

# Shadow Council

<b>Title:</b>	<b>Leader's Statement</b>	
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<b>Documents attached:</b>	<b>None</b>	

## Leader's Statement

1. It is less than 50 days before the new West Suffolk Council is created. The work that has gone into this has been tremendous and at pace. Something I know in our talks with Government we have been praised for as well as the thorough detail that we have been supplying. But a Council is much more than committees, policies and debates. It is a power for good that is part of our communities helping our residents and businesses thrive. Tonight we will be discussing several important items that breathes life into the ambitions we have for West Suffolk Council. A strong balanced budget means we can push on with not only delivering high quality services but carry on investing in our businesses and communities. I also look forward to hearing the debate on the independent panel's proposals for remuneration which will cost the tax payer less than before but help attract more people to become councillors.

## Budget

2. For the first time we are creating a budget for the new West Suffolk Council. This not only gives us the funds to deliver the high quality and award winning services we already do but is an investment in the future of West Suffolk. It also gives us an opportunity to help young people leaving care by reducing their Council Tax. I believe this is a strong budget that builds on the great work our councils have been delivering. That is not to say there are not challenges ahead that all councils and public bodies are facing. But this budget puts us in a good position to face those challenges going forward. Indeed the new West Suffolk Council also puts us in a better position to then champion our area nationally in asking for fairer funding. Thank you to our finance team and Cllrs Ian Houlder and Stephen Edwards, Cabinet Members for Resources and Performance, for your hard

work on this and helping provide such a strong foundation for our new Council.

### **Independent Remuneration Panel**

3. Our residents and tax payers rightly expect us to be prudent with their money in running a lean and effective council. At the same time they want us to reduce barriers for people to take part in the democratic process and stand themselves to be councillors. Our make your mark campaign is part of that work to encourage people to stand and vote in the forthcoming election. Like every council across the UK the new council has to have remuneration policies for councillors. We have before us a report rightly carried out by an independent panel that has looked at the current and future demands on councillors, the national picture and value for the tax payer. I look forward to hearing the debate on this but welcome the principles that the suggestions being made are based upon. That is a saving on our current budget of nearly 6% while also addressing the need to make sure we attract a range of councillors who previously might not have been able to afford to stand will get the chance. Councils need to not only represent their communities but reflect them too. This is part of a wider picture of policies and changes that we have had to make, think through and harmonise ready for the new Council. This has been made much easier by the cross party and council working we have seen and the advice of the Future Governance Steering Group led by Cabinet Members Cllrs Ruth Bowman and Carol Bull.

### **Fairer Funding**

4. Currently there is a consultation on how councils are funded in the future. We are taking part in this consultation and making sure West Suffolk's voice is heard. As ever the devil is in the detail and that is still to come forward as well as any figures. That said we believe we are being listened to in our campaign to recognise the extra need in rural areas or where services are being delivered in places with high numbers of service personnel such as here in West Suffolk where we host 11,000 US visiting forces and dependents. As this moves forward we will keep you all informed. The Government is also looking at business rates reform and whether to reset the baseline for this. We are a high growth area and worked hard together to encourage investment and businesses in West Suffolk. Therefore, we are lobbying with other councils not to have a complete reset which would reduce funding.

### **Rough Sleeping**

5. Reducing homelessness and helping the most vulnerable is at the core of what we do. I am sure many of you know the hard work that is going on to reduce rough sleeping in West Suffolk and even saw the latest photo of our staff going out at 4am to carry out a count. We are a pilot area with the Government and our latest figures show that we are making a difference. In our latest count we have seen a 44% drop in numbers from 25 to 14 since September. This is a complex area and I know from the dedication of our staff and Cabinet Member for Housing Cllr Sara Mildmay-White something we are tackling in an innovative way. For example the successful 'Looking For Change' initiative has seen a range of charitable,

commercial and public sector partners join together to encourage people to give in a different way. This helps those on the streets not just find a bed but get support as well. However, we know this is a complex area of work and those numbers can be affected by a whole range of issues but it is heartening to see with our partners we are making a difference.

### **Social Prescription**

6. Both I and Cllr John Griffiths have in previous Leader's Statements talked about the success of social prescribing in West Suffolk and indeed the recent investment of £660,000 in strengthening and extending our existing scheme. Which is why I am pleased to hear in recent weeks the national recognition and need for more of this initiative in the UK. Social Prescribing is a complicated title to explain an initiative that changes and saves lives. It means that people who may have a range of issues from loneliness, obesity and mental health problems can find help and support in the community when traditional medical services may find it difficult to help. This is supported by GPs, health partners and a range of community groups and stakeholders. One again West Suffolk is taking a lead. Our Families and Community work is pioneering and I would like to thank Cabinet Members Cllrs Robin Millar and Robert Everitt with our staff on this truly transformational work.

### **Transport future**

7. West Suffolk is at the hub of trade routes and successful economic areas that are key to the UK economy. One of our priorities is ensuring we keep people, goods and data flowing to benefit our current and future communities and businesses. Our work around that is ongoing and starting to bear fruit. We have been working closely with partners in Cambridgeshire, as part of the Cambridge sub-region, and I am pleased to see works are now beginning on the A1307, a vital link with Haverhill. It marks the beginning of a £14m package of works by the Greater Cambridge Partnership to improve road safety, bus priority and to upgrade walking and cycling routes along the A1307. But we will continue to keep pressure on for further improvements.
8. Equally we, with other Suffolk colleagues, have taken the fight for an upgrade to the A14 to Westminster. This is the premier route from Felixstowe for trade in the UK. The £150 million investment required from Government would generate a massive £1.5 billion uplift in GVA, reducing congestion and further cementing West Suffolk as the place to do business. Cabinet Members, Cllrs Susan Glossop and Lance Stanbury, with colleagues from business, including Claas based here in West Suffolk, took the campaign to ministers to highlight the need for this investment.
9. In addition West Suffolk is campaigning for rail improvements with the new East West Rail Eastern Section Rail Prospectus. The Prospectus sets out the economic and growth opportunities that can be realised by providing better rail connectivity between Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridge with Milton Keynes, Oxford and beyond. It has been developed by local authorities in Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire in conjunction with New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership and the East West Rail Consortium. Through better rail connectivity, the three counties have the potential to

improve economic performance, grow industries, create new jobs, and enable housing growth, as well as reduce road congestion and long journey times.

### **West Suffolk Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering Group**

10. I was pleased to see the first meeting of a business group designed to further advance manufacturing and engineering in West Suffolk, has taken place. The newly formed West Suffolk Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering Group will help drive forward innovation and skills development within the sector. Close to two dozen businesses from across the area came together for the meeting organised by West Suffolk Councils and the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership. We have a strong and diverse mix of manufacturing and engineering businesses in West Suffolk and this new group offers the chance for local businesses to collaborate, to speak with one voice, to network and to further develop their own local supply chain. It will ensure that the region goes on to become even more globally competitive.