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| Title: | Leader's Statement | |
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Leader's Statement – December

1. I apologise for the lateness of this Leader's Statement - which had to await the end of purdah and the recent general election - but Councillors would have seen from an attachment to the email in which this Statement was circulated on 16 December 2019, as an aide memoire, the update which I sent to Councillors in early November in anticipation of this.
2. The general election is now over - I suspect many in this room have opened more letter boxes and knocked on as many doors as the Royal Mail delivering the Christmas Post! - and things have been exceptionally busy for both Councillors and our excellent officers and staff.
3. I will therefore, if I may, keep this relatively brief and not least because Christmas is traditionally a time to relax and be with family and friends.
4. That said, while many people are enjoying their festivities, many of our staff will of course still be delivering the services we all need, including working with some of the most vulnerable in our society. The same goes for our public service and emergency service colleagues working as well as the voluntary sector over this period to keep us safe and help those in need. I am sure you will join me in thanking them in particular, but have also sent all our staff a message (on all our behalves) thanking them for everything they do so well every day of the year for West Suffolk and the people we serve.

Taskforces

5. Excellent work has also been going on behind the scenes (while we have been in the election period) as Members have worked together to bring forward a range of proposals from our taskforces and working

groups.....councillors unifying together to bring forward ideas and actions designed with our residents at their heart.

6. I have also been impressed by the engagement that has been going on, such as by the Rural Taskforce, where well attended workshops were held in our communities. I know that this has helped to shape ideas and I, with Cabinet, look forward to seeing the formal proposals.

Elections

7. I have of course mentioned the election and many of you will have seen and know the tremendous amount of extra hard work that this requires from the Council. It has again brought together officers from across the Council working as one team to deliver this, on top of and alongside the many other services they deliver for us. As you can all appreciate an election is both complicated, with very strict legal requirements, and takes a great deal of planning and work to deliver (not to mention the very long hours). I am delighted and proud that once again our staff have delivered another smoothly run election and would like to thank each and every one of them for this.

Future

8. As a forward thinking Council, we constantly look ahead and challenge ourselves both on what we can do even better and on things we want to achieve for our communities. Tonight we will be looking at our Medium Term Financial Strategy. This is more than numbers on a spreadsheet; this is how we not only can deliver the things that make our residents lives better now but the strategy to make sure we can continue doing so in the future, no matter the challenges ahead. We are a financially stable Council that is financially prudent, while using investment and our commercial skills to bring income and extra benefits for our residents and businesses. At the same time our innovative work with partners and in communities is bringing real benefits to a range of important issues from mental and physical health, reducing homelessness to tackling environmental issues. The strategy we are looking at tonight means we can be in a robust position to continue that work and ensure a prosperous future for West Suffolk.

West Suffolk College Campus

9. A good example of the added benefit that we are delivering is the work we are doing with local education providers. All of you will no doubt have seen the work going on with West Suffolk College and indeed some of you will have been on the Campus Tour or at the opening of the new STEM Centre (don't worry if you have missed these as we are arranging more tours). Improving skills and opportunities for current and future residents is vital for the continued prosperity of this area, and I am proud that we are supporting this. It also fits in with our Western Way project which includes West Suffolk College as one of our many partners and will support our overall aim at improving our environment, quality of life,

services, job opportunities and the economy. The planning application for Western Way is now in.

10. Another example of our support for youngsters gaining a passion for STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths) is a new initiative being trialled in Newmarket involving robotics.
11. There is currently a national shortage of people with skills in STEM subjects which makes it less easy for employers to recruit the staff that they need. Part of the reason for that shortage may be the lack of opportunities for primary school students to experiment and develop their interest in science, technology and engineering.
12. Now West Suffolk Council has teamed up with BT Adastral Park's Schools Outreach Programme and Newmarket Academy. Together we are developing the new primary school programme which will show students some of the exciting things that STEM subjects can be used for. It will also create a legacy empowering primary school to teach STEM subjects and inspire interest in the subjects from a much earlier age.

Operational Waste Hub

13. I am pleased to say that the move to the new Hub has gone well and our services are now using it. Not only is this a much more modern facility linked with the County Council but it will help us to manage waste services in a more efficient way as our population in West Suffolk continues to grow. This future proofing is part of the long term vision we have at West Suffolk to make sure we are ready to both face challenges ahead, and to seize opportunities as they arise. The recycling centre will also be operational in the new year which should make it easier for our residents to reduce, reuse and recycle.

#OurDay

14. Talking about the future of public services, this year our West Suffolk Council apprentices took over a national social media marathon celebrating #OurDay.
15. The Council is currently working with 19 apprentices, many of whom made videos introducing the services they work in and promoting what the authority does.
16. From housing to bin collections, open spaces to car parks, leisure centres and community hubs, the council provides hundreds of valued services, which were brought to life by this initiative in November. The social media marathon is led by the Local Government Association and our films were picked up and promoted. We were among hundreds of Councils nationwide to participate and give residents an insight into the hundreds of jobs and services which councils do every day (the event was trending both nationally and internationally on the day).

Fly-tipping

17. We are part of a Suffolk wide campaign to crack down on fly-tipping. While the actual crime is easy to spot, detecting and finding the culprit is not. As part of this we are also making sure people know they are using reputable companies to dispose of rubbish.
18. A recent successful enforcement in this respect involved a restaurant owner from Bury St Edmunds who was fined for breaching a duty of care which led to his waste being fly tipped. The Ipswich Magistrates court heard that rubbish had been dumped on a Bury St Edmunds road including black sacks, pieces of carpet, cardboard, rubble, an oil fryer, a single mattress and pieces of wood.
19. The owner was unable to provide the details of the two men who took the rubbish or any receipts. While he did pay us for clearing up the mess, the Court also ordered that he pay a fine of £359, costs of £450 and a victim surcharge of £35.....a lesson to others, and we will continue to be vigilant about any fly-tipping which is unacceptable.

Recognising our past

20. A new information point and plant sales area has opened in the Abbey Gardens in Bury St Edmunds, offering visitors even more to enjoy.
21. The wonderful Abbey Gardens attract more than 1.2 million visits per year (the footfall is recorded at its entrances). One of the big attractions is the floral displays which are looked after by West Suffolk Council and a much valued team of volunteers.
22. It is anticipated that the Gardens will have even more visits next year. The Abbey Gardens is part of the much larger area that once served as the Abbey of St Edmund, and next year will see community celebrations to mark 1000 years since the Abbey was founded by King Canute.
23. I have highlighted above just a few examples of some of the many things happening in West Suffolk, but would like to take this opportunity to wish you all - councillors, officers and staff as well as the residents we all serve - a very Merry Christmas and a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year.

Councillor John Griffiths
Leader of the Council