerable residents in West Suffolk by identifying a project to fund energy efficiency improvements to park home properties. The Park Home Insulation project will involve installing insulation and cladding on mobile homes in West Suffolk using £140,000 in funding from the councils' Homes Assistance Grant and third party funding from Suffolk's Warm Homes Healthy People (WHHP) project and National Grids new gas connection scheme.
- The project aims to deliver improvements to three park home sites across West Suffolk to improve the quality of life for the residents and make a difference to their financial circumstances by reducing fuel costs. The proposals include gas connections, for those not currently on this cheapest form of heating, installation of approved external insulation systems, new boilers and first time central heating systems.
- The three sites will be part of a pilot with potential rollout to other sites. We will begin delivering the project in summer 2018 and look forward to updating you on our progress.
- We have been working with registered providers of social housing and the police to resolve issues of anti-social behaviour and noise complaints in the community through the adoption of early intervention strategies. A range of enforcement tools are being used to remedy the most serious cases.
- We have also commented on planning and licensing applications, advising whether developments or activities will cause nuisance or have an adverse impact on the amenity of an area.
- We are continuing to work with Suffolk County Council to identify one of a number of suitable locations for a Gypsy and Traveller transit site (temporary stopping site) across the county, to help ease the difficulties that sometimes occur during the summer months with unauthorised encampments.
- This work supported our equality objective of providing 'homes that are flexible to meet people's changing needs'.
- **Specialist Domestic Abuse Refuge** – Through a successful funding application to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath, along with Suffolk County Council and the five other District and Borough councils in Suffolk, are piloting a project to make 23 bed spaces available across Suffolk for victims of domestic abuse who are not eligible for support through the existing refuges. This could be due to substance dependency, mental health issues or they may have a male child over the age of 16 which would prevent them from accessing refuge. There is also a bed space available for a female victim who has no recourse to public funds. The specialist refuge is offered alongside Domestic Abuse and Housing Options support.
- **Domestic Abuse Link Worker** – Part of the funding has been used to appoint a specialist link worker who sits within the West Suffolk Housing Team and offers support and advice to victims of domestic abuse when they present as homeless. The post is hosted by Anglia Care Trust and funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

### Meeting our new duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act

- The Homelessness Reduction Act came into force in April 2018. The Act modifies and extends existing homelessness protection in a number of ways. Crucially, councils are required to start assessing someone at risk of being made homeless 56 days before losing their home, instead of the 28 required previously.
- To meet increased demand brought about by these changes, the Housing Options team recruited 6.8 full-time equivalent posts in housing options and homelessness, funded by the Flexible Homelessness Reduction Grant.
- In order to meet this increased demand on services, we have been working with our partners to establish the West Suffolk Landlords Forum to ensure private landlords understand changes that may affect them and their tenants under the new Homelessness Reduction Act. The Forum is held quarterly and open to all private landlords in the West Suffolk area. The councils are keen to work

with landlords to ensure that the availability and suitability of homes meet growing demand.

- We have worked hard to strengthen our partnerships to prevent and tackle homelessness arising from the new duties. In 2017, 350 partners attended an event organised by Housing Options which discussed our duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act. The team have further events scheduled for the next few months to continue to raise awareness of housing and homelessness.
- We have also been working with Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP), the Department for Work and Pensions, local Jobcentres and the Citizens Advice to ensure robust plans are in place to deal with those who are moving to Universal Credit in order to prevent rent arrears. We have funded additional posts for Suffolk West Citizen's Advice to provide personal budgeting support for claimants. These posts are located in the Haverhill and Bury St Edmunds jobcentres.

We are also preparing for the introduction of Universal Credit in Forest Heath in December 2018.

- In the next 12 months, we plan to review our Home-Link policy, Homelessness Strategy and Housing Strategy to respond to changes to legislation and welfare reform and the different challenges this presents to the councils.

# Ways of working

## Why was this important to us in 2017/18?

Changes in the way the Government funds local councils have meant we need a new approach to our finances, becoming less reliant on central government budgets and more self-sufficient, including generating our own income streams. Throughout this annual report we have already highlighted ways in which we are focusing on local growth, investing in our assets and 'behaving more commercially' to help make the transition to self-sufficiency. However, we need to take this further by developing our organisation, our estate and our people. All of this will mean new ways of working with public and private sector partners.

By working together as West Suffolk councils, we already know that Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury have made significant savings to taxpayers, but we need to become even more flexible and effective in the future.

This section covers our activities under the headings:

- Transformation
- Managing our finances – investment and commercial opportunities
- Developing the public sector estate in West Suffolk
- Developing our people

## Transformation

### Single Council

- In September 2017, Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury councils agreed a business case to Government to create a single council for West Suffolk from April 2019 in order to drive prosperity, jobs and meet future challenges. In September 2017, the Secretary of State indicated that he was minded to support the process, which triggered a legal process. Plans to create a new West Suffolk Council were supported by the Secretary of State

for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in February 2018.

- An independent opinion poll, carried out by ComRes, an industry-leading research agency showed that 70% of the 1,000 electors polled supported the proposals. The methodology used, and the size and representative nature of the sample, mean that we can be 95% confident that between 67 and 73% of the West Suffolk electorate would support the proposals. The results of the poll were considered alongside other qualitative responses to the open consultation exercise. The draft business case demonstrated that making no changes or going back to two separate councils would have a negative impact on achieving the aims of both authorities and services. It showed how a single council will better meet the challenges facing our communities, such as increased population, demand on healthcare and reduced funding. At the same time it will better drive jobs, deliver services and continue investment to support our communities. In addition it will generate hundreds of thousands of pounds of savings and efficiencies.
- It will mean the council is the right size to still deliver local and tailored solutions but also have a large and unified voice to champion the aspirations of our communities nationally and to attract new businesses.
- Internally, work is progressing to ensure all services are prepared for the new Council, which is being facilitated by a new Single Council Programme Manager.
- Since writing this report, the orders to create a new West Suffolk Council have been supported by the Grand Committee in the House of Lords, following a debate in the House of Commons a week before where MPs also supported the proposals.

### Suffolk-wide working

- Transformation Challenge Award (TCA): In November 2014, a Suffolk-wide bid to the Government's Transformation Challenge Award (TCA) programme was successful in securing



## Case Study: The future of West Suffolk councils



Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury councils have been jointly delivering their services since 2012 and have achieved annual savings of £4million by doing so. In 2017 the leaders of both authorities agreed to build on that success by taking the opportunity to look at the option to replace the two councils with a new district-level council for West Suffolk. This was considered both locally and nationally to be an ambitious plan which would help the councils to meet future challenges and better drive prosperity in West Suffolk.

The councils produced a business case and undertook a comprehensive programme of engagement receiving strong support from residents, businesses and MPs as well as the County Council and other public sector partners. An independent poll of local residents, carried out by ComRes, identified that more than 70% of residents supported the creation of a new West Suffolk Council.

In January 2018 the proposals to create a new West Suffolk Council were backed by the Secretary of State, giving the authorities the go ahead to start to get ready for elections to the new Council in May 2019. Orders to create a new West Suffolk Council have been supported by the Grand Committee in the House of Lords, following a debate in the House of Commons a week before where MPs also supported the proposals.

The Secretary of State highlighted our bid at the District Council Network Conference and the authorities are seen as leading transformational councils nationally. This groundbreaking work is enabling the councils to meet future challenges and continuing to deliver services while encouraging growth, jobs and supporting local communities. The new council will generate hundreds of thousands of pounds of savings and efficiencies and at the same time it will be able to better support, invest in and meet the challenges facing communities, such as increased population, demand on health care and housing as well as reduced funding nationally.

funding, to develop new ways of collaborative working that support communities, reduce costs and generate benefits for residents. Throughout 2017/18, the TCA funding continued to support Suffolk-wide collaboration, particularly in the area of Data and Intelligence, examples include:

- Launch of a virtual network for researchers, analysts, data, knowledge, intelligence, GIS and insight specialists where collaborative work is initiated; analysis and insights are shared; and where knowledge, innovation and best practice around analytical techniques, presentation & visualisation techniques, data systems and tools and data sources is shared;
- Development of a Business Rates Forecasting Model to support Suffolk's Chief Finance Officers to gain a better understanding of the Business Rates income stream;
- In 2016/17, a wide-ranging review of the Suffolk Observatory was conducted to understand whether it was still fit for purpose. Based on user feedback and a wider understanding of existing data and insight needs across all public service organisations across Suffolk, the web site was re-designed and re-launched in 2017/18. The site now provides easier access to the most up-to-date third-party, published data and information about Suffolk and its residents, businesses and communities, thereby supporting local government officers and commissioners, elected members, parish councils, the police, and others in evidence-based decision making and shaping of policies, services and business cases. It is therefore one of the key sources of data, information and evidence to focus resources and improve services across the public sector in Suffolk.
- Development of an Evidence and Evaluation Framework to enable ongoing measurement of 'Community Resilience' – understanding how well communities are doing in terms of crime, employment/economy, wellbeing, poverty and social relationships.
- Joint posts with Suffolk County Council and Clinical Commissioning Group: Last year, the Families and Communities team expanded the team through multi-agency working with the successful secondment of the Building Community Capacity Officer for the west. The

officer is now a full time member of the team with a locality and specialism and provides a great link between the district and the county council. The team now also host two posts which are shared with West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group which has increased opportunities for patient and community engagement. It also links the work that councils do in terms of wider determinants of health and our focus on prevention, with the CCGs need to reduce demand on the health service.

- Suffolk Design Guide: In a bid led by West Suffolk, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government awarded £300,000 to Suffolk Local Planning Authorities to deliver a Suffolk Design Guide and an aligned training programme for staff and members setting out policies and approaches to master planning and design for major strategic sites / developments. The project will be taken forward on a joint basis across the Suffolk's Local Planning Authorities as part of the Suffolk Growth Programme Board's planning workstream.

### **Success of working with the Anglia Revenues Partnership**

- West Suffolk councils continue to play a key role in the Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP), which administers Council Tax and business rates revenues, and benefits, on behalf of the seven partner councils. The partnership continues to develop its role in line with recent changes to local government funding, providing advice and support to partner councils.

Highlights from ARP in 2017/18 include:

- Enforcement Agency service (bailiffs): ARP provides an enforcement agency service (bailiffs) which was launched in July 2015 for all seven partner councils. Enforcement has continued to perform well in 2017/18 with the team collecting £9.3 million since the service began, of which £4 million has been in this financial year. ARP has continued to meet the cost of running the service through fees collection and produced a surplus this financial year. The surplus will contribute to each partner councils' efficiency targets and help them to fund essential services.

- Digital Transformation: 11,039 council tax payers and Housing Benefit recipients have now opted entirely to receive their bills and notifications electronically, rather than by traditional letter.
- Fraud prevention: ARP were tasked with identifying and preventing fraud in the following areas; local Council Tax support, single person discount, Council Tax and business rates and, tenancy fraud, with the aim of this leading to an increase in Council Tax income. ARP exceeded their financial saving 2017/18 target of £1,300,000 by reaching £2,574,613 in February 2018 including over £696,200.15 for West Suffolk. The team also continue to participate in national DWP and local authority Housing Benefit Steering Groups to have input into shaping and influencing current and proposed operational matters. Current topics include Universal Credit plans, tackling fraud and error, local authority financing and data share.
- Working together: West Suffolk's Information and Communications Technology (ICT) team were part of the annual billing project; a multi team involvement that tests the seven databases, with over 340,000 Council Tax bills alone in January 2018.

### Shared legal service

- In November 2016, four councils (St Edmundsbury Borough Council, Forest Heath District Council and Mid-Suffolk and Babergh councils) established a shared legal service.
- We united the service using our existing budget and used no new additional funding. We are pleased to report that we came in on budget in our first year as a shared legal service.
- In future, we plan to expand the service to support the councils' growing business needs. Our focus is on developing our existing team members. Full structure has now been established and we are looking at how we may improve in future.

### Planning Improvement Plan

- **Pre-applications planning advice** - In last year's report, we outlined how our new paid-for-service that enables the delivery of timely planning

advice was set to exceed the budgeted income of £50,000. We are pleased to report that we have exceeded this income with the current forecast for 2018/19 at £85,000. We are currently reviewing the service to look at how we can fine tune it further. However, the first 20 months of implementation have been successful and proved itself to be a popular and useful service.

- **Paperless parishes** – We are pleased to report that 50% of our parish consultations are now done electronically, removing the need for paper copies of plans that was costing the service approximately £19,000 per year.

### General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

- In May 2018, the councils will be required to ensure it has taken all appropriate steps to become compliant with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). In October, Cabinets agreed to support funding to appoint a GDPR coordinator, and undertake the relevant organisational development to ensure compliance. This work is now well progressed and staff awareness of GDPR has increased by completing mandatory training modules.

### Cyber security

- Public sector organisations have fallen victim to an increasing number of cyber security attacks in the past year. The councils have recognised that the public sector is increasingly vulnerable to these types of attacks and took measures in 2017/18 to prevent service failures by reviewing our practices and considering ways we can be more resilient.
- Our Information and Communications Technology (ICT) team have continued to prevent and intervene with malware, viruses, threats and cybercrime. The councils receive 30,000 emails per day, however nearly half of these are flagged as suspicious, and less than 1% represent emails with known malware attachments, which are trapped and blocked by ICT to protect our systems and services.
- The councils have achieved cost efficiencies in its telephony system by phasing out its main ISDN voice lines and replacing with SIP Trunks. The new system provides greater resilience, better

- performance, improved site to site resilience and business continuity, all whilst saving the councils around £50,000 per annum.
- Other achievements in ICT include extending our Abbeycroft and ARP contracts by switching to three year contracts rather than previous rolling annual contracts. The councils also adopted an Information Framework in 2017/18 which is the first step towards becoming more of a data driven organisation, improving services for our customer base through a more integrated approach to data and sharing of data with our key partners.

## Managing our finances – investment and commercial opportunities

### Managing our finances

- The Local Government Finance Settlement for 2017/18 was announced in December 2016. Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury were both successful in being included in the settlement which confirmed our figures from the four year Revenue Support Grant settlement in 2016 and gave details of the revised New Homes Bonus figures and rules.
- Both St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath have been able to create a Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) that balances out income and expenditure to 2021. There were six key themes behind the creation of these plans:
  1. aligning resources to both West Suffolk councils' Strategic Framework and essential services;
  2. continuation of the shared service agenda and transformation of service delivery;
  3. behaving more commercially;
  4. considering new funding models (e.g. acting as an investor);
  5. encouraging the use of digital forms for customer access; and
  6. taking advantage of new forms of local government finance (e.g. business rate retention).
- Each MTFS highlights the change in relationship between central and local government through the increase in local funding from business rates, council tax and other revenue streams, as well as reduction in central government grants.
- Suffolk has been awarded 100% Business Rates pilot status for 2018-19 (this is a one-off, one year only pilot) based on the proposal submitted in October 2017. The proposal builds on the Business Rates Retention pool which Suffolk has successfully operated since 2013. In all pilot areas, the councils within the pool have to forego the funding streams of the revenue support grant and rural services delivery grant in return for higher shares of business rates. The Suffolk pilot is based on a no detriment to each of the councils and therefore the risk to the Council's budget of not achieving the business rates anticipated in the 2018-19 budget is low. Any additional business rates collected in Suffolk will be invested in inclusive growth. This is unique nationally and reflects our 'place based' way of working which better supports both the urban and rural areas.
- In 2015, the Local Audit and Accountability Act was published. A key area of these regulations was that from the 2017/18 financial year, the timetable for the preparation and approval of accounts will be brought forward to a draft accounts deadline of 31st May and an audit deadline of 31 July.
- This is a reduction in preparation time of 30 days for the final accounts (moving from 30 June to 31 May) and 62 days for the audited accounts (moving from 30 September to 31 July). The Government believes that this change will reduce the burden of the closure process, enabling finance staff to give more time to in-year financial management.

### Our approach to investment – Solar Farm

- Forest Heath District Council celebrated the first birthday of its Toggam Solar Farm in August 2017. During the year, the solar farm generated 11,682MWh of electricity, bringing in £1.2m of income, £308,000 net income (taking into account the capital outlay) to contribute towards funding local services.
- It is one of the biggest local authority-owned solar farms in the UK, producing enough





*Norfolk Horns at  
Toggam Solar Farm*

electricity to offset the carbon footprint of 1,700 cars and enough electricity to power 3,500 homes.

- The solar farm, along with other initiatives such as the councils' Solar for Business roof-top solar scheme, is saving a total carbon footprint of around 4,900 tonnes each year.

### **Purchasing the DHL building/ Development of Western Way**

- In November 2017, St Edmundsbury purchased a 3.26 acre warehouse in Olding Road for £4m. This long term investment will help deliver income to support the future proofing of local services. The DHL purchase was completed at the end of 2017. The purpose of the purchase is to enable the realisation of Western Way Development Masterplan that was adopted in 2016.
- We continue to work with Public Sector Partners and stakeholders to develop the vision for Western Way Development both in terms of the development itself and the opportunities that arise to improve efficiencies and customer experience through colocation and integration of services.

### **Purchasing the Post Office building**

- The site at 17-18 Cornhill, due to its relationship with Cornhill/Buttermarket, St Andrews Street South and Market Thoroughfare, was identified by the Council as having strategic importance in relation to the emerging Bury St Edmunds Town Centre Masterplan (adopted in December 2017).
- Following the announcement by Post Office Ltd that Bury St Edmunds main post office facility on 17-18 Cornhill would close, the Council subsequently purchased the site.
- Two of the aspirations of the Bury St Edmunds Town Centre Masterplan, which was shaped through public engagement, are "Market Thoroughfare – improvements to provide continuity from the historic centre to the arc" and "Develop area between the arc and Cornhill i.e. St Andrews Street South to provide for a mix of uses and to establish closer integration." The purchase of 17-18 Cornhill, although not a masterplan aspiration in itself, offers the opportunity to deliver on some of these improvements and in so doing to encourage other land owners and investors to also make improvements in line with both of these masterplan aspirations. In addition, the site provides the Council with an opportunity not only to bring a historic building back into use

## Case Study: Purchasing the former Post Office building

The Victorian building on 17-18 Cornhill in Bury St Edmunds is in the heart of the town and had previously been home to the Crown Post Office for more than 100 years.

After officially closing in November 2016, the council bought the building and, following extensive interest, appointed Donald Insall Associates as architects for a project to refurbish and extend the building. The architects have been asked to keep the historic Victorian front, respecting the town's heritage while also bringing it back into economic use.

Two of the aspirations of the Bury St Edmunds Town Centre Masterplan, which was shaped through public engagement, are "Market Thoroughfare – improvements to provide continuity from the historic centre to the arc" and "Develop area between the arc and Cornhill i.e. St Andrews Street South to provide for a mix of uses and to establish closer integration." Purchasing the building allows us to work with our partners to improve links between these areas of the town.

Although not a masterplan aspiration in itself, the building offers the opportunity to deliver on some of these improvements and in so doing to encourage other land owners and investors to also make improvements in line with both of these masterplan aspirations.

Investing in the building not only gains financial return, but also helps deliver social and economic improvements to the area by building on its unique qualities. Further, it helps deliver income to support the future proofing of local services.

but also to deliver wider social, economic and financial benefits for the town.

- We are currently working to develop options for the site including associated financial modelling with the above key aspirations in mind.

### Civil Parking Enforcement

- West Suffolk councils have submitted an application to the Department for Transport (DfT) for taking over responsibility for enforcing on street parking restrictions from the police (known as civil parking enforcement or CPE). This enforcement includes yellow lines, loading bays, taxi ranks, bus stops and school 'keep clear' restrictions.
- The benefits of CPE include:
  - More local accountability and the ability to be adaptable to local needs
  - Safer traffic conditions and improved traffic flow

- Easing congestion caused by inconsiderate parking
- Improving access and response times for emergency vehicles and public transport
- Reducing abuse of specific parking bays designed for blue badge holders
- A more cohesive and cost effective operation achieved through a coordinated approach between on and off street parking enforcement
- Public sector leaders across Suffolk have sponsored this transfer of enforcement powers including East, West, Babergh and Mid Suffolk councils.
- The set up cost of implementing CPE will be in the region of £1.1million and will include a review of all traffic regulation orders, signs and lines, recruitment and training of new enforcement staff and any new equipment and

ICT systems required. These set up costs will be met by Suffolk County Council and the police.

- West Suffolk councils will manage CPE within their boundary as well as managing enforcement in parts of Mid Suffolk and Babergh.
- The recent application to the DfT anticipates an implementation target date of April 2019.

## Developing the public sector estate in West Suffolk

### Mildenhall Hub

- In November 2017, Forest Heath's Development Control Committee gave approval for the Mildenhall Hub following submission of the planning application in May. The Mildenhall Hub brings a new school, leisure facilities, larger swimming pool, health centre, library and other public services together on one site close to the heart of the existing town centre.
- The council is now a step closer to delivering better school and leisure facilities for our growing population of residents in and around Mildenhall.

### West Suffolk Operational Hub

- The West Suffolk Operational Hub (WSOH) is an initiative between Forest Heath District Council, St Edmundsbury Borough Council and Suffolk County Council (the 'partner councils') to manage waste by relocating a number of facilities to a single site. The aim of the hub is to increase efficiency, reduce costs and future-proof waste management for West Suffolk's growing communities.
- A planning application for the site was submitted in March 2017. Detailed designs were then prepared and planning permission was granted in November 2017. Construction contractors Moran Sindell have now been appointed and started on site in April 2018 following the conclusion of archaeological work.

## Developing our people

### Supporting our staff through training

In the section on priority 1 (increased opportunities for economic growth), reference was made to the success of our apprenticeship scheme across West Suffolk councils. We are committed to the development of our workforce and the learning of new skills, behaviours and competencies. The ways in which we have supported our staff in 2017/18, are set out below:

- This year has seen an increase in the number of training sessions offered with 105 events and 1,007 attendances at training events recorded. We have seen the introduction of the new GDPR regulations and the Agresso upgrade. These training programmes have been delivered by internal subject specialists. We have continued to offer ICT skills development with a series of advanced Excel and Powerpoint training. For those new to management we offer access to the Suffolk-wide blended learning resources for the "21st century manager training". This has included a new offer of Coaching conversations for managers, Presentation training and chairing and facilitating meetings. The Itrent self-service system has seen increased efficiency in the administration of events and the waiting list facility to ensure we are delivering repeat courses on evidence of demand.
- We have 28 members of staff working towards accredited professional qualifications across a range of subjects including; Foundation degree in Payroll management, CIH level 5 diploma in housing, MSC Town Planning and Accountancy ACCA. This year we have seen an increase to 10 members of management staff doing the Institute of Management and Leadership (ILM) qualifications at level 3 and level 5. In addition five staff members are about to start the ILM mentoring qualification which will take our cohort of internal qualified mentors to 15.

## Improving wellbeing and mental health at work

- **Time to Change** – In 2016 we introduced our Mental Health at Work policy. In September 2017 we signed up to the Time to Change Employers pledge which was supported by the portfolio holders and the mayor. This pledge represents a commitment to an action plan which says we will continue to support staff, increase awareness, initiate actions to prevent and manage issues and support managers to help support their staff to stay well and in work. We also worked with ACAS to shape its new mental health guidance for employers which was launched in October 2017. This year, 112 members of staff have attended one of the mental health training interventions we have offered, including 48 managers.
  - **Suffolk Workplace Wellbeing Charter** - We have made a commitment to the Suffolk Workplace Wellbeing Charter which focuses on an organisation's commitment to the wellbeing of staff. To deliver this we are working with the following partners: Suffolk County Council, East of England Local Government Association, occupational health providers, neighbouring local authorities, and hospitals including Ipswich and Addenbrooke's and the Clinical Commissioning Group. In November 2017, as the first of the partners, we submitted our evidence for assessment for the Charter. We were successfully awarded a Certificate of Accreditation in December 2017, with four excellence and four achievements against the eight standards.
- delivered three external LGA sessions with a focus on the role of the councillor in the 21st century.
- We recorded 113 attendances at the events giving an average attendance at each event of eight. The Joint Member Development Group with Democratic Services continues to monitor and manage the programme and are working on new initiatives such as e-learning and small seminar sessions to improve attendance.

## Councillor Learning and Development

- This year we launched the member's e-learning portal with nine courses including LGA programmes on Licensing and Regulation, and Planning and Scrutiny for councillors. To date, 12 councillors have used this resource and we are continuing to promote this in the coming period.
- We have delivered 14 member development events this year with topics based on; the Training Needs Analysis outcomes from members, key changes in legislation such as housing and Universal Credit and key West Suffolk strategies such as Energy Matters. This year, we have



## The future

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You will have seen from this report that we have made significant steps towards achieving our strategic priorities in 2017/18. We also know there are challenging times ahead and that we need to utilise the opportunities available to us in the future.

Our Strategic Framework 2018-2020 sets out our vision and priorities for the next two years: [www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/Council/Policies\\_Strategies\\_and\\_Plans/upload/StrategicFramework2018-20.pdf](http://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/Council/Policies_Strategies_and_Plans/upload/StrategicFramework2018-20.pdf)

## Appendix 1: Community Chest funding

The following organisations have been supported with Community Chest funding in Forest Heath for financial year 2017/18:

Organisation	Funding provided to support:	Location of delivery	Amount for 2017/18
HomeStart	Parental and Family Support	Available to people across Forest Heath	£9,800.00
Newmarket CAB	Advice, Support and Advocacy Services	Newmarket	£34,970.00
Relate	Relationship Counselling services	Available to people across Forest Heath	£2,000.00
Suffolk West CAB	Free Information, Advice and Advocacy	Available to people across Forest Heath	£39,650.00
The Voluntary Network	Community transport	Available to people across Forest Heath	£18,400.00
Rural Coffee Caravan	Funding to visit 6 rural villages lacking in amenities or social activity	6 locations across FHDC area	£3,210.00
Sharing Parenting	Parenting programmes	Available to people across Forest Heath	£35,500.00
Our Special Friends	Animal support services for vulnerable adults	Available to people across Forest Heath	£6,000.00
Suffolk West Citizens Advice Bureau	MoneySmart service	Available to people across Forest Heath	£27,192.00
YOPEY Befriender	Young adult intergenerational service	Newmarket	£4,000.00
Alumah CIO	Domestic abuse support group	Brandon & All Wards	£3,700.00
Unit Twenty Three	Play production – young carers	Available to people across Forest Heath	£5,000.00
Epic Dads	Fathers support and empowerment group	Lakenheath	£24,491.03
Arts For Us	Out of school children's activities	Available to people across Forest Heath	£9,520.00
The Volunteer Network	Befriending	Available to people across Forest Heath	£10,299.33
Fresh Start New Beginnings	Sex Abuse Support Sessions	Available to people across Forest Heath	£10,000.00

The following organisations have been supported with Community Chest funding in St Edmundsbury for financial year 2017/18:

Organisation	Funding provided to support:	Location of delivery	Amount for 2017/18
Gatehouse Caring	Home Furnishings for disadvantaged families	Bury St Edmunds & All Wards	£5,000.00
HomeStart	Parental and Family Support	Available to people across St Edmundsbury	£45,475.00
REACH	Foodbank and Supported Volunteering	Haverhill and surrounding	£5,000.00
Relate	Relationship Counselling services	Available to people across St Edmundsbury	£5,000.00
The Voluntary Network	Befriending Scheme and Community Car Service	Available to people across St Edmundsbury	£15,234
Suffolk Rape Crisis	Counselling Services	Bury St Edmunds	£4,800.00
Gatehouse Caring in East Anglia	Funding towards Dementia Hub	Available to people across St Edmundsbury	£10,000.00
Millennium Farm Trust	Learning disabilities support group	Available to people across St Edmundsbury	£10,000.00
Suffolk Accident Rescue Service (SARS)	Specialist Medical equipment	Available to people across St Edmundsbury	£2,000.00
Suffolk Mind	Community allotment	Haverhill & All Wards	£4,970.30
Upbeat Heart Support	Health support group	Bury St Edmunds & surrounding	£7,875.00
Catch 22, Suffolk Positive Futures	Free weekly sports project for young people	Haverhill & surrounding	£8,189.00
Suffolk Cruse Bereavement Care	Community Support project	Available to people across St Edmundsbury	£9,458.00
Survivors in Transition	Sex abuse support group	All Wards	£11,560.00
Bury St Edmunds Women's Aid Centre Ltd	Family support project	Bury St Edmunds	£5,400.00
Our Special Friends	Animal support services for vulnerable adults	Available to people across St Edmundsbury	£6,000.00
Suffolk West Citizens Advice Bureau	Operational costs	Available to people across St Edmundsbury	£182,000.00
Theatre Royal (Bury St Edmunds)	Arts Wellbeing programme	Bury St Edmunds & All Wards	£5,000.00

## Appendix 2: Rural Initiatives Grant Scheme

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The following organisations have been supported with Rural Initiatives grants in St Edmundsbury for financial year 2017/18:

Organisation	Grant provided to support:	Amount for 2017/18
Ixworth Village Hall	Replacement flooring for main hall	£5,000.00
Thurlow Sports Club	Kitchen, storage and fencing improvements	£2,000.00
Thurlow Village Hall	Replacement wiring	£5,049.00
Ingham PCC	Replacement heating for church community facilities	£7,500.00
Whepstead Community Association	Replacement kitchen for Community Centre	£7,500.00



## Appendix 3: Ways we have supported our rural communities in 2017/18

Examples are listed in the order they appear in the report.

Small business grants	We supported a number of small businesses in rural areas including a lamb charcuterie in Stoke-by-Clare. More information on how we have supported local businesses by awarding small business grants can be found on page nine.
Clare market and Clare Winter Festival	Clare market was reinstated in August 2017 and a special Christmas market was held in December 2017. More information about these events can be found on page 15.
Litter picks	33 of the 57 litter picks that took place in 2017/18 were in West Suffolk's rural areas including Tuddenham, West Row and Ixworth. More information about litter picks and our Love Where You Live campaign can be found on page 18.
Tree services	We successfully prosecuted a landowner for the unlawful removal of five trees within the Flempton conservation area. More information about this case can be found on page 19.
Epic Dads	We supported Lakenheath-based project EPIC Dads to become a community interest company and helped expand the project into other areas of Forest Heath. More information about this project can be found on page 21.
The Shed, West Row	We provided support to The Shed in West Row by way of locality budgets, funding advice, and general support dependent on the needs of the group. More information about this project can be found on page 22.
Sharing Parenting	Outreach project Sharing Parenting covers Brandon, Red Lodge, Lakenheath and Mildenhall and links with all primary schools in rural areas across Forest Heath. Details about this project can be found on page 23.
Brandon Day Centre	Through stakeholder steering group support and collaborative working with Ward Members and the Council, Brandon Day Centre were able to deliver new initiatives and purchase two new mini-buses to enable those living in Brandon, Lakenheath and the surrounding rural villages to access the centre. Further details regarding the day centre and the council's support can be found on page 23.
St Nicholas Open House	St Nicholas Open House operates in Brandon and Barrow and supports those facing long term and life threatening illnesses, their loved ones and carers, as well as those struggling with bereavement. More information on this can be found on page 23.
Home Start	With support from the Families and Communities team and Community Chest funding, family support charity Home Start is now operating in both our rural and urban communities across West Suffolk. More information about Home Start in West Suffolk can be found on page 23.

<p>Locality Budgets</p>	<p>Locality Budget funding was used to support a number of rural community groups and activities in 2017/18, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Red Lodge Millennium Centre were able to purchase an indoor curling set, enabling the centre to establish a group who can now enjoy sport within the centre.</li> <li>- Speedwatch schemes in rural areas such as Cavendish and Freckenham and community defibrillators in rural areas were both funded by a number of locality budgets.</li> <li>- Carols on The Green in Flempton-cum-Hengrave was supported by locality budget funding, enabling the community to come together. More information on this event can be found on page 26.</li> <li>- A Community Thinking Day to celebrate World Thinking Day, led by Mildenhall Girl Guides brought all neighbouring guides and scout groups together with communities to host a day of celebration.</li> </ul> <p>Further details on how we have supported communities using locality budgets can be found on page 27.</p>
<p>Rural Initiatives Grant Scheme</p>	<p>During 2017/18, £27,049 was committed towards five projects in rural areas. More information about this scheme can be found on page 28 and the projects supported are presented in Appendix 2 on page 57.</p>
<p>Creative People and Places Programme</p>	<p>The programme helped support various creative projects to allow residents in Brandon to showcase their talents through the Brandon Forum. More information about the programme can be found on page 30.</p>
<p>Awards</p>	<p>West Stow Country Park retained its Green Flag Award in 2017 and West Stow Anglo Saxon Village achieved a Learning and Access Award from the Museum of the Year Awards. More information on our achievements in relation to our parks and green spaces and arts, heritage and leisure can be found on pages 29-31.</p>
<p>The Brecks Project</p>	<p>As part of the Brecks project, plans are in place to open a 15-mile long distance footpath between West Stow and Brandon Country Park. More information about this project can be found on pages 34-35.</p>
<p>Buurtzorg</p>	<p>An innovative way of providing health and social care known as Buurtzorg was introduced in Barrow in early 2018. Further details regarding this project can be found on page 36.</p>
<p>Neighbourhood plans</p>	<p>Neighbourhood plans are currently in preparation for the following rural areas; Great Barton, Hargrave, Ixworth and Ixworth Thorpe, Exning and Barningham. More information on our neighbourhood plans can be found on page 39.</p>
<p>Toggam Solar Farm</p>	<p>Our Solar Farm, based near Lakenheath, generated 11,682MWh of electricity, bringing in £1.2m of income and £308,000 net income (taking into account the capital outlay) to contribute towards funding local services. More information regarding the project can be found on page 49.</p>

Forest Heath & St Edmundsbury councils

**West Suffolk**  
working together