



Annual Report

**2018/19**

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## Foreword from the Leader of West Suffolk Council

**I write this having been given the honour of being elected the first leader of the new West Suffolk Council.**

For many of our local residents I hope it will feel like business as usual. We pride ourselves on the high quality of the day to day services our residents deserve, need and value. It's not just our waste crews brilliant though they are, or our environmental health team protecting the public from poor hygiene practices and ill health. It's our wonderful parks and open spaces, our play areas, our leisure facilities; these are just a few of the things that make West Suffolk such a great place to life and work.

Of course we do much more than that. Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury have in recent years saved money through innovative ways of working while investing to increase opportunities for business growth and development to meet the needs of our communities. We have also been and are continuing to work side by side with our partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors to, for example, create better opportunities for young people to gain high skilled local, well paid jobs.

Housing need remains a priority. As you will read in this annual report, the last for the two councils (St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath) we are working through a number of means including planning to ensure that there is the right mix of housing types and sizes –that homes are suitable to people's changing needs as they get older, that there are homes to support the growth ambitions of local employers and which meet the needs of our communities in our towns and villages.

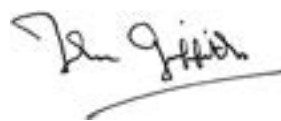
There are of course challenges ahead both for us in local government and more importantly for our residents, our businesses, our communities. They are at the heart of everything we do. This annual report outlines our approach to investing

in projects partly to create income to pay for the services we provide, but also to create opportunities, whether these be opportunities for employment growth and regeneration or social benefits that will help improve residents' health and wellbeing.

We also recognise that we can't do everything alone. One of the many benefits of becoming West Suffolk Council is that it gives us a stronger voice to lobby for national investment in infrastructure for some of the major improvements our residents and businesses are asking us for. It also puts us in a better position to further our work helping people and families address some of the key challenges they face. Addressing issues such as loneliness before they become ill health, tackling disengaged youth before it becomes anti-social behaviour and crime, finding a way for our communities to support each other and become more self-sufficient – these are all crucial to people's enjoyment of their lives.

The work of Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury, of our staff and our former councillor colleagues is captured in this final annual report of the two councils, and gives us reason to be confident in the face of many unknowns. Confident that we can continue to deliver good, value for money, services to meet the needs and aspirations of our communities, confident that we can continue to progress and innovate, all the while fostering a good quality of life, protecting our environment and heritage, and promoting a strong local economy.

Welcome to West Suffolk.



John Griffiths,  
Leader of the Council



# Introduction

**This Annual Report presents the progress that West Suffolk councils made during 2018-19 in delivering our vision and priorities.**

We have now completed our journey to becoming a single West Suffolk Council after successfully sharing services since 2013. This report therefore looks back on everything we have achieved in our final year as Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council.

The vision and priorities that we worked towards during 2018-19 are set out in the West Suffolk Strategic Framework 2018-20 at: <https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/strategicframework>

The report describes our achievements in detail across all of our localities, whether towns, villages or countryside. Some of the work we have done impacts on 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 one provides an overview of how we have particularly supported our more rural communities and businesses in 2018-19, as well as highlighting key achievements in rural areas. Further details about the examples within the appendix can be found within the report.

Some highlights across the whole of West Suffolk in 2018-19 are shown below:

We made history by becoming the first council of its kind to be given official backing from parliament in May 2018 for the creation of a new West Suffolk Council.

We completed a nine month renovation of Haverhill Leisure Centre which opened its doors in February. The £1.5 million investment has transformed fitness facilities in the town.

We helped install 17 new solar PV installations onto buildings in West Suffolk using the Solar for Business grant. This amounts to a £750,000 investment into renewable energy generating £80,000 a year for the Council.

We successfully secured £591,344 (£245,782 of which for 2018-19) of Government funding to help reduce rough sleeping across West Suffolk and secured a joint bid of £320,000 with Ipswich Borough Council to prevent people privately renting from being made homeless.

We secured £660,000 of funding to continue Haverhill LifeLink and to introduce social prescribing in Brandon and Mildenhall.

We were awarded £355,000 of funding for a project to further support our work in reducing energy consumption.

By working proactively with developers and house builders and allocating deliverable sites in our local plans, we were one of the 60 per cent of all councils who met their Housing Delivery Targets.

## Our highlights in numbers



**1,629,407**

activity visits to our leisure centres



**1,142** volunteers  
cleared an amazing  
**725** bags of litter

from their local communities

**4 million**  
bins emptied



We helped deliver

**207** much needed  
**affordable homes**  
in West Suffolk



We provided housing advice to

**1,607 households**

Volunteers spent  
**9,371 hours**  
working in our parks  
and green spaces



We provided **£575,384** in grants  
to communities, voluntary organisations and small businesses

# A vision and priorities for West Suffolk 2018-19

From 2018-2020, Councillors and staff across West Suffolk Councils are committed to:

**“Supporting and investing in our West Suffolk communities and businesses to encourage and manage ambitious growth in prosperity and quality of life for all.”**

In practice, this will mean continuing to focus our energies and resources on the following strategic priorities:

## **Growth in West Suffolk’s economy for the benefit of all our residents and UK plc.**

We will use our influence, investment, partnerships and regulatory powers to:

- lobby for a better connected West Suffolk, in terms of transport and digital connectivity
- promote West Suffolk as a place to do business, so as to attract investment and innovation that increases salary levels and encourages the right mix of jobs to grow our economy
- invest in and promote our local places by building on their unique qualities through specific local strategies, projects and environmental services
- develop our current and future local workforce through education, training and opportunities for all.

## **Resilient families and communities that are healthy and active.**

We will use our leadership, local connections, commissioning role and assets to:

- foster supportive networks to improve and sustain the lives of individuals, families and communities
- use our community, leisure, open space and heritage assets to support wellbeing and education
- work with and influence partners including the voluntary sector in our shared endeavour of improving the health, wellbeing and safety of families and communities.

## **Increased and improved provision of appropriate housing in West Suffolk in both our towns and rural areas.**

We will use our roles as a local housing and planning authority, a regulator, an investor and local influencer to:

- plan for housing to meet the needs of current and future generations throughout their lifetimes, that is properly supported by infrastructure, facilities and community networks
- improve the quality of housing and the local environment for our residents
- enable people to access suitable and sustainable housing.

The full version of the Strategic Framework document is available at [www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/strategicframework](http://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/strategicframework). You can read more about West Suffolk Councils including examples of our work in partnership with residents, communities and businesses in our Annual Report at: [www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/annualreport](http://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/annualreport)





# Priority 1: Growth in West Suffolk's economy for the benefit of all our residents and UK plc

In our Strategic Framework, we committed to using our influence, investment, partnerships and regulatory powers to:

- lobby for a better connected West Suffolk, in terms of transport and digital connectivity
- promote West Suffolk as a place to do business, so as to attract investment and innovation that increases salary levels and encourages the right mix of jobs to grow our economy
- invest in and promote our local places by building on their unique qualities through specific local strategies, projects and environmental services
- develop our current and future local workforce through education, training and opportunities for all

## Why was this a priority for 2018-19?

Without 'good growth' in West Suffolk, our residents have little prospect of achieving the goals they want to achieve. A strong economy that is capable of growing, sits at the heart of this growth, and the councils hold a number of key levers in driving forward economic change.

We need to use our resources to foster good growth in West Suffolk because there are areas where the potential of our places and people is not being maximised and where more could be achieved. For example in 2018-19, we directed our energies towards projects and activities that helped bolster productivity, improve educational attainment and increase wages, which are currently lagging behind national trends. We also worked with others to

improve infrastructure, which is so critical in rural areas such as ours.

As we look towards the next decade and the significant social and economic change that we are likely to experience, West Suffolk Council needs to be leading the way in ensuring that our local economies are resilient and growing in an inclusive way.

We have highlighted our achievements under the following headings:

- **Creating the right conditions for growth**
- **Investing in growth**
- **Skills and education**
- **Creating prosperous places to live in, work in and visit**

## Creating the right conditions for growth

We have continued to lobby for a better connected West Suffolk. For example, after the councils, Suffolk County Council and other stakeholders lobbied for improvements, Highways England installed traffic signals on the approaches to the A11 Fiveways junction in December 2018. The project received £400,000 funding from the Department for Transport and has been used to address safety concerns on the approaches to the A11.

Working with Suffolk County Council and Suffolk Chamber of Commerce, the councils have continued to campaign for road improvements along the A14 as part of the **No More A14 Delays** campaign, to help unlock economic growth, jobs and housing. A parliamentary reception was held in Westminster in January to support the Road Investment Strategy and a funding decision for Suffolk is expected in the 2019 Autumn Statement.

We successfully lobbied for **upgrading of A1307** to be part of the national road network, increasing potential to access additional funding.

We worked with Suffolk County Council to secure Defra Broadband funding of £1.725 million to help extend broadband to more businesses across rural areas in Suffolk.

We also regularly engaged with the county council on a number of infrastructure issues across West Suffolk, including pot holes and other road repairs.

### **Suffolk Business Park and 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.

Following the opening of the Eastern Relief Road in September 2017, Suffolk Business Park continued to welcome new and expanding businesses to its site. As well as the new headquarters building serving animal feed firm Forfarmers, the park is also the chosen location for the high quality power tools supplier Festool.

A new spine road on the western part of the site, provides access to two large warehouses built for new occupiers.

Once finished, the site will provide approximately two million square foot of commercial space and opportunities for a range of companies, from start-ups to well-established large businesses. 37 acres of the site is also designated as an Enterprise Zone, enabling companies to benefit from reduced business rates.

### **RAF Lakenheath**

We hosted a free event for businesses to see how they can be part of multi-million contracts for USAF Lakenheath and growth in West Suffolk. The 'Get Ready for Growth' event in October 2018 brought together national and multi-national construction contractors with local businesses and showcased upcoming opportunities for how businesses could become part of future supply chains.

### **Haverhill Research Park and the Epicentre**

Haverhill Research Park is located on the northern edge of Haverhill, within 17 miles of Cambridge. The park consists of 30 acres of landscaped grounds with full infrastructure in place, ready for companies to relocate. The site has planning permission for 450,000 square



foot of commercial space over four plots. It is also one of only five sites to be given Cambridge Compass Enterprise Zone status, which brings a number of benefits, including a business rates discount of up to 100 per cent for the five years of a lease.

Following discussions with West Suffolk Council and the Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority, the developer Jaynic recently secured a planning application for the 'EpiCentre'; a new 30,000 square foot four-storey innovation/business centre. The proposed location for the centre is at the gateway to the town and adjacent to the Spirit of Enterprise roundabout, where it will have maximum visual impact and create a prominent 'landmark' building at the entrance into Haverhill.

A 1,438 square foot extension was also approved for business start-up Menta at Hollands Road in Haverhill.

## Helping businesses remain in the area

West Suffolk councils supported Pecksniffs, a premier independent British Fragrance and Cosmetic House based in Brandon with a move to a new premises. Pecksniffs had found themselves in a position where they had to leave the building they were manufacturing in and needed another premises urgently. The councils' Economic Development team helped Pecksniffs find a new property, access £202,500 of grant funding from New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership and supported the company through the planning process, thereby retaining the company and jobs in the town. Furthermore, the company created new positions with the assistance of the grant.

## Commercial property investments

During 2018/19, the councils invested £6.58 million in commercial properties funded through the Investing in Growth Fund. These properties will generate an initial gross annual revenue to the councils of £451,000 which, after borrowing and other costs, equates to an initial net annual revenue of £88,000.

The properties also contribute toward our wider strategic outcomes, including the provision of additional temporary accommodation in Newmarket, helping deliver the Haverhill town centre masterplan and acquisitions that will help progress to the Western Way Development in Bury St Edmunds, shaping the future of public services for the benefit of our residents and local businesses.

We continue to have a low number of empty properties in our commercial property portfolio. Some of the empty properties were purchased by the councils for investment purposes, such as 17-18 Cornhill. We are pleased to report that income received from our property portfolio has increased; in 2018-19 our income totalled £5,192,412 compared with £4,642,869 in 2017-18.

## CASE STUDY

### Solar installation at Unisurge Ltd

In December 2018, the councils installed its largest community energy solar project to date. An investment of £375,000 delivered an installation of 1,600 solar panels on the roof of Unisurge International's headquarters in Newmarket and also an LED lighting upgrade. Unisurge has entered into a 20-year lease to purchase the renewable energy and will save around £20,000 per year.

The council's three income streams from this project are, the feed in tariff, selling the electricity to Unisurge and selling any excess to the grid. The Internal Rate of Return (IRR) is 9.96 per cent with a 20 year annual average return to the councils of £47,000.



### 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 2018/19, 16 grants totalling £24,000 were awarded across West Suffolk. We have supported a wide variety of businesses including a vegan catering business, a land maintenance business and a marketing consultancy business.

### Helping business be greener

We continue to help businesses reduce their energy use whilst also helping them save money on their energy bills. During 2018-19, 17 new solar photovoltaic (PV) installations were installed on buildings in West Suffolk using the Solar for Business grant. This amounted to a £750,000 investment in renewable energy, generating £80,000 a year to support the council services. The businesses will benefit from electricity savings of £38,000 per year collectively along with the associated carbon dioxide savings.

The councils issued five Greener Business grants during the year, with four receiving support for LED lighting. The combined annual saving for the four recipients will be £4,400. We received eight new applications during the year for energy efficiency improvements including insulation, LED and an electric vehicle charging point.

### Electric Vehicles

The councils held an event specifically aimed at local businesses as part of the West Suffolk Business Festival in October, showing the advances in electric vehicle innovation and charging infrastructure and the relevant support available to businesses. This work is part of the council's commitment to cutting air pollution which includes reducing vehicle idling and encouraging greater use of clean

energy. The councils also held an Electric Vehicle (EV) roadshow in the arc in August, highlighting the financial, economic and environmental benefits of EVs.

### EU Interreg Project Award

Last year, a project funded by the European Union was identified that could further support our work in reducing energy consumption across West Suffolk businesses.

Following a successful bid with three other European local authority partners, the councils were awarded £355,000 in December 2018 for the four year project. This will involve piloting smart energy solutions to develop a local smart grid.

The project targets are to:

- Engage with up to 50 businesses
- Use the proposed battery storage capacity from the Mildenhall Hub project and solar Photovoltaics (PV) generated electricity for additional storage in the local network
- Save 600,000 kWh and 250 tonnes carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) annually
- Achieve 15 per cent energy efficiency improvement across participating businesses
- Assess the potential to upscale across the Eastern Power Network

Local support has been gained from the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership, UK Power Networks, New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership and the Local Energy Hub Greater Cambridgeshire Combined Authority.

If successful, the project could be rolled out across the Eastern Power Network to meet long-term energy, growth and carbon dioxide reduction goals. An Energy Advisor has been recruited (funded by the project) and work has started with UK Power Networks, University of Cambridge and Office of Gas

and Electricity Markets (OFGEM).

### Business events

Our growth team, in partnership with local businesses and organisations, has held a number of events in 2018-19 to help promote investment and business opportunities and deliver growth across West Suffolk.

In October, the councils led and organised the **West Suffolk Business Festival** which attracted 1,500 attendees and consisted of 18 events, including various workshops and networking opportunities. Other events included a business breakfast with the Bank of England and an electric innovation event. The event closed with the Bury Free Press Business Awards.



The councils and Suffolk Chamber of Commerce held a Building for Business engagement event at Newmarket's Rowley Mile Racecourse in November to discuss their ambitions for growth ahead of the creation of West Suffolk Council. The event was a great opportunity for the councils to understand what businesses will need in terms of development land to enable them to achieve their ambitions for growth.



The **West Suffolk Manufacturing Group**, pictured above, held its first meeting in January 2019 and attracted 40 attendees from across the area to help drive forward innovation and skills development within the sector. The meetings, organised by the councils and supported by the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership, will rotate between other towns in West Suffolk in future.

## Investing in Growth

### Newmarket Cinema

The councils committed £210,000 of support for a business case to bring a cinema to Newmarket town centre. The business case is the result of essential viability studies commissioned in 2017, which confirmed that there is strong local demand and that operators are interested in running a cinema. The final business case, which is expected in autumn 2019, will include traffic studies, a car parking study and a planning application.

### 17-18 Cornhill, Bury St Edmunds

A public exhibition of designs for the former Post Office in Bury St Edmunds took place in June and July 2018. The designs, which were

enthusiastically received, included retaining the historic Cornhill front, and redeveloping the rest of the site to provide a wider walkway at Market Thoroughfare. It will also create a new frontage onto St Andrews Street South which could encourage other owners to invest in improving this area, and also aims to deliver much needed housing. Barnes Construction, a Suffolk builder, was appointed to work on the next stage of the Cornhill project in December 2018.

## Skills and education

### Local skills and education needs

In January 2019, the councils approved £200,000 of funding, over two years, for a project to support young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) in West Suffolk. The funding has been matched by Suffolk County Council (Suffolk County Council agreed to devolve their budget to districts for place-based approaches) and Suffolk Public Sector Leaders Board (through pooled business rates), with £100,000 approved for year one and additional funding for year two dependent upon outcomes achieved in year one. The project has two parts. The first part is to contribute towards

continuing the Haverhill Youth Skills project – this is delivered by Haverhill Town Council on behalf of the One Haverhill Partnership and provides a dedicated support for Haverhill’s NEETs, led by the Youth Skills Manager and apprentice. For the second part of the project, West Suffolk Council has commissioned West Suffolk College to deliver ‘One Step Closer’. This project will identify and select individuals who are NEET and have yet to be successful in securing employment. The College will provide them with targeted coaching and training in order to prepare them with skills, attitudes and behaviours that will ensure success in further education, the apprenticeship job market, or employment. The college will work with local voluntary and community organisations as appropriate in order to find the best solution for each individual young person.

Further, in February 2019 we delivered the ‘Future Workforce in West Suffolk’ business skills forum in partnership with Suffolk Chamber of Commerce, pictured below. The event was well received by businesses and included updates on the New Anglia Sector Skills Plans and T-Levels (T standing for technical) that Government recently introduced.

## Apprenticeships

We have 20 members of council staff working towards an apprenticeship, nine of whom are on apprenticeship contracts and 11 are permanent members of staff.

The new apprenticeship standards have opened up a wider choice of specialist subjects, allowing staff the opportunity to study subject areas such as digital marketing, paralegal and public relations.

Of our current workforce, 10 members of staff who started their careers as an apprentice have now moved into permanent positions while many others have taken the experience of working at West Suffolk and applied it to progress careers elsewhere.

Through this work we are contributing towards one of our 2018-20 equality objectives to ensure we develop our current and future local workforce through education, training and opportunities for all.





## Graduate programme, internships and work experience

We continue to participate in the public sector Suffolk Graduate programme. One graduate is based in West Suffolk councils' corporate policy team. The first cohort of graduates will complete the two year programme in August 2019 and a second cohort will begin the scheme in September 2019.

For the fifth year running, we took part in the Suffolk Rising High programme and welcomed five new interns in the summer of 2018. During the 12-week work placements, our interns were given responsibility for aspects of work within the service where they were based. They also worked on a group community challenge to tackle loneliness for people of all ages across west Suffolk.

We now have six employees working at the councils who had previously been with us as interns but then successfully applied for permanent posts. 13 of our interns from the last three years went on to work in local and central government, including seven who are currently working for West Suffolk Council. Others gained employment in other parts of

the public sector, such as the health service and police, and the East of England Local Government Association.

We also hosted 12 young people on work experience from a range of local schools and colleges and have attended careers fairs for those over the age of 16 at Brandon, Thurston and Haverhill, raising awareness of the opportunities at the councils.

For the first time, we are hosting a work placement at the Apex in the marketing team and a University of East Anglia master's degree in Museum studies student is completing their placement at Moyses Hall.

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

### Newmarket Business Improvement District (BID)

Love Newmarket Business Improvement District (BID) is now in its third year operating in the town and has been instrumental in



delivering a number of events over the year, notably the Christmas “Making Magical Memories” events which saw increased footfall and spend in Newmarket.

The BID is also utilising the recently installed town Wi-Fi network which provides free Wi-Fi access to visitors to the town in addition to providing valuable footfall insights. 2019-20 will see a continuation of events and services to businesses which all aim to increase footfall and spend to the businesses and retailers within the BID area. The councils have continued to provide support to the BID board and has worked collaboratively with the BID on a variety of schemes.

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

Bury St Edmunds BID (OurBuryStEdmunds) works to promote local town centre businesses by encouraging more people to visit the town centre, spend money in the local shops and have an enjoyable experience in the process. OurBuryStEdmunds does this by organising various events and promotions in the town centre, such as the Whitsun Fayre, the Food and Drink Festival and Christmas Lights Switch on. This year, the BID, in partnership with the My WiSH charity, organised the tremendously successful World War One public art trail which saw 18 pieces of individual and unique works of art located around the town, all commemorating the centenary of the ending of World War One. The councils have continued to provide support to the BID board and has worked collaboratively with the BID on a variety of schemes.

### **Bury St Edmunds Destination Management Organisation (DMO)**

Bury St Edmunds and Beyond Destination Management Organisation (DMO) is responsible for driving the strategic, long-term marketing for Bury St Edmunds and

the surrounding area. The DMO has been instrumental in understanding the visitor demographic to Bury St Edmunds and utilising targeted marketing to further entice new overnight visitors and increasing the overall value of tourism to the area.

Bury St Edmunds has also partnered with neighbouring DMO’s across Suffolk to deliver marketing campaigns to increase the visibility of Suffolk to potential visitors by capitalising on Suffolk’s unique and varied attractions.

2019-20 will see further campaigns from Bury St Edmunds and Beyond, in addition to working with partners in the town to prepare for the 1000th anniversary of the Abbey of St Edmund. The councils support the DMO by ensuring that they are aware of upcoming events so that they can be promoted. We also collaborate on a number of schemes and initiatives.

### **Screen Suffolk**

Screen Suffolk launched in 2017 as the official film office for Suffolk. The aim of Screen Suffolk is to promote public and private locations across the county to the film and television industry and encourage increased filming days in Suffolk. Filming days into the county surpassed initial targets and Screen Suffolk have successfully attracted a variety of television and film productions.

2018 saw the filming of scenes for “The Personal History of David Copperfield” in Bury St Edmunds. This production generated around £82,500 to the local economy and will be a catalyst for additional tourism visits upon release.

A number of television programmes were also filmed in West Suffolk including DIY SOS and Love It Or List It. The councils provided all appropriate property owned by the councils as locations to film. In addition, we helped by

closing roads and providing parking to ensure that locations could be used in productions.

## Tourism

Tourism and the visitor economy is one of our key sectors in West Suffolk, supporting around 10,650 jobs. Figures from 2017 show that there were 11.4 million visitor trips to the West Suffolk area which is an increase of 7.3% when compared to 2016. This growth exceeds the target of 5 per cent.

The latest figures from Destination Research find that the value of tourism to the local economy in West Suffolk currently stands at £538 million, an increase of 5.4 per cent compared with 2016.

In partnership with our local and regional tourism organisations, we continue to promote and market the area to encourage more visitors to visit West Suffolk and increase their length of stay to further increase the value of tourism to the local economy.

## Street scene

Alongside our local communities and invaluable support from volunteers, we work hard to ensure that our localities remain vibrant, clean and safe.

We continue to promote the **Love Where You Live** campaign which helps people set up group or individual litter picks and take pride in their communities. In 2018-19, 62 groups consisting of 1,142 volunteers managed to clear an amazing 725 bags of litter from their local communities throughout the year, equating to approximately 3.6 tonnes of waste.

We have also provided **300 individual volunteers** with their own litter pickers, hi-vis jackets and supplies of bags so that they can litter pick in their local communities on a regular basis.

We emptied over four million bins and recycled and composted 27,000 tonnes of waste across West Suffolk.

We also:

- dealt with 567 fly tipping incidents and carried out 1423 actions. These include carrying out investigations and duty of care inspections, and issuing warning letters and notices and;
- installed 20 dog waste bag dispensers at various locations across West Suffolk which are being well used by dog walkers. Eight more dispensers are due to be installed later in the year.

The **Suffolk Waste Partnership** has continued to raise awareness of reducing, reusing and recycling. In November 2018, the Partnership helped educate the public about plastic pollution and littering with a recycled Christmas art project. 23 schools, a library, a care home and Brownies and Guide groups from all over Suffolk took part. The participants made over 1,350 polar bears and penguins for a display; well in excess of the 1,000 target. The works were hung in the Apex over the Christmas period.

Another area of focus for the Suffolk Waste Partnership has been to reduce food waste. We launched the Food Savvy website in partnership with an environmental charity called Hubbub and Norfolk County Council in order to secure external funding to promote food waste reduction. More information about Food Savvy is available: [www.foodsavvy.org.uk](http://www.foodsavvy.org.uk)

## Tree services

- We successfully secured £8,642.40 from Countryside Developments to carry out remedial work and fund replacement tree planting in the Northern Way tree belt as part of the Marham Park Development.

- We also recouped £4,500 after root damage was caused to trees owned by the councils in the Marham Park Development. This money was spent on additional planting along Mildenhall Road.
- We planted 250 trees across West Suffolk as part of our commitment to ensuring our areas remain a green and pleasant place to live, work and visit. The replacement planting programme included 100 large heavy standard size trees and 150 woodland whip trees.

### Car parks

All of our car parks have achieved Park Mark status and achieved Disabled Parking Accreditation. The awards demonstrate our commitment to creating high quality parking facilities all.

Our cashless payments (debit and credit card) for car parking have also increased by 51 per cent since 2017-18. This increase demonstrates the changes in way people pay for parking, which we are embracing.

We installed a new Electric Vehicle (EV) charger in School Yard East in Bury St Edmunds in association with Highways England and other local authorities across Norfolk and Suffolk. The rapid charger, pictured below, is capable of charging two cars at a time and can substantially recharge the battery of an EV in just 30 minutes. Users are able to park for free for up to two hours while their vehicle charges and only have to pay for the amount of electricity they purchase. Use over the first few months has been strong and consistent, with as much as 83.4kwh (the equivalent of over 330 emission free EV miles) being delivered in a single day.





### Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO)

In March 2019 an additional condition was added to the existing PSPO which is in place in Bury St Edmunds town centre. Following complaints from residents and business about anti-social driving around Bury St Edmunds town centre, a consultation took place to decide if a new condition should be added to the existing order, which already covers anti-social behaviour in relation to alcohol and begging. The results of the consultation supported the proposal and councillors approved the decision to add the additional clause.

### Supporting our local food businesses

The Eat Out Eat Well award rewards businesses who offer healthier food choices to customers by either using healthier catering practices, increasing fruit and vegetables, decreasing levels of fat or providing healthier options for children.

15 business in West Suffolk achieved the award in 2018-19, with 54 in total now having achieved the award since its launch.

The Suffolk Take Out Eat Well award scheme was also launched at Suffolk County Council and promotes the provision of healthier options for customers visiting takeaway businesses, pictured above. Three West Suffolk businesses achieved awards at the time of the launch.

### Supporting our markets

We have continued to improve market provision across our towns. Some highlights include:

- Helping improve High Street footfall in Newmarket and reviving the market by moving it back to its original home on Newmarket High Street. Since leaving the Market Square in September the market has grown from six stalls to 15 stalls and there

is a waiting list of traders of approximately 15–20 traders. This included a successful campaign to not only promote the market and the move but also awareness raising over moving vehicles from laybys, as well as recruiting help in setting up the night before.

- Hosting the fourth beer and music festival in Haverhill in July 2018, drawing hundreds of visitors to the town, as well as the Haverhill Queen's Street Christmas Market in December.
- Doubling the number of traders at Mildenhall market after we installed new electricity points in early 2019. Some of the new traders include stalls specialising in jewellery, photography and racing memorabilia.
- Welcoming 140,000 people to the Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre. Market traders in Bury St Edmunds traded on Sunday as well

as their regular Saturdays and Wednesdays in December, allowing shoppers to enjoy the festive atmosphere of the market.

- Continuing the Clare monthly market, which has gained popularity, with a survey showing that many customers were visiting from areas outside of Clare. We also helped Clare put on a Christmas Market which consisted of more than 20 stalls.
- Holding five monthly markets in Brandon between August and December, which saw an increase in stalls from three to approximately 12.





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

In our Strategic Framework we committed to using our leadership, local connections, commissioning role and assets to:

- foster supportive networks to improve and sustain the lives of individuals, families and communities
- use our community, leisure, open space and heritage assets to support wellbeing and education
- work with and influence partners including the voluntary sector in our shared endeavour of improving the health, wellbeing and safety of families and communities

### Why was this a priority for 2018-19?

Many of the difficulties experienced by West Suffolk residents could be prevented or tackled early if support and potential solutions were available close to home, for example, from within family, neighbourhood or community networks. This would then result in a different role for public services, namely being an option of last resort, rather than the first port of call.

We are already developing the foundations of a more preventative approach, working across groups and organisations, listening to and working within and with our communities. Crucial to this approach is encouraging communities and individuals to explore their strengths and assets, and tailoring our support and responses accordingly. Traditionally we think of assets as being buildings or places but in this approach references to assets also means local people who care enough about

an issue in their community that they are prepared to do something about it.

Each locality's social, economic and demographic make-up is different, as well as the challenges and opportunities, and understanding these will be fundamental to the success of our work. This is particularly true as we see long-term trends in demographics, families, the make-up of communities and priorities changing across Suffolk. For example, a third of new-borns will live to 100 years of age. Increasingly, those approaching retirement age are still caring for their parents, which has an impact on housing choices, where people decide to live and work, and their lifestyles.

In practical terms this means rethinking what public services do. Prioritising the role of families and communities in society will mean that West Suffolk councils advocate, empower and enable people to spot, prevent and address emerging problems, rather than waiting until they become serious and manifest themselves as not working, anti-social behaviour or poor health.

We have highlighted our achievements under the following headings:

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



## Making connections in the community

A key way in which West Suffolk councils have worked to support families and communities in becoming stronger and more resilient is through enabling them to make connections. These connections are the foundations on which a range of other initiatives have been built.

Much of the work detailed in this section contributes to our 2018-20 equality objective of working with and influencing partners, including the voluntary sector, in our shared endeavour of improving the health, wellbeing and safety of families and communities.

### Haverhill Life Link

This year, we led a successful partnership bid to secure £660,000 of funding from Suffolk County Council, the West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group and West Suffolk business rates retention fund for social prescribing. The funding will be used to strengthen our social prescribing project in Haverhill, known as Haverhill LifeLink, as well as working with local partners to develop the model in Brandon and Mildenhall. The

scheme helps address social and wellbeing needs of residents which can also impact on health and are sometimes hard for medical services to address. The people who have used the service have reported that they have gained confidence, returned into employment and volunteering, reduced loneliness or been helped with their physical and mental health.

Haverhill LifeLink has helped more than 130 people by connecting them to more than 150 existing community groups, while also identifying and establishing new groups where required.

One of the users of the service said:

*"I have met new people, got out the house and overall feel more positive. I feel brighter and more upbeat since starting Haverhill LifeLink."*

### Ixworth Patient Association

The councils supported a village transport scheme to help patients with transport problems access their local health centre. The councils connected the group to a Clinical





Commissioning Group Patient Participation Officer and helped arranged a meeting with the chair of the Patient Association, One Suffolk and the local doctor's surgery practice manager. Since connecting with the local organisations, the transport scheme has improved and funding secured for three years. A number of activities were also developed, such as a session called Get Help to Get Fit, which led to the recruitment of five new volunteers. Locality budget funding was also provided to help towards volunteer drivers' expenses for the patient journeys they make.

### **The Shed, West Row**

The Shed in West Row provides an area for people to come together, volunteer their time, build relationships and enjoy the company of others. Locality budget funding was awarded to the project by the councils in 2017, enabling the project to grow in 2018-19. Over the last 12 months the group have cleared hedgerow and started to plant memory trees, as well as beginning work on a woodland walk. They have also carried out general repairs to buildings already on the site and held numerous events throughout the year.

### **War Memorial, Red Lodge**

Over the last 12 months district councillors for Red Lodge, together with the parish council, and local school and church have taken forward a proposal from the community to provide Red Lodge with a new war memorial. The proposal secured funding and the memorial was unveiled on 11 November 2018; commemorating the centenary of the end of World War One.

### **Home Start**

Following a successful application to the West Suffolk councils' Community Chest, alongside other external funding, Home Start Mid Suffolk and West grew and expanded

throughout West Suffolk in 2018-19. In the last 12 months the range of services available to families throughout the area has expanded to include more coverage of home visiting and one to one support, as well as a birth and beyond programme being launched in Forest Heath and a Perinatal Support Group operating in Brandon, support groups have also been established in Honington and Stanton, including the Honington Family Group and RAF Honington Little Gems Group. This programme ensures parents and families facing challenges receive vital support and practical help.

### **Brandon Perinatal Support Group**

After a need for more community based support services was identified in Brandon, the councils enabled the establishment of a perinatal support group in September 2018. The councils helped by identifying a volunteer in West Suffolk who wished to enhance community based support and was willing to work with other volunteers to help set up support groups in the area. The councils connected the volunteers with Home Start, who could facilitate group work, and also helped the group find a venue and provided locality budget funding. The group provides support as well as advice and information.

### **Markets Matter Project**

The councils' markets and museums services worked in partnership with a community arts teacher to develop the Markets Matter Project which saw students from St Benedict's Catholic School in Bury St Edmunds organise a Mad Hatter's tea party at which children served free cake and tea to local elderly residents and involved a pop-up museum and workshops. The project brought generations together by involving nine schools, the Gatehouse Dementia Hub, a care home and two sheltered housing schemes.

**CASE STUDY:**

## Hedgehogs Café, Rougham

Hedgehogs Café opened as part of a village initiative designed to combat loneliness and isolation. The councils contributed to the start-up costs which helped with the opening. The weekly café creates a community hub for residents of Rougham, Rushbrooke and Bradfield St George. It runs during the day, so it is aimed particularly at those who are at home on Fridays (for example, those who are retired, young parents, part-time workers or people who work from home). It aims to encourage local residents to meet one another and create new supportive friendships and restore a sense of community and belonging.



## Skate Park in Newmarket

In our 2017-18 report, we said how we had been engaging with young people in Newmarket to design a new skate park to help bring the community together and create a space for young people. The project has progressed and a project group has been established, with young people playing a fundamental role in taking the lead in securing funding from various stakeholders, and the councils overseeing the project and connecting key people. We are now out to tender and will be overseeing the building of the new facility in 2019-20.

## Western Assembly of Youth (WAY)

Following the development of the Suffolk Assembly of Youth (SAY) last year, the councils have been working with students from Sybil Andrews School under the Western Assembly of Youth (WAY). WAY is aimed at bringing young people together across the west of the county to create a young person's platform; something we have not had since the Bury Youth Forum was disbanded in 2015/16.

The young people came together from all high schools in West Suffolk in December 2018 to form the foundation of WAY, after the culmination of a year's worth of work. The students will explore opportunities to motivate and bring young people together on local issues in their communities and work alongside West Suffolk Council.

## Newmarket Interfaith Forum (NIFF)

Throughout the year, the NIFF have done some outstanding community work, including sharing food with a care home, supporting the injured jockey fund masquerade ball, clearing an elderly resident's garden and organising a community cricket match in September for the entire community. We have been the link to

connecting communities with NIFF, providing guidance and support to develop each stage of their progress. This included linking them with the Bury Drop In and encouraging them to take a leading role in the alternative giving campaign Looking For Change, as well as empowering the group to take on bigger projects.

The group also bought a building to create a community space for the Islamic community. The space will have an open door approach and be open to the whole community. Pre-planning discussions are currently taking place between West Suffolk Council's Conservation Officer and Planning officers.

### **Teen Chill**

In last year's annual report we said how we had helped establish Teen Chill; an initiative in Newmarket and Brandon developed by young people which gives them a space to relax and engage with youth workers. Since launching in September 2017, the sessions have attracted 30-50 young people weekly. A group has also formed, led by Abbeycroft Leisure and supported by West Suffolk councils and Suffolk County Council, to explore the direction of Newmarket for young people.

### **Brandon Day Centre**

We have been working to develop relationships with a broad range of partners within the Brandon community who are now operating or using the day centre in Brandon. Over 150 people attended the official launch of the centre, which was opened by Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and West Suffolk MP Matthew Hancock. Many different groups now use the facility, including a Family Carers group and a Diabetic Clinic, benefitting not only day centre members but a wide range of groups with various needs in the community. The centre also now have their first mini bus.

### **BMX Pump Track**

We are pleased to report that the Haverhill South People's Forum launched the Puddlebrook BMX Pump Track in December 2018. The forum is part of the 'Local Conversations' programme in Haverhill South, a People's Health Trust initiative which involves residents developing a shared vision for their community. The forum, supported by Community Action Suffolk, worked in partnership West Suffolk councils, Haverhill Community Trust and Suffolk County Council to deliver the BMX Pump Track. Residents have been involved in all aspects of the project, from the design of the track, to its upkeep and getting involved in user groups. The track was built by Clarke and Kent, the same builders who built the London 2012 Olympic Games BMX track. So far, it has attracted a large number of users of all ages and abilities and has received highly positive feedback.

### **West Suffolk Parish Conference**

We held our second West Suffolk Town and Parish Conference for town and parish councils from across the area in October 2018.

The free conferences give town and parish councils the opportunity to exchange information, share experiences and grow their knowledge by hearing from expert speakers and taking part in workshops. This year's conference had workshops on a variety of topics such as community energy, neighbourhood planning, neighbourhood schemes, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the impact of General Data Protection Regulation, particularly in relation to using email.

### **Helping rough sleepers sustain a life off the streets**

The councils backed 'Looking for Change'; an alternative giving campaign run by local

charity The Bury Drop In. The campaign encourages people to donate to support the charity's work in helping rough sleepers sustain a life off the streets, rather than giving directly to those on the street.

Giving money directly to those on the streets may fund addictions that prevent them from being able to get into and keep their place in temporary accommodation. Addiction has led to many being evicted from their accommodation. The campaign was introduced in October 2018 and is supported by our partners, Our Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk Police, the Bury Free Press and Bury St Edmunds Town Council. So far, the charity has received over £4,000 in donations. The money donated is available as grants to people who have been rough sleeping, have received support for any issues of addiction and are ready to move on from temporary accommodation. The first grant was used to pay for a laptop for someone who was sleeping rough and who was supported with finding accommodation and is now moving on with their life, studying with a view to gaining qualifications and starting work.

The 'Looking for Change' campaign was also launched in Newmarket in March with the assistance of the Newmarket InterFaith Forum and The Bury Drop In. Support from the campaign has come from The Newmarket Journal, Love Newmarket, Suffolk Police and Newmarket Town Council. The Newmarket campaign is slightly different in that it is also set up to help people who are homeless but not rough sleeping, and people who are vulnerable in the town.

### **Togetherness Fayre**

The West Suffolk councils interns helped raise awareness of the problem of loneliness by creating the Togetherness Fayre in August 2018; a free event that brought together 30 local businesses and charities to showcase the important work they are doing across Suffolk to reduce loneliness. The event was a great opportunity for organisations to recruit new members, network and spread awareness of the services on offer.



## Stillbirth and neonatal death charity (Sands) support group

Sands support group provides emotional support for grieving families who have experienced the devastation of losing a baby, either during pregnancy, at birth or soon after. The councils helped set up the first Sands support groups in Suffolk by providing locality budget funding. The money was used to cover the costs for hiring a meeting room, as well as purchasing a computer and printer for vital administrative support.

The support meetings are so important for bereaved families and friends to meet with others who have been through a similar experience. The group is made up of bereaved parents who are very appreciative of the councils' support during the startup period.

The group now hold monthly support meetings in Bury St Edmunds. They have also been helping with raising money for a bereavement suite in the West Suffolk Hospital.



## CASE STUDY



## Fibromyalgia Group

Our Families and Communities approach is all about helping community groups make links with other organisations to help them reach their goals and become more resilient in the process. Last year, a Facebook fibromyalgia support group with over 150 members wanted to meet to socialise and find a suitable premises so that they could host events with speakers. The Facebook group was a great first step in helping individuals with the condition feel less isolated and for them to gain information and advice in a positive environment.

The group's admin had organised a number of self-funded events, which were successful, but costly due to outgoings for speakers, the room booking and refreshments.

After the group reached out to the councils to seek advice about funding opportunities, we helped them find suitable premises and provided contact for others in the voluntary and community sector who offered free space to community groups.

They also advised them to contact the Gatehouse Charity in Bury St Edmunds who offered a room for monthly meetings. The group received financial support from local councillors in the form of locality budget funding, which enabled them to fund speakers and day trips.

## 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 groups of residents take ownership of issues that they care about and help councillors ensure that funding gets to the heart of their communities.

One of the many projects which was allocated locality budget funding was the Multi Use Games Area in Risby. It offers somewhere for local residents to play tennis, netball, basketball and hockey, while in winter months it can also be used for football and cricket.

In 2018-19 West Suffolk councillors contributed £82,626 towards initiatives and projects in their wards.

A full list of projects funded by councillors in 2018-19, together with information about how the scheme works can be found on our website: [www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/localitybudgets](http://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/localitybudgets)

### Community Chest funding

The West Suffolk Community Chest provides voluntary and community sector groups the opportunity to apply for funding for projects and services which will bring benefits to local people and help the councils achieve their priority of supporting families and strengthening communities.

In total, £468,758 has been awarded to voluntary groups and organisations across West Suffolk in 2018-19 to support their valuable work.

A full list of projects that have received Community Chest funding in 2018-19, together with information about how the scheme works can be found on our website: [www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/communitychest](http://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/communitychest)





## 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 9,371 hours working in our parks and green spaces during 2018-19.

In 2018-19, four parks across West Suffolk (the Abbey Gardens, East Town Park, Nowton Park and West Stow Country Park) were awarded Green Flag status for the seventh year in a row and Aspal Close Nature Reserve in Mildenhall was awarded a Green Flag for the first time. The Green Flag scheme is run by Keep Britain Tidy and is awarded to parks that are safe, clean and well looked after.

The plant displays in the Abbey Gardens also contributed to Bury St Edmunds' success in this year's Britain in Bloom competition, as well as the regional Anglia in Bloom

competition. Bury St Edmunds was awarded a gold in the national competition and gold at the regional competition. Brandon in Bloom was also awarded a silver-gilt in the Town Category and 'Best New Entry'.

In June 2018 the ownership and management of **Brandon Country Park** was transferred from Suffolk County Council to Forest Heath District Council. Since then, management of the café has been leased to Verse Facilities management and a new senior Ranger has been appointed. The main car park has also been resurfaced and numerous other improvements have been initiated.

Work is progressing to bring the former Eastgate nursery, part of the Abbey Gardens, back into a meaningful use. Two new tennis courts will be installed into the area. Once installed the old tennis courts near to the former abbey church will be removed.

Through developer contributions from section 106 funding for developments in the Newmarket area we were able to support with the commissioning and installation of an ornamental gateway on the Exeter Road end of the **Yellow Brick Road** in Newmarket which was created by metal sculptor Nigel Kaines. Since its installation a number of environmental improvements have progressed along the route of the Yellow Brick Road and we will soon be installing CCTV to deter antisocial behaviour along a certain section of the route.

### Biodiversity in our parks

We are committed to encouraging biodiversity and taking action to encourage responsible use of the council owned green spaces. Some initiatives during 2018/19 included:

- Working with the local planning authority and developers to ensure that new developments include appropriate natural green spaces that provides the widest

possible diversity of habitats being appropriate for the location and sustainable.

- Working with the River Lark Catchment Partnership group to improve the biodiversity of the river corridor throughout West Suffolk where we have riparian responsibilities for the river.
- Encouraging biodiversity along the meadow lands that we own by encouraging responsibly grazing
- Altering our maintenance regimes to encourage and preserve plants of significance
- Adoption of a Tree Policy which seeks to preserve and enhance our tree stock.
- Planting pollinator friendly annual plants in the formal bedding schemes in the Abbey Gardens to encourage plant pollinators.

Tayfen Meadow (Bury St Edmunds), York Road (Haverhill) and Strasbourg Square (Haverhill) play areas were refurbished in 2018, with local communities choosing some of the equipment that they wanted to see in their play areas, increasing the sense of community ownership.





## Arts, heritage and leisure

### Events, museums and tourism

In 2018-19, there were **148,658** visits to West Stow Country Park (including **20,986** admissions to West Stow Anglo Saxon Village) and **21,076** admissions to Moyses's Hall.

At West Stow Country Park we ran a number of popular events including Ring Quest, a Lord of the Rings themed family challenge and the annual Dragon Fest.

Moyse's Hall in Bury St Edmunds held a number of high profile exhibitions including, the Marilyn Monroe exhibition, Sci-Fi exhibition, Sybil Andrews exhibition and the Space exhibition. The success of these exhibitions led to a nine per cent increase in visitors to Moyse's Hall in 2018-19 and a 25 per cent increase in income compared with 2017-18.

We also hosted **60** events as part of the 2018 Bury Festival.

### Market Place – Phase two

Market Place is an audience development programme for the engagement and growth of arts and culture in seven market towns, including Brandon, Mildenhall and Newmarket. It focuses on engaging people who are not currently engaged in the arts, or likely to have a background in arts engagement, and giving them a voice and access to the arts and culture.

This year has seen the implementation of phase two of the programme, made possible through the extension of Arts Council England funding. The next phase (2018-2021) will see us work with the people and the things that uniquely characterise each place. The

work recognises the impact creative arts engagement can have on people in their daily lives, increasing confidence and self-esteem and support wellbeing.

Since 2016/17, there have been just over 39,000 attendances at Market Place's 50 events and 129 activities.

### The Apex

The Apex in Bury St Edmunds hosted 258 shows in 2018-19 and the box office took **£2,062,824**, exceeding the target set for the financial year and increasing income by 1.6% compared with 2017-18. Ticket sales also increased by 3,000 compared with 2017-18, with 108,004 tickets sold in 2018-19. The last financial quarter (January – March 2019) was the best on record and up 14% on the same quarter in 2017-18.

The new Apex membership scheme was launched in the summer of 2018. The target for the first year was 250 members but 400 members joined in nine months, generating an additional £14,000 of income for the venue per year.

In February half term in 2019, the Apex hosted the hugely successful Museum of The Moon installation, attracting over 15,000 visitors to The Apex.

## Historic environment

### Abbey of St Edmund Heritage Partnership

The Abbey of St Edmund Heritage Partnership aims to deepen public understanding of the life and times of St Edmund and the medieval abbey and to encourage people to experience the historical and archaeological significance of the Abbey of St Edmund. In 2018-19, the partnership completed two

major pieces of academic research into the Abbey of St Edmunds. The first was a Heritage Assessment, which brought together all the available history and archeological information about the Abbey. The second was a Conservation Plan, which assessed the significance of the Abbey precinct and outlines a conservation framework for its future care and enhancement. Both studies were commissioned by the Abbey of St Edmund Heritage Partnership with grant support from Historic England and St Edmundsbury Borough Council. The results of both studies were presented in January 2019 at a one day conference at St Edmundsbury Cathedral. Around 175 people attended the conference, which was supported by the University of East Anglia.

In March 2019, plans for a series of community engagement events and workshops to help communicate the work of the partnership were backed by councillor funding. Five Town councillors and eight St Edmundsbury Borough councillors agreed to support a total of £6,254 in locality budget allocations for a series of seven projects for Heritage Conservation and Community Engagement in the Abbey of St Edmund. The funding will also be used to

produce a new visitor leaflet and wall map about the Abbey and help develop website content, social media and IT.

### Suffolk Armed Forces Day

In June 2018 we hosted Suffolk Armed Forces Day in the Abbey Gardens. The event was formally opened by the Mayor of St Edmundsbury and the Suffolk Armed Forces.

The event was a celebratory family fun day and a chance to show our support for the men and women who make up the Armed Forces community: from currently serving troops to service families, veterans and cadets.

It was sponsored by Bury St Edmunds Town Council and included living history re-enactments from throughout the ages, including the Norwich & Norfolk Medieval Association, the 95th Rifles Living History Society and the Suffolk Regiment Living History Society, storytelling, military vehicles, arts and crafts and live music. Further children's activities throughout the day included a climbing wall, fun fair rides and lots of more relaxed activities such as face painting and arts and crafts activities.





Live music was provided by several artists including the Haverhill Silver Band and Bury St Edmunds Concert Band. Later in the evening, an Armed Forces Day concert by the Suffolk Philharmonic Orchestra was held at the Apex.

## Health and wellbeing

### Leisure Centres

Our leisure centres had **1,629,407** activity visits in 2018-19. Our leisure centres exist to inspire healthier, more active communities through excellent facilities and services, great experiences and strong partnerships. We do this as an accredited social enterprise meaning that any surplus is used to support positive social change in our communities.

**Newmarket Leisure Centre** won a national competition and was awarded Local Authority Leisure Trust Gym of the Year at the National Fitness Awards 2018.

A £1.5million investment for **Haverhill Leisure Centre** (pictured) was completed January 2019, with the centre opening its doors shortly after. The improvements to the centre include



an extended gym, bigger studio space and new changing rooms, as well as a new self-centre suite, a new café, a children's party area incorporated into a new soft play area, an X-Height climbing experience and a parkour/free running area. We also invested £60,000 into Samuel Ward Academy School's sports barn floor to make improvements to accommodate displaced users of the leisure centre.

Abbeycroft Leisure received investment from the Clinical Commissioning Group to develop and deliver **Stand Tall** in West Suffolk. The Stand Tall programme enables 11 to 19 year olds to identify their own wellbeing needs and goals through education and practical support, alongside physical activity, helping to keep them physically and mentally healthy. The delivery of the programme will begin in September 2019 and operate in schools across West Suffolk.

Our **Keep Active** programme has continued to operate beyond its funding period becoming an embedded programme within our leisure sites. Keep Active focusses on the engagement and activity provision for over 55's and 14-25 year olds in Newmarket, Mildenhall and Brandon with the aim of increasing and continuing participation. Active Mums, our programme for expectant and new mothers in West Suffolk has continued to go from strength to strength and is being extended across Suffolk in partnership with midwifery teams.

## Events

We delivered five running and triathlon festivals in partnership with HaverTri, attracting 1,668 participants, 80 volunteers and raising £4,800 for five local charities.

200 women took part in the Women on Wheels (WoW) charity cycle ride in Bury St Edmunds organised by Abbeycroft Leisure Centre and Suffolk County Council in July. The

initiative aims to encourage women and girls to experience the benefits of a cycling and to challenge themselves. Over the last four years the WoW rides in Bury St Edmunds have raised £24,616 for the hospice.

## Exercise Referral Scheme

Exercise referral schemes enable GPs and health professionals to refer patients with long term health conditions to a fitness programme based within the community, to increase their physical activity levels as part of a healthy lifestyle. Abbeycroft Leisure Centre in Bury St Edmunds became the first Exercise Referral Scheme in Suffolk to be awarded a new county-wide quality standard developed by Suffolk County Council Public Health and county wide partners. The standard is important in ensuring that GP's, physiotherapists and other medical practitioners can feel confident that they are referring patients into a scheme that is safe and effective. The scheme also operates in Haverhill, Newmarket, Mildenhall and Brandon. There were **300** referrals across our centres in 2018-19. Those who participated in the scheme experienced improvements to their BMI levels, their resting heart rates and their wellbeing.

## Dementia Action Alliance (DAA)

We now have Dementia Action Alliances established in Bury St Edmunds and Newmarket. Over 50 organisations are signed up to Newmarket DAA and we are about the launch a scheme in Haverhill.

## Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership (WSCSP)

Over the past year we have continued to be active partner in the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership (WSCSP). The CSP is a statutory body made up of the following partner organisations; police, local

authorities, probation, clinical commissioning group and fire and rescue services. Western Suffolk CSP covers West Suffolk Council, Babergh and Mid Suffolk council areas. Representatives from the Youth Justice Service and Registered Social Landlords have been co-opted to the partnership.

Based on the outcomes of partnership discussions and a strategic assessment of crime, the following priorities were identified as the focus for the WSCSP:

- a. **County Lines** drugs markets established by criminals from out of the county. This includes supporting victims of substance misuse, tackling drug dealing and supply, safeguarding vulnerable adults at risk of 'cuckooing', and young people being used to 'run' drugs and who could be sexually exploited.
- b. **Violence against women and girls (including men and boys)**, which includes domestic abuse, sexual violence, modern day slavery and sexual exploitation.
- c. **Domestic Homicide Reviews**, including ensuring that the WSCSP continues to carry

out effective reviews, refines processes and shares learning across Suffolk.

- d. **Hate Crime**, including the identification and support for victims of hate crime by raising awareness and building confidence in reporting hate crime incidences.
- e. **Prevent** - this is one of the stands of the Government's CONTEST strategy to counter extremism and terrorism. The 'prevent' stand aims to raise awareness to stop people becoming drawn into terrorism and ensure that they are given appropriate advice and support at an early stage.

### County Lines

As a result of concerns raised about County Lines in Suffolk, a multi-agency Suffolk wide Strategic Action Plan was developed and agreed. This has been supported by the local western Suffolk tactical action plan. This was developed through a series of meetings and workshops with engaged stakeholders from all sectors.

Raising awareness sessions have started for practitioners including; what is a county line;



how is it different from local drug activity; what to look for; how to report issues and share intelligence and how to support those who may become involved. Community awareness raising is in the planning stage for identified key areas, working with local community groups and connectors. This will focus on awareness raising, what to look for and how to report concerns.

It has been a priority to ensure that schools and colleges receive the appropriate information delivered by a variety of means to pupils, staff, governors and parents. A series of age appropriate sessions have been delivered by commissioned organisations and partners to upper schools. Primary schools are being supported through their feeder upper schools, however further support will be available for any school that has a particular identified issued.

Bespoke packages are being designed for use in Pupil Referral Units in conjunction with head teachers and internal officers from the partnership. Home schooled children are also receiving information through Suffolk County Council Home School Co-ordinators. Work to encompass those children who are excluded from school is being delivered through the Suffolk Strategic action plan.

### Crucial Crew

Around 1,100 St Edmundsbury school children visited the annual Crucial Crew personal safety event led by the councils in July 2018. The overall focus of the event is on personal safety and personal well-being.

Year six children aged between 10 and 11 years, from 36 schools, came together at West Suffolk College in Bury St Edmunds to experience various scenarios, staffed by experts from partner agencies, to show children how to deal with potentially

dangerous situations and how to protect both themselves and others. The Fire Service simulated what it is like being in a burning house, The Dogs Trust talked about being Dog Safe and Suffolk Police spoke about keeping safe online and the dangers of becoming involved in county lines. Other lessons covered first aid, keeping safe on the road and in water. Our commercial environmental health team also helped raise awareness of good food hygiene and the children were taught about good handwashing and kitchen hygiene practices.

## Communicating with our residents

Our Communications team supported our major projects in 2018-19, including the work to create the new West Suffolk Council. This has included evolving the West Suffolk website and social media as part of the drive to increase online access. In addition, we have supported initiatives such as the Western way development, Mildenhall Hub, Social Prescribing projects and lobbying for funding such as the Future Highways Fund.

The councils were used as a national case study for better engagement with residents through the use of social media in 2018-19. This includes Customer Service answering questions as well as the Communications Team engaging with more than 60 Facebook pages and recently utilising the new ability to comment as a page in a group. This was welcomed by many people posting in these pages and has been used to help answer complex questions, as well as encouraging people to take part in campaigns. Some of these groups include membership levels of more than 18,000 people and a total of nearly 100,000.

The use of new dynamic and vibrant material such as images, films and gifs has helped not only improve engagement with the councils but also increased the audience for our social media channels by 45% over the last year. The use of films has seen thousands of views; from councillors explaining new initiatives to partnering with the media to live stream questions on Civic Leadership. This saw one of the largest engagements in a consultation on a council issue. The councils have also been using social media advertising as a cost effective way for recruitment and engagement in various campaigns.

We led on the county wide commemoration of Armed Forces Day with a range of events. This included a mixture of marketing and a range of social media channels managed by the councils to advertise, promote and celebrate the various events held in West Suffolk for Armed Forces Day.

We have also worked closely and supported the local media and partnerships on initiatives such as the 'Looking For Change' campaign. This was part of wider work to help explain rough sleeping, what is being done by the councils in this area and to encourage a change in behaviour from people who naturally want to help.

## Customer Services

Throughout 2018-19, our Customer Services team have worked across five locations, delivering face to face and telephone support to customers across eight different service areas. The team have continued to:

- answer in excess of 165,000 phone calls
- provide support to around 43,000 customers face to face
- support around 76,000 households with renewing their garden waste subscription
- issue around 2,200 parking permits

The front of house team have also helped customers access online services, providing support and advice for those wishing to use the public access computers at West Suffolk House in Bury St Edmunds, the College Heath Road site in Mildenhall and at our offices in The Guineas, Newmarket.

We take great pride in the service we offer to those contacting the councils and are delighted to have received a 99 per cent satisfaction rating from customers surveyed in 2018-19.







## Priority 3: Increased and improved provision of appropriate housing in west Suffolk in both our towns and rural areas



### Why was this a priority in 2018-19?

We know that good housing can play an important role in improving health and wellbeing of people in our area, and it is vital to realising our ambitions for economic growth. Without suitable and affordable housing, our residents will not be able to achieve their ambitions. The local conditions in West Suffolk makes housing particularly difficult to afford, given relatively high house prices and low wages. The councils therefore has an important role to play in seeking to address this situation, and also ensure housing is suitable for the increasingly ageing population. At the same time, the councils continue to work to improve the quality of housing, so as to ensure it supports the

health and wellbeing of residents, families and communities. The councils also responded to homelessness in West Suffolk by investing resources in preventing homelessness, supporting the most vulnerable in our society and securing suitable accommodation for those in crisis.

We have highlighted our achievements under the following headings:

- **Planning for housing needs that is supported by infrastructure, facilities and community networks**
- **Improving the quality of existing housing**
- **Reducing homelessness and supporting vulnerable households**



## Planning for housing needs that is supported by infrastructure, facilities and community networks

### Local Plans

The adopted and emerging Local Plans covering St Edmundsbury area and Forest Heath area (and all related policy documents, including guidance and Supplementary Planning Documents) will continue to apply to those parts of the West Suffolk Council area until a new Local Plan for West Suffolk is adopted. This is currently scheduled for mid-2023.

The Forest Heath Single Issue Review (SIR) and Site Allocations Local Plan (SALP) are nearing completion of their examination. The post-modification hearings sessions concluded in June 2018 and the councils has been waiting for inspectors to issue the reports. This is the final stage of the process before adoption.

In November 2018, Pegasus Group, an independent consultancy firm acting on behalf of the Newmarket Horseman's Group, issued a legal opinion to the inspectors who carried out an examination into the SIR and SALP. The legal opinion references a series of decisions in the European Court relating to the preparation of the Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) which were decided after the close of the hearing sessions.

In light of the recent European judgements, the councils are required to review and update the HRA. This update may result in modifications to the SIR and SALP. The updated HRA was submitted to inspectors in March 2019.

The councils also adopted a Local Development Scheme in November 2018.

This document committed West Suffolk to a timetable for the preparation, consultation and adoption of the West Suffolk Local Plan.

### Neighbourhood Plans

We are committed to encouraging local people to engage in the planning and development of their own areas. Neighbourhood planning is led and owned by the local community themselves, however the councils provide guidance and technical assistance at each stage of the process. This includes providing advice on which issues are considered to be relevant planning matters, mapping neighbourhood boundaries and helping communities communicate with local partners and/or organisations where required.

The Hargrave Neighbourhood Plan 2017-2031 is a statutory development plan document for the councils. The plan was formally created in July 2018 and is a material consideration within the parish of Hargrave for planning application purposes to be read alongside the council's Local Plan.

There are now six neighbourhood plans being prepared by town and parish councils in:

- Barningham
- Exning
- Freckenham
- Great Barton
- Ixworth and Ixworth Thorpe
- Newmarket

### Housing Delivery

We are part of 60 per cent of councils who have met their Housing Delivery Target for last three years. We have sought specialist advice to understand the continued role that the councils can play in supporting deliveries, which included the allocation of sites and having an up to date local plan. With this in mind, the councils approved a timetable in

December 2018 and a commitment to prepare a West Suffolk Local Plan to be submitted for examination in 2021 and adopted in 2023.

## Housing Strategy

In this year West Suffolk councils approved a new Housing Strategy for the period from 2018-2023. We know that good housing plays an important role in the health and wellbeing of people in our area and that residents need access to suitable housing that is affordable and helps them achieve their future goals for a settled home, family life, career development and fulfilling retirement. Providing the right housing is also vital to realising our ambitions for inclusive economic growth and it supports communities, health and education.

We are working to ensure that there is a sufficient supply of the right types of housing that our residents can afford. By adopting this strategy we are focusing on priorities around planning for housing to meet the needs of current and future generations throughout their lifetimes, improving the quality of housing and the local environment and enabling people to access suitable and sustainable housing.

## Affordable housing

Working with private developers and registered providers, we have delivered 207 new affordable homes in 2018-19, compared with 236 in 2017-18 and 142 in 2016-17. We have been ahead of our target of 185 per year since 2017.

The Newbury Community Association (NCA), Suffolk County Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council selected one of the UK's top ten home builders, Keepmoat Homes to seek detailed planning permission and undertake work at the former Howard Community Primary School and the Newbury Community Centre sites in Bury St Edmunds to help build a new community centre and 79 new homes. The scheme will include 30 per cent affordable housing and has received a grant of £670,000 from the Government under its Land Release Fund.

## Barley Homes

The councils took the decision during 2018-19 to become the sole owner of Barley Homes, buying Suffolk County Council's shares in the company. This decision was taken in order to help aid delivery, reduce red tape and simplify



governance, meaning the company could move forward in developing a range of much need open-market and affordable homes. The company's first planning application for the development of 37 homes on the former Westfield Middle school site in Haverhill was approved in February 2019. A development brief for the second site, the former Castle Hill middle school site, also in Haverhill, was approved in March, with a planning application being submitted soon afterwards.

### Housing conference

The councils hosted a regional housing conference at The Apex in October 2018, bringing together some of the biggest national names in the housing industry to discuss issues around affordability, quality of housing and the need for homes to be adaptable to suit people's changing needs. Over 100 people attended the event which included talks from high profile speakers such as the House of Lords spokesman on social housing and the chairman of Homes England.

## Improving the quality of existing housing

We know that good quality housing can improve health and wellbeing. In 2018-19, we have worked with private landlords, tenants, and the voluntary and community sector to ensure privately rented accommodation is up to standard and implemented policy changes to allow the councils to impose financial penalties on rogue landlords whose properties are in poor condition.

Much of the work in this section supports our 2018-20 equality objective of enabling people to access suitable and sustainable housing.

### Bringing empty homes back into use

We worked with owners of long term empty homes in West Suffolk and brought 67 homes back into use in 2018-19, resulting in a 33.5 per cent reduction in the number of properties deemed high priority for bringing back into use across West Suffolk.

### Improving standards in the private rented sector

Following the introduction of the new Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Mandatory Licensing Requirements on the 1st October 2018, which saw the scope of licensing extended, the councils' Public Health and Housing team has successfully licenced over 40 additional HMO properties, with 83 in total across West Suffolk. Any established breaches of legislation relating to HMO licensing or management is being enforced in line with our Civil Sanctions Policy, with Civil Penalty Notices to the sum of £14,000 issued.

During 2018-19, our Housing Standards team helped 1,367 households by improving their homes. This includes administering 24 grants to help those on low incomes insulate their park homes, 127 housing enforcement interventions to improve living conditions and 32 inspections of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO). We also resolved 582 noise complaints.

Our Public Health and Housing officers worked alongside Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service to carry out Impact Days in Brandon, Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill, Ixworth, Lakenheath, Mildenhall and Newmarket. The officers carried out checks on safety standards in flats above commercial properties.

We provided advice to landlords at the free-to-attend West Suffolk Landlords Forum events. At one event there was advice for landlords on

*continued on page 46*

CASE STUDY



## Bringing a long term empty property back into use

The Empty Homes Grant was successfully used to bring a long term empty property in Exning back into use. The property, in a prominent community location, suffered damage when a vehicle drove through the ground floor shop front, which had residential accommodation above. West Suffolk councils' Public Health and Housing officers worked with the owner over a period of time to explore all the options. The property was subsequently sold, the new owner undertook renovations using the grant, and new tenants have now moved in.



CASE STUDY



## Park Homes Insulation Project

The councils provided £140,000 of funding to help insulate low-income homes and those households living in fuel poverty.

Park home properties in Ashdale Park, Brandon were identified for the project. Vulnerable elderly persons reside in the homes that were heated by expensive bottled gas and would therefore significantly benefit from energy efficiency works. In total, 24 homes were clad in external wall insulation. Most also had additional measures fitted, such as underfloor and loft insulation.

Using a means tested method, the majority of residents didn't have to pay anything towards the works, on average worth around £6,000 per home. The improvements will save many residents in the region of £500 per year in energy bills. In total it is estimated the works will save 43 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> entering the atmosphere every year.

A long term resident with numerous health issues said, "We are thrilled with the works. There is no way we could have done this without the funding. Our home looks great, feels warmer and reduces the impact of outside noise."



laws around Houses in Multiple Occupation and the need for Energy Performance Certificates. Many residents rent their homes so it is crucial that we work with landlords to ensure they are aware of the support that is available to them and their tenants, as well as their legal responsibilities to tenants.

## Reducing homelessness and supporting vulnerable households

### Homelessness Reduction Strategy

The Homelessness Reduction Act came into force in April 2018, and we have responded to the fundamental changes to legislation and additional duties introduced by the Act. Through the Act there is now more emphasis on the prevention of homelessness, working with partners and helping individuals to access housing. In West Suffolk we know that housing is particularly difficult to afford, given relatively high house prices, high rents and low wages and we are working to address that situation through this strategy and the Housing Strategy (outlined above). As well as focusing on new housing we have also responded to rising homelessness in West Suffolk by investing resources in prevention and securing suitable accommodation and support for those people in crisis.

The development of our Homelessness Reduction Strategy for the period 2018-2023 is an important part of our approach to preventing and reducing homelessness across West Suffolk. We are focusing on five priority areas: homelessness prevention, tackling rough sleeping, supporting vulnerable households, increasing accommodation options and supporting the implementation of welfare reforms.

Both of these strategies are supported by robust plans that will help us to focus on delivering our priorities and we look forward to reporting on progress in due course.

### Preventing homelessness

We have continued to ensure those affected by homelessness receive timely advice and assistance to maintain or secure suitable accommodation and combat homelessness using a proactive and preventative approach.

In 2018-19 we prevented 405 households from becoming homeless and provided housing advice to 1617 households. We also relieved (took action to help resolve homelessness) 183 cases and accepted a main homelessness duty to 54 households (due to changes in homelessness legislation and the reporting requirements, we are unable to compare the data with previous years).

We recruited six new members of staff as part of our Rough Sleeper Outreach Service, including a Rough Sleeper Coordinator, a Specialist Substance Misuse Outreach Worker, two Outreach and Resettlement workers and a Specialist Mental Health Outreach Worker. Since the service commenced in September 2018, the number of people sleeping rough across West Suffolk has reduced from 37 to 15 in March 2019. This represents the invaluable work the team are doing to help individuals off the streets.

The service has supported people by either helping them into emergency accommodation, temporary accommodation, or into more long term accommodation. They have intervened on many occasions to prevent individuals losing their place in accommodation and reverting back to rough sleeping. They have also helped relieve homelessness through a non-housing intervention or by reconnecting people to their local area. In total, the team have assisted twenty individuals move into

long term accommodation since September 2018.

### **Temporary accommodation**

We purchased a property in Newmarket which will be used to provide much needed temporary accommodation to help reduce the need to use bed and breakfast. The property consists of ten bedsits and two commercial business units, which means not only can the councils provide stability for tenants, but also receive a rental income from the investment to help support services.

We have also added further to our temporary accommodation stock this year by refurbishing a former caretaker's house in Mildenhall for use by up to four single people and have a long term lease on a flat in Bury St Edmunds for use as emergency housing for rough sleepers.

We spent £261,574 on bed and breakfast accommodation in 2018-19, however £226,018 of this was reimbursed to the councils through Housing Benefit claims, making the net total spend £35,556. This is compared with £40,088 in 2017-18.

### **Successful funding bids**

We were awarded a total of £591,344 (£245,782 of which for 2018-19) of Government funding following a successful bid to help reduce rough sleeping across West Suffolk. The councils and our partners met with representatives from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government to outline initiatives to help support people who are rough sleeping. The funding has been used to provide multi-agency outreach workers with expertise in drug and alcohol as well as mental health issues as well as providing additional accommodation and on-site support.

We also successfully secured £320,000 in a joint bid with Ipswich Borough Council which will enable us to do more work in preventing tenants in the private sector from being made homeless. The bid includes the recruitment of two new tenancy sustainment officers (one working across West Suffolk and the other across Ipswich) and an assistant recovery officer who will work with struggling tenants and their landlords in both council areas. The money will also be used for training and to sustain private sector tenancies across West Suffolk and Ipswich.

### **Supporting vulnerable households**

We have worked in partnership with Suffolk County Council, Babergh & Mid Suffolk district councils, Bury St Edmunds Women's Aid and Anglia Care Trust to deliver accommodation and support to victims of domestic abuse who are either homeless or threatened with homelessness and also have mental health or substance misuse issues.

A specialist substance misuse worker was recruited by Anglia Care Trust in October 2018 to connect victims with mainstream services. The worker is hosted by our housing options team and is funded until March 2020. Through this role we have strengthened our relationship with the refuge in Bury St Edmunds and can offer bespoke ongoing support to people experiencing a housing crisis.

We have also supported disabled households by spending £1,033,606 on Disabled Facilities Grants in 2018-19 which has helped provide a variety of adaptations, aids and equipment so that disabled people can continue living independently in their homes.



Suffolk  
County Council

West Suffolk  
House





# Ways of working

## Why was this a priority in 2018-19?

In carrying out our work, West Suffolk councillors and staff are committed to a number of 'ways of working'. These ways of working govern the way in which we carry out our business and choose those opportunities that are important to pursue. They are based on the values that drive our approach, coupled with the circumstances facing local government in the 21st century.

Changes in the way the Government funds local authorities have meant that we have needed a new approach to our finances and become more self-sufficient by generating our own income and recognising investment and commercial opportunities. However, we

need to take this further by developing our organisation, our estate and our people.

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**



*At the launch of the construction of the Mildenhall Hub*

## Transformation

### Creation of a new council

The councils agreed and implemented, through an order in the Houses of Parliament, the creation of the new West Suffolk Council. This is one of the first of its kind in the UK requiring and receiving strong public and partner support. The creation of the new Council is part of both councils work to transform how local government works and drives prosperity for our communities and businesses; managing growth and attracting investment while meeting future financial challenges and opportunities. The new Council, which came into being from the beginning of April, also gives the area a louder voice to champion West Suffolk, while also being the right size to work with local organisations and communities to create place based initiatives.

The new ward boundaries for West Suffolk Council were submitted to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) and finalised in October 2018 following consultation. The wards were shaped by local groups, town and parish councils, as well as members of the public.

The councils also undertook a comprehensive review of civic leadership arrangements and gained views from 494 individuals on what civic leadership should look like in future. The report was shaped by local and national research and evidence and showed people believed civic leadership is wider than just one person and about how councillors and local government should act.

### Anglia Revenues Partnership

Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP) administers Council Tax, benefits and business rates and revenues on behalf of seven partner councils, including West Suffolk councils.

In 2018-19, ARP has worked closely with West Suffolk councils' Customer Services and Housing Options to implement Universal Credit by forming a working group and action plan, involving stakeholders such as Citizens Advice, social housing landlords and the Department for Work and Pensions.

Work was also undertaken by ARP in 2018-19 to amend the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme by removing the requirement for a Universal Credit claimant to complete an additional claim form. By using DWP data, ARP can assess entitlement, preventing the customer from having to unnecessarily complete a separate form.

ARP's Fraud and Compliance team has continued to work closely with West Suffolk councils' Housing Options team by identifying and assisting residents who are having difficulties paying their rent by administering Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP). DHPs also assist those with rent arrears and help households to move to more affordable accommodation.

Other highlights from ARP include:

- Working closely with our Customer Services team to simplify and improve benefits and Council Tax services for our customers by developing and implementing online forms. In 2018-19, this resulted in 14,611 Council Tax and business rates bills being sent electronically and 2,775 Housing Benefit notifications being received electronically.
- ARP's Fraud and Compliance team worked closely with West Suffolk councils' to identify £943,729 of fraud across West Suffolk in 2018-19. This includes Council Tax fraud, tenancy fraud and business rates fraud.

## Planning and development services

Our work and investment in supporting planning delivery has resulted in the average time taken to deal with a planning application improving by 25 per cent in the last two years. Some other highlights for our planning and development service are:

- Preparation was undertaken in 2018-19 to ensure all Parish and Town Councils will be consulted electronically from May 2019 as the final part of our shift to paperless working.
- We introduced Planning Performance Agreements (PPA) over the last year to support developers. These are bespoke agreements between the Local Planning Authority and an applicant about the timing and processing of a planning application. Work is progressing on more PPA's for the coming year.
- We have introduced newsletters/update briefings for Planning Agents and Parish/Town Councils to support our engagement in local and national planning updates
- We have held workshops for Parish/Town Councils covering material planning considerations, enforcements and electronic submissions
- The team dealt with just under 2900 applications, 92 of which were major developments of 10 dwellings or more and 483 of which were either 1-9 dwellings or other smaller non-residential development.
- We served 14 enforcement and planning contravention notices.

## Providing high quality building control services

Our building control team has had another successful and busy year and dealt with a range of matters. As well as continuing to promote the wellbeing and safety of the built environment for our community, we are also exceeding a number of our performance targets. Some highlights from 2018-19 include:

- Three surveyors passing the new level six exam demonstrating their ability to work on high rise residential buildings and complex buildings, introduced following the Grenfell Tower tragedy.
- Dealt with 32 dangerous structures.
- Carried out 5,072 site inspections.
- Checked 90% of full plans applications within 15 working days and 79% within 10 working days.
- Maintained our market share in the face of increasing competition.
- Supported multiple council projects including alterations to the Haverhill sports centre, West Suffolk Operational Hub and the Mildenhall Hub.
- Began work on a collaborative building control service across Suffolk.
- Achieving ISO9001 quality assurance status. This is an internationally recognised Quality Management System standard which is being rolled out by Local Authority Building Control across the country.



## Managing our finances - Investment and commercial opportunities

Examples of our commercial behaviours are included throughout this report, demonstrating where our investments are achieving outcomes for our communities in line with our strategic objectives. Some other specific examples are included below.

### 20 High Street, Haverhill

In May 2018, the councils purchased a Haverhill High Street property investment. Occupied by major retailer, Iceland Foods Ltd, the acquisition of 20 High Street forms a significant strategic investment by the councils to support the economy of the town centre, as well as providing a valuable revenue stream to help support the delivery of services. The councils have invested a total capital sum of £1.97 million, including costs and stamp duty, which will provide an ongoing market return on the investment and illustrates our commitment to help deliver the town centre masterplan and the future prosperity of Haverhill.

### 30-35 High Street, Haverhill

The councils purchased the former HSBC building on Haverhill High Street; an acquisition in a strategically important location which will act as a key catalyst for growth and delivery of the Haverhill Masterplan. The property borders an important pedestrian link to the bus station and leisure quarter and was bought for a total cost of £376,400. The potential for re-development will help raise the quality and attractiveness of pedestrian walkways between the two, and ultimately provide income to help deliver valued council services.

Whilst the options for re-development are appraised, interim uses will be sought both to help support the local community and provide a return to help cover holding costs.

### Managing our finances

As part of the preparations for becoming West Suffolk Council, a review of all contracts within Finance lead to several re-tenders and negotiations which delivered contractual savings on insurance, audit and treasury management that will be delivered in 2019-20.

The West Suffolk Shadow Authority approved the creation of a **Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)** for West Suffolk Council that balances out income and expenditure to 2021. The MTFS highlights the change in relationship between central and local government through the increase in funding from locally influenced revenue streams such as business rates, council tax and fees and charges, as well as reduction in central government grants. There are budget 'gaps' between the forecast income and expenditure beyond 2021 which will be impacted by future funding decisions for all local government within the central government Spending Review and Fair Funding Review. This position will be monitored and reviewed in next year's MTFS.

Suffolk benefitted from the 100% Business Rates pilot in 2018-19. The additional £2.8 million of funding generated by this pilot enabled the district and county councils to invest in place-based initiatives to drive inclusive growth across the region. The pilot built on the Business Rates Retention pool which Suffolk has successfully operated since 2013. 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. Both councils met these new deadlines.

## External funding

The councils have been successful in attracting external funding. Including grants we would expect, both councils received £51.36 million in funding in 2018-19, of which £48.62 million was revenue and £2.74 million capital. Some of the funding we received included Disabled Facilities Grants funding to help disabled households adapt their homes to ensure a better quality of life, Rough Sleeping Grant funding and Flexible Homelessness Support Grant to enable the councils to work towards reducing homelessness across West Suffolk and a contribution from Suffolk County Council towards One Step Closer; a project to help those who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) develop skills and secure opportunities.

## Toggam Solar Farm

Just as in its first two years, our solar farm has performed better than expected and is on target to generate its most electricity yet in a 12 month period.

In 2018-19 the solar farm generated 13,031 MWh compared to the 11,623 MWh that had been estimated. The electricity sold on and into the National Grid, is enough to power around 3,300 homes and offset the Carbon Dioxide emissions from 1,500 cars. It has also helped Forest Heath establish itself as a carbon neutral council.

The solar farm also generated £1.39 million of income (against an income budget of £1.29 million). After taking into account the operating costs and recouping some of the capital used to buy the solar farm, that has

meant it is forecasting to generate £460,000 towards the funding of council services, compared to a budgeted £336,000.

## Shared legal service

The shared legal service provides services for St Edmundsbury Borough Council, Forest Heath District Council (now West Suffolk Council) and Mid-Suffolk and Babergh councils. With recruitment agencies seeing a 20 per cent increase in locum placements due to a shortage of local authority lawyers, our service is defying the national trend with a full complement of officers in a team of 25.

The service continues to perform without additional funding and has achieved year on year savings for the authorities.

The service is also developing its skills in order to support the councils' growing business needs and has been able to offer and provide support, services and training to some of its neighbouring authorities.

## Developing the public sector estate in West Suffolk

### West Suffolk Operational Hub

The West Suffolk Operational Hub (WSOH) is a partnership between West Suffolk Council and Suffolk County Council 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.

Construction contractors Morgan Sindall started on site in April 2018. The build is progressing well and is due for completion in October 2019, with a view to it being fully

operational as a Depot, Household Waste Recycling Centre and Waste Transfer Station by the end of 2019.

### Western Way Development

Under the councils' Investment Strategy for Growth, we have been seeking to invest in assets that help bring a mix of income or savings to support service delivery and bring economic, employment or other social benefits for our local communities.

The councils continued to work with public and commercial partners in 2018-19 to look at the regeneration project for the Western Way area to bring health, education and leisure services together. We have made progress with the project by purchasing an unused retail site on Anglian Lane in Bury St Edmunds which will support long term plans with partners to develop the Western Way area. There is an option that the site could retain a commercial use or take on a public sector use depending on how plans develop. It could also form part of the wider transport plan for the Western Way Development by providing off-site car parking. Whatever the option it will promote employment, skills and health improvements either directly or indirectly. In the short-term the councils will keep options open and will be looking for a temporary use to cover its costs for the tax payer.

### Mildenhall Hub

Work is now well underway to creating modern accessible services that are more financially resilient and better suited to the present and future needs of people living in Mildenhall and the surrounding area.

This year we appointed building contractor RG Carter to carry out the construction work, with a £39million contract enabling works to begin in January 2019. Construction work began soon after in March.

The Hub will include a new school, children's centre, new leisure facilities, a health centre, and facilities for Suffolk Police, West Suffolk Council and Suffolk County Council, as well as a library, JobCentre, and Citizen's Advice office.

## Developing our people

### Developing our staff

- We have delivered 108 training events in 2018-19 and over 1061 staff attending courses.
- We have continued to encourage and support staff with professional development opportunities, in particular through the introduction of the "development post". This has enabled 35 members of staff to work towards professionally accredited training, including 14 who are working towards an Institute of Leadership and Management qualification and six finance staff working towards an AAT or ACCA. AAT is considered to be the first step towards becoming an accountant, while ACCA is an advanced qualification for people who already are accountants.

### Developing our members

With the focus on becoming a new single council, this year our member development programme has focussed on specialist workshops and seminars. This included a seminar on Development Control highlighting key relevant topics, sessions on sustainable housing with a visit to a sustainable co-housing site in Colchester, and awareness raising sessions to inform members of Suffolk's partnership response to 'County Lines'.

## Improving mental health at work

### Suffolk Wellbeing Charter

Since November 2017, we have been working with a number of partners, neighbouring local authorities and hospitals to develop the Suffolk Workplace Wellbeing Charter. The councils currently hold four levels of excellence and four levels of achievement against the eight standards of wellbeing.

We have also helped develop a Healthy Workplace Award, a new workplace accreditation scheme, which recognises the efforts of organisations across the East of England to improve workplace health, with a commitment to helping organisations focus on the wellbeing of their staff. Any business, health, public or voluntary sector organisation can register their interest in achieving the standard. Achieving the award marks a clear commitment by organisations to keeping employees well at work, which in turn has a positive impact on morale and productivity.

### CASE STUDY



## Our commitment to Mental Health

As part of our commitment to raising awareness of mental health issues, the councils have trained 12 staff to be Mental Health First Aiders. The staff have all undertaken a Mental Health First Aider England training course, equipping them with the skills and confidence to spot some of the tell-tale signs of common mental health issues and signpost them to the appropriate help if required.

Twenty of our training events also helped raise awareness of mental health issues. Topics included stress awareness, resilience and increasing manager's awareness of mental health issues.



## Appendix 1: Ways we have supported our rural communities in 2018-19

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

<b>Supporting rural businesses</b>	We worked with Suffolk County Council to secure Defra Broadband funding to help extend broadband to more businesses in rural areas across West Suffolk.
<b>Small business grants</b>	We supported a number of small businesses in rural areas including a land maintenance business. More information on how we have supported local businesses by awarding small business grants can be found on page nine.
<b>Ixworth Patient Association</b>	We supported a rural transport scheme to help patients with transport problems access their local health centre, as well as developing a number of activities to improve health and wellbeing. More information about this initiative can be found on page 20.
<b>The Shed, West Row</b>	The Shed provides an area for people to come together, volunteer their time, build relationships and enjoy the company of others. The project grew in 2018-19, with work being completed to improve the appearance of the area and events were held by volunteers. Further information about the councils' role in enabling the project can be found on page 21.
<b>War Memorial, Red Lodge</b>	We supported a rural community with taking forward proposals to provide Red Lodge with a new war memorial. More information about this project can be found on page 21.
<b>Home Start</b>	The councils helped expand Home Start to rural areas including Honington, Brandon and Stanton. The service provided vital support and practical help to parents and families facing challenges. Further information about how he supported this service in 2018-19 can be found on page 21.
<b>Hedgehogs Café, Rougham</b>	We helped set up a community café for residents of Rougham, Rushbrooke and Bradfield St George to help combat loneliness and isolation. More information about the initiative can be found on page 22.
<b>West Suffolk Parish Conference</b>	We held our second West Suffolk Town and Parish Conference in October 2018. The conference gives town and parish councils the opportunity to exchange information, share experiences and grow their knowledge by hearing from expert speakers and taking part in workshops. More information about the 2018 conference can be found on page 23.



<p><b>Togetherness Fayre</b></p>	<p>The councils' interns held an event to help raise awareness of loneliness and isolation; a problem particularly prevalent in our rural communities. More information about the fayre can be found on page 25.</p>
<p><b>Locality budgets</b></p>	<p>The councils' locality budget scheme supported a number of initiatives in rural communities, including opening a Multi-Use Games Area in Risby. More information about how the councils supported community project with funding can be found on page 26.</p>
<p><b>Parks</b></p>	<p>West Stow Country Park retained its Green Flag status in 2018-19, along with other parks across West Suffolk. Awards are given to parks that are safe, clean and well looked after. Further details about our parks can be found on page 27.</p>
<p><b>Neighbourhood Plans</b></p>	<p>We provided guidance and assistance to the community of Hargrave to help them develop the Hargrave Neighbourhood Plan 2017-2031. More details about how the councils supported communities with neighbourhood planning can be found on page 35.</p>
<p><b>Bringing empty properties back into use</b></p>	<p>We worked with the owner of a long term empty property in the village of Exning to help bring the property back into use. A case study with further details about this project can be found on page 37.</p>
<p><b>Improving standards in the private rented sector</b></p>	<p>We carried out Impact Days alongside Suffolk Fire and Rescue service across rural areas in West Suffolk, including Ixworth and Lakenheath. The officers carried out checks on safety standards in flats above commercial properties. More information on how we have been working to improve the quality of existing housing can be found on pages 36-38.</p>





**West Suffolk**  
Council