

Title:	Leader's Statement	
Paper No:	COU/WS/19/005	
Paper to and date:	Council	19 September 2019
Documents attached:	None	

Leader's Statement - September

1. I would like to welcome everyone back as summer recedes. I know it has been holiday time, but I also know how busy both councillors and officers have been making sure our services continue to run and the various initiatives and projects we are involved in progress at pace for our communities whom we serve. For this I would like to thank you all.
2. We, with other councils, have been lobbying hard to explain to Government the challenges faced across the public service system. This has been reflected in the recent spending review announcement. While, as ever, the devil is in the detail, we have had confirmation that the Fair Funding Review, Business Rates Review and business rates reset has been deferred by 12 months to 2021/22. This is in line with our current budget assumptions, and at least allows us to retain another year of local growth under the current 50% business rates retention scheme.
3. There is a £2.9bn increase in Core Spending power overall for local government. Most of the additional funding is for adults and children's services, but there is £54m to help reduce homelessness and rough sleeping. This is good news for the system as a whole but we are asking Government, in particular, about what it means for West Suffolk in our ongoing drive to tackle rough sleeping and homelessness. What of course we really need, and will continue to lobby for, is longer term certainty.
4. Moving forward more generally in West Suffolk we have (as always!) ambitious plans that directly improve the quality of life for our residents. Some of those we will be debating tonight, and should help us to further transform the way we work as well as delivering improved outcomes for our communities.
5. Our ambitions are being recognised nationally and locally. Government and partners are backing investment in Haverhill Research Park, working

with us to secure funding, jobs and certainty for business. Ministers are looking at how we are leading in tackling loneliness through Social Prescribing initiatives, which are now in Mildenhall and Brandon (following its success in Haverhill), with health, leisure and other partners coming together to help provide funding and accommodation. Meanwhile, working with the Bury Free Press we are getting ready for another (our ninth) successful Business Festival. The paper ran a recent editorial recognising the work we have done and the successful investments we have made and are making to improve the quality of life and future prosperity here. This included projects such as the Arc and now Western Way, as well as managing building the right kind of homes in the right places in West Suffolk.

6. I am also pleased about the pace and progress we have seen having with setting up the Rural and Environment and Climate Change Taskforces. These are initiatives that seem to have been welcomed by the public and councillors alike, and should ensure that councillors from across the chamber (and others) would have the opportunity to take part. I want to make sure that everyone who wishes to, can be involved in helping to constructively inform Cabinet, so that the Council can take the most impactful and practical actions possible.

Environment and Climate Change

7. We will be talking later tonight about Cabinet's recommendations that the Council declares a Climate Change Emergency. I think this is important (and is progressing) but I also believe it is actions, not words, that count. The taskforce is already looking at work streams and options, which should help build on the great work we are already doing such as Toggam Solar Farm, initiatives to reduce waste and increase recycling, energy for business, the way we build our buildings, including recycling old ones, for Western Way – all reducing our carbon footprint while being financially prudent.

Toggam Solar Farm

8. Our Solar Farm which celebrated its birthday over the summer, has generated more than £1.5million last year (£100,000 more than anticipated).
9. This is alongside our desire to not only declare a climate emergency but take practical action, and it is helping make a significant carbon reduction. It also brings the total income it has raised since it was plugged in back in August 2016 to more than £4million. It is also helping West Suffolk Council towards becoming carbon neutral.

Rural Taskforce

10. Many of you are also involved in the Rural Taskforce, which has already launched a consultation and I encourage everyone to contribute to this.

11. Residents, businesses and organisations across West Suffolk are being invited to help the taskforce identify opportunities and issues in rural areas in a variety of ways, including via a simple online survey which is now live at www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/rural. (hard copies are also available at our offices, or on request from policy@westsuffolk.gov.uk or by calling 01284 757633).

The survey is open until 30 September but evidence will continue to be fed in throughout the review process.

12. The taskforce is also holding special meetings across the area. The review will encompass all of West Suffolk's areas, in order to better understand the issues and opportunities that all rural or all urban areas have in common, as well as those facing specific localities. Engaging directly with local communities and businesses, the Rural Taskforce will identify key issues, assets and challenges and use a range of existing local and national evidence and research produced by other bodies, for example, the Rural Services Network and the House of Lords Select Committee on the rural economy.

Transforming public services

13. Today we will be discussing the next steps to deliver the ambitious Western Way Development which is ground breaking in the UK and includes new and modern leisure facilities. The paper has been considered by Cabinet and has recommended approval and I now await the debate at Council. However, I would say this is yet another example of West Suffolk, with partners, leading the way in local government in our ambition to look for new ways to work that will deliver better outcomes for our communities.
14. How we work together and break down barriers to improve education, health and wellbeing for our communities is something that sets West Suffolk ahead from other areas. This proposed new development aims to make sure we, as public bodies, deliver more than the sum of our parts. It is more than just bricks and mortar, but about how we can improve the lives of our residents, while gaining best value.
15. Another good example of this is the Mildenhall Hub which is progressing well with work on the steel frame. I know partners are looking forward to moving in, and to using the new facilities and providing improved services for our residents.
16. Similarly we are making a real difference by transforming how we work with partners through social prescribing. The difference this is making to people's health and well being is plain to see and recognised by the NHS and local public sector leaders, who have helped us fund this. The LifeLink work in Haverhill is now being rolled out with social prescribing schemes now taking referrals in Brandon and Mildenhall, and co-ordinators now in post. There will be an official launch in Mildenhall and Brandon in October 2019 (more information about this to follow).

17. This transformative work has also attracted a fact finding mission by Lorna Demming (Lead on Loneliness at the Department of Health and Social Care). She wants to learn how we have used social prescribing to tackle loneliness and made this work with partners.

Investing in our businesses and future

18. Supporting businesses and making sure we have the right environment, and to help people get the right skills for the future, is a priority for our council. It is part of our work with partners, both from the public and commercial sector, to make sure West Suffolk has a thriving economy. Supporting and growing local businesses as well as attracting investment is essential for providing a good quality of life, jobs and opportunities for our residents. By investing ourselves in infrastructure, lobbying for improvements and linking areas such as skills and education we play an essential role in securing a bright future for our area. The below examples are just some of the initiatives we have been working on from multi-million investment, the West Suffolk Business Festival to working with our interns to help improve skills.

Haverhill Research Park

19. Our hard work and policy on bringing forward investment has paid off as Haverhill Research Park and Enterprise Zone is soon to see a new multimillion pound business centre to attract jobs, investment and support the economy.
20. The project will create an innovation and business centre, the gateway site directly adjacent to the 'Spirit of Enterprise' roundabout helping to attract further commercial investment and to support the creation of jobs for the area. The large, four storey Epicentre, on the Enterprise Zone will be open 24 hours a day and home to a range of businesses including research and development. It is not just about number of jobs, but the right kind of jobs to make sure we have businesses and employees ready to seize opportunities now and in the future, helping provide a robust local economy.
21. This development should be a real catalyst to attract businesses, which will benefit from the investment which the Council and other partners are making in Haverhill's growth. Businesses will have the ability to be part of a high quality but affordable location and we are working with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority to ensure that they benefit from the ability to draw on, and network with, expertise from some the most innovative and progressive businesses across Suffolk and Cambridgeshire.
22. This is another example of our drive for investment to support the economy while achieving a financial return on our loan to support council services. It also highlights the strong relationship we have forged with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority who recognise the importance Haverhill and West Suffolk plays in the Cambridge Sub-region and indeed the national economy.

23. We will continue this good relationship, especially around issues such as improving transport links, alongside our partnership with the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership and others.

Business Festival

24. I am looking forward, once again, to our Business Festival and Bury Free Press Business Awards, which will be on from 1 to 11 October 2019. Networking and tangible support is just as important to our businesses as investment.
25. West Suffolk can be justifiably proud of the range of successful businesses and creative individuals we have in our area. It is the Eastern Region's leading business festival which we established with partners including the Bury Free Press in 2011 and has gone from strength to strength.
26. It is part of our work with partners, both from the public and commercial sector, to make sure West Suffolk has a thriving economy. Supporting and growing local businesses as well as attracting investment is essential for providing a good quality of life, jobs and opportunities for our residents. By investing ourselves in infrastructure, lobbying for improvements and linking areas such as skills and education, we can continue to play an essential role in securing a bright future for our area.

Crafty Entrepreneurs

27. West Suffolk Council has teamed up with community artist Louise Gridley to launch a free training programme for 'crafty' entrepreneurs looking to start-up a market trading business.
28. This innovative programme is designed to help craftspeople and makers who have fully developed their creative skills but do not yet have the business knowledge or support to set up as a market trader. The aim is to provide business support and mentoring through a series of workshop sessions, tailored to the needs of a potential market trader.

Interns – Skills Fair

29. For the first time West Suffolk held two Skills Share Fairs attracting around 120 people designed to boost skills and reduce social isolation.
30. Impressively the Skills Share Fairs were organised by our interns and was praised by residents, visitors and participating organisations alike.
31. Organisations taking part included West Suffolk College, the Rural Coffee Caravan, Realise Futures, Menta, Community Action Suffolk, the icanbea... jobs service, The Shed at West Row, Market Place, The Duke of Edinburgh Awards scheme, NHS Volunteers and the Suffolk Childcare Agency. They were on hand to speak to residents looking to learn new skills, return to work, start their own business or volunteer.

Volunteering

32. West Suffolk prides itself on its community spirit and we have an army of volunteers working and supporting our residents. Over the summer volunteers from major Haverhill employer AXA joined councillors, council workers and tradespeople to give Queen Street shop fronts a facelift, as part of the Haverhill Town Centre masterplan.
33. The work has been funded equally by Haverhill District Chamber of Commerce and West Suffolk Council, and supported by Haverhill Town Council and West Suffolk Council's Waste Services. The initiative is based on West Suffolk Council's shop front scheme together with Government money awarded under the Portas High Street project.

Investing in Leisure - Newmarket Leisure Centre

34. The health and wellbeing of our communities is, of course, very important and we are investing in our leisure centres as well as our parks, many of which have achieved Green Flag status.
35. In July, the Cabinet confirmed our latest £1.8m investment in new facilities for Newmarket Leisure Centre. This investment is designed to encourage more people to be more active while at the same time reducing the management fee paid by West Suffolk Council to its leisure provider, not-for-profit charitable social enterprise, Abbeycroft Leisure.
36. Work is set to start now and will be completed in phases to ensure minimum impact on customers, who have helped inform the design. It is anticipated that the first phase will be undertaken on the first floor, to provide an enhanced gym and brand new changing rooms. Work will then move to the ground floor to provide a brand new soft play and sensory play area, and café and hospitality area. Finally, the new studios on the first floor and ground floor spin facilities will be completed early summer 2020. The sports hall and swim facilities will not be affected.

Douglas Park Mildenhall

37. I was pleased to see the reports that a new £60,000 play area has been opened at Douglas Park, Mildenhall.
38. We had to close the park earlier this year after equipment was damaged. The Council has worked with primary school children from St Mary's Church of England Academy to select equipment for a new look play area which has now officially opened.
39. Investing in parks such as this is vital for our families and communities, which are not just a place for children to play but help with wellbeing and loneliness.