

Title:	Leader's Statement	
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Welcome

1. This is my first Statement as Leader of West Suffolk Council. I want to thank everyone for their support ideas and enthusiasm since we met last at the annual meeting. The comments and suggestions I have received has reinforced my belief that no matter what part of West Suffolk we come from, doing our best for all our residents and businesses are (as it should be) at the forefront of our thinking. We have an ambitious programme and challenges to face together and hopefully irrespective of party politics. West Suffolk Council was designed to better realise opportunities, meet these challenges and manage the inevitable changes ahead but vitally, at the same time, to work closely with our local communities and deliver the high quality services they need.

Working across borders

2. I am pleased to say that already we have seen some of the benefits of the new West Suffolk Council and significant interest from other authorities in the changes we have made. Over the last few weeks, I have been speaking to other Leaders (including at the recent Local Government Association Conference) about our journey from shared services to our future plans and the benefits we will deliver. I have also been continuing to forge stronger links with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, including being part of the Cambridgeshire Autonomous Metro Advisory Group. This scheme has ambitions to link into West Suffolk, including Mildenhall and Haverhill, and underlines our important role in the Cambridge Sub-region.
3. Officers and I also delivered a presentation to the Suffolk Public Sector Leaders on the opportunities the Western Way Development could bring for residents, businesses and the public sector. Leaders from across the Suffolk public service and councils agreed unanimously to grant £100,000 from the Transformation Challenge Award fund to help us deliver better

ways that services within the development can work together for better outcomes. Suffolk, and especially West Suffolk, is recognised as a national leader in joining services and removing boundaries for the benefit of our residents. The Western Way Development initiative is both part of that work and an ambitious, exciting project. The latest physical manifestation of that work can be seen in Mildenhall as the steel frame of the new hub is rising quickly from the ground. However, the real examples are not in the bricks and mortar of the building but in the way we can improve and deliver services every day.

4. We also continue our lobbying work for better connectivity in West Suffolk, from data, rail and road – such as the A14; and have been continuing with partners across the area to make sure Government is listening to us.

Task Forces

5. At the Council AGM, I outlined my plans for two task forces to be set up. One to look at rural issues and the other to concentrate on the environment and climate change. I am pleased that both of these initiatives are moving forward, with the Rural Task Force being agreed by Cabinet already and Members from across the political groups appointed. Anybody who lives in a rural area knows the challenges faced by their residents but also of the opportunities to improve things for them. The new task force will look at a range of evidence, issues and challenges and make suggestions on what we, and our partners, can do better and how, and if, we can support residents and businesses in our rural areas even more. This is being chaired by Councillor Chester and it is expected that Cabinet will receive interim reports from the task force before a final report by year end.
6. Similarly, I am pleased to reaffirm this Council's commitment to acting on the climate change threat. I announced at the Annual Meeting that we would be setting up an Environment and Climate Change Task Force and, by the time of this Council meeting, the proposed terms of reference for that task force should have been circulated. While these terms of reference are still to be formally agreed, I know this taskforce will be using an evidence based approach to look at what is happening in West Suffolk and wider. It will then use this to look at what additional meaningful and practical steps we can take to have the best impact. We have a good record in this area already, but we can always do more. I think we all recognise the threat to our environment and climate and we can and must do everything we reasonably can to combat this. I look forward to capturing views on that and undertaking this important work.

Suffolk Chamber

7. I and the Chief Executive recently met with many Suffolk businesses as part of a special breakfast event with the Suffolk Chamber of Commerce. We outlined the opportunities our new Council brings, how we have been

and are supporting business as well as the challenges going forward and how we can all help by working together.

8. It was also good to see so many independent businesses in West Suffolk, including in our own markets, celebrating Independent Business week. Our vibrant and many independents is something that sets our area apart and ahead of many others.
9. We have also been listening to our businesses. I think we are all aware of the impact nationally set business rates have, perhaps especially small businesses. This also applies to rental rates for companies. We will continue to lobby for our businesses and support them, as well as looking to persuade Government of better and more innovative ways to manage and implement business rates inclusion that it has direct benefit for the locality they are generated in.
10. This seems like a good opportunity to mention our 9th Business Festival, taking place in October 2019. This is the region's leading business festival with a first class collection of events for everyone, as well as in business (or anyone wanting to make their mark in the business world) and I would encourage you to visit and support it.

Rough Sleeping

11. I am glad to report that even greater support will be available in Suffolk to help rough sleepers find and retain private sector housing following a successful bid for Government funds.
12. As many of you may know housing authorities are often finding that private sector landlords maybe unwilling to house somebody who has been homeless and sleeping rough as that person may have addiction, mental health or other complex needs and require specialist support.
13. This in turn leaves councils and rough sleepers dependent on hostel and other emergency or temporary accommodation beds, which isn't always ideal.
14. To help address this and, incidentally in a good example of working across boundaries, we, together with Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, are creating a Supported Lettings Team. This will enable us to offer greater assurances and confidence to landlords to house these tenants.
15. The team is being established following a successful joint bid for £209,000 from our councils to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) as part of the Government's plans to end rough sleeping by 2027.
16. The support team will step in to help people at the early stages of rough sleeping, and hopefully before they become entrenched in the lifestyle and their support needs become much more complex.

Crucial Crew

17. Some 1,450 school children from across 44 local schools here in West Suffolk have been learning valuable life lessons as part of the Crucial Crew initiative.
18. We fund and organise this initiative which has now been going for more than 20 years and helped thousands of young people stay safe and talk to public services.
19. Year six children aged between 10 and 11 years, from 44 schools from across West Suffolk, have been coming together at West Suffolk College in Bury St Edmunds to experience various scenarios, staffed by experts who show children how to deal with potentially dangerous situations and how to protect both themselves and others.
20. Suffolk Fire Service simulate what it is like being in a burning house while Suffolk Police teach the children about keeping safe online and Abbeycroft Leisure showed what to do if you see someone in trouble in the water. The overall focus of the event is on personal safety and personal well-being.
21. This year, children have been attending the scenarios run by the Fire Service, Police, West Suffolk Council, First Responders, County Council Road Safety team, Live Well Suffolk and Abbeycroft Leisure. Crucial Crew is organised and funded by West Suffolk Council.
22. I would like to thank all our partners and volunteers who help run Crucial Crew and make it the success that it is.

Dragon Fest

23. Every year the Council holds very successful and popular events in our country parks and open spaces. This not only brings an income and visitors but also encourages people to come back. Our parks and open spaces are much more than lovely places to walk and visit but also help with mental and physical health as well as the local environment.
24. For example recently around 2,500 people attended the Dragon Fest event at West Stow which is in its fifth year. Thank you to all our teams that help put on these events, often over weekends, and working long hours.

Health funding available

25. One of our core policies is to work with residents and groups through our families and communities initiatives. This brings communities, organisations and partners together to generate better outcomes, seize opportunities or tackle issues that affect all of us.
26. I would like to make sure you are aware and can encourage community groups in West Suffolk who are working to tackle loneliness, improve mental health and reduce obesity, to bid for funding.

27. A total of £432,756 has been made available for West Suffolk groups to bid for under the Realising Ambitions programme created by the Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care System. This is part of our work with health colleagues.
28. The fund, designed to improve physical and mental health for adults and children, is being administered by the Suffolk Community Foundation. Funding will be given for projects, new and existing, that look to improve one or more of the following:
- Mental health and/or reduce suicides
 - Provide neighbourhood action to tackle loneliness
 - Prevent and treat obesity
29. Micro grants of up to £1000, larger grants of £1000 to £50,000 and partnership grants of up to £70,000 are all available. The closing date for grant applications is 5 August 2019 with grants set to be awarded in October.

Budget

30. As a public sector services, we are not strangers to uncertainty over funding and indeed we have been at the forefront of transforming what we do to meet that challenge. You will have read the latest reports from the Local Government Association on the impact that reduced national funding has had on councils and concerns over the future of some. The fact we have not had the results of the fairer funding review or the spending review creates uncertainty for all. We will continue to lobby Government with partner authorities across the UK to fairly fund public services, which despite the continuing uncertainty, continue to deliver good service, and protect the vulnerable to the best of our ability. This is an ongoing challenge, not only for public services, but our communities and businesses too.

Councillor John Griffiths
Leader of the Council