

Leader's statement

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Leader's Statement – September 2020

1. Although this has been traditionally the holiday period, I know for many of us and our staff it has been more business – but not as usual.
2. The summer has seen both staff and councillors continue to support our businesses and communities while delivering services. Work has been challenging and unceasing in our continued and ongoing impressive efforts to respond and lead during the pandemic. I want to put on record my sincerest thanks to all of you and our staff who have been working tirelessly, often having to react very rapidly to local and national changes.
3. While, naturally, much of our focus is on reacting to the here and now, West Suffolk is as always looking forward to protect, support and improve our environment and the future prosperity of our communities and businesses. I know that this will be a theme that continues and already, as you will see from my report, we are pushing forward with initiatives that will shape the future of West Suffolk and service delivery for years to come.
4. You, our staff and our communities and businesses will be at the heart of shaping that future and once again West Suffolk is leading, nationally and locally on that work and inevitable changes ahead.

Hubs integrating services

5. If anything, this pandemic has shown the benefits of and need for integrated services for our residents that support not only better access but improved outcomes for health, education and leisure.
6. In this regard, I was pleased to see Western Way get planning permission and the excellent build progress being made at the Mildenhall Hub, especially during these challenging times. These are UK leading schemes in integrating services in a holistic way and are surely excellent examples for the future and how organisations should work together.

7. Mildenhall College Academy have been welcoming back pupils for what will be their final year at the existing Bury Road site. The move to the new hub is likely to take place within the first half of 2021, although as we all know, this still depends on Covid-19 restrictions.
8. As well as a new school, the multi-million-pound Mildenhall Hub will also bring together leisure facilities, a health centre, library, children's centre, Citizens Advice and Job Centre, as well as desk space for Suffolk Police, West Suffolk Council, Suffolk County Council and the NHS.
9. Mildenhall College Academy principal Nicola Hood, who with pupils has visited the site of the hub, summed up the need for the new hub and their eagerness to move in.
10. For those who did not see the article, Miss Hood said: "The hub and all the good things it brings together, is so important to me, my staff, our students and our wider academy family.
11. "Finally, the students and the community of Mildenhall are going to have an educational building that reflects the outstanding work and achievements of our staff and students. Standards at the academy have improved but it is hard to raise the profile of the academy in the community even further with the buildings we currently have. We need a building that reflects this and our ambitions for the future – and that is the Mildenhall Hub."
12. The hubs projects are multi-partner initiatives, which of course help break down barriers between organisations, and are being held up nationally as case studies of how to deliver services in the future.

LifeLink – social prescribing

13. The forward thinking and success of our families and communities work has also shown itself to be an essential strength during the pandemic and a model to build on for future working.
14. Not only has this been clear through our magnificent response to the Home But Not Alone scheme but also in the work of the social prescribing initiative LifeLink.
15. This has helped improve the lives of hundreds of West Suffolk residents and has saved the NHS thousands of pounds. The scheme was rolled out across the whole of West Suffolk in February, before lockdown, and has been invaluable to many.
16. You will remember LifeLink began as a pilot in Haverhill in 2018 - funded and supported by West Suffolk Council, the Government and Suffolk County Council. It grew to include Brandon and Mildenhall in October through funding from Suffolk Public Sector Leaders and West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group. It expanded to cover the rest of West Suffolk in February 2020 thanks to funding from GP practices that form the Primary Care Networks in West Suffolk.

17. LifeLink adapted its delivery so to support participants during the Covid19 lockdown period; and between April 2019 and 1 July this year, LifeLink has seen more than 500 people.
18. LifeLink was established to achieve better outcomes for people living with loneliness, poor self-esteem, low mood and anxiety by helping them through coaching support and involving them in community groups and support available on their doorstep.
19. All that in turn, reduces some of the dependency on trips to the GP, prescription costs and hospital admissions, a saving that has been estimated to run into thousands of pounds.
20. I include three case studies, anonymised to give you a small flavour of some of the people LifeLink has been helping.
 - Sarah lacked stable housing and had poor contact with her son and carried a lot of guilt. Coaching helped her take better control over her life including how she deals with anger and frustration. She is now living with her mum, has made room for her son to come to stay, and is exploring patterns in the change in her mood with her GP.
 - Andy suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, had been struggling to manage his finances and had been threatened with eviction. LifeLink intervened working with organisations to help him keep his home. LifeLink gave him help from a financial support worker so he can better manage his money and his bills, while he has also quit drinking and is taking steps to improve his physical and mental health including through Wellbeing Services.
 - Lilly lacked the confidence to meet new people after her husband died. LifeLink provided health coaching to help with her self-esteem and confidence and connected her to the St Nicholas Hospice bereavement support group. She is now feeling more connected to other people and has seen a marked improvement in her mental health and wellbeing.
21. Of those that took part in surveys to measure their progress with LifeLink, the vast majority showed an improvement to their sense of wellbeing.
22. Around two thirds of the people who were referred to LifeLink have either a disability, long term condition or frailty. Of those that took part in the survey, 86 per cent felt more empowered and motivated to take the steps to better manage their condition. That in turn reduces some of their likely need for NHS services such as GP appointments, hospital visits, treatments and medicines.
23. LifeLink partners include Abbeycroft Leisure, West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust, ONE Haverhill Partnership, Suffolk County Council, JobCentrePlus, West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group, West Suffolk Citizen's Advice, the West Suffolk Primary Care Network and West Suffolk Council.
24. To find out more visit [**www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/community/lifelink**](http://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/community/lifelink)

Rough sleeping

25. As you know the Council has been working very hard to reduce rough sleeping and meet Government's requirement of local authorities during lockdown. While we can always improve, the Council has had considerable success working with partners in an holistic way to give people the opportunity of getting off the street and improving their life chances.
26. To help support our efforts, I am pleased that Government has recognised our work by granting £174,000 for this financial year from the Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP). This is a welcome boost to help our work in reducing homelessness. We now await to hear about the following three years funding which we have bid for and which will be crucial for our long-term planning and for supporting people progress from rough sleeping and homelessness into a home. While we appreciate the Government listening to us on this, we continue to lobby for longer term funding so that we can plan, along with our partners, to help make lasting and sustainable changes.

#YourFuture #YourSay - West Suffolk Local Plan

27. People's views will be at the heart of forming a new Local Plan for West Suffolk which will help shape the future of communities and supporting development up to 2040.
28. We will be discussing this tonight as part of the Issues and Options paper, so I will not write much here. Suffice to say the Local Plan is not just about where development will take place but at this early stage will help us set the scene for what a future West Suffolk could and should be like, and the issues and options we have to meet.
29. The Local Plan should help local communities continue to thrive in the future by setting out where, and what kind of, homes will be built and support where new jobs and other vital facilities could and should be located. All West Suffolk planning decisions are judged against Local Plan policies.
30. The Local Plan should help ensure the right number and types of homes are built in the right places and through its policies support the provision of space for employment, green spaces, education, culture, health and sports facilities.
31. It also looks at what infrastructure is needed to support this growth and other challenges faced in the area, including climate change.
32. It is also vital to prevent speculative development that could harm local communities and the environment and ensures that growth is well planned.
33. We, as Councillors, will have a vital role in this process to help our residents have their say, and be heard.

Environment

34. We are already building on our good environmental record with a range of further initiatives either being put into place this summer or in the pipeline.
35. Putting environmental considerations at the heart of what we do has not only been something we have been known for as a Council but as the way of working going forward into the future. We have declared a climate change emergency and the Cabinet has agreed the findings of the Environment and Climate Change Taskforce including ambitious targets and a comprehensive road map of how to achieve it; which we are now putting into practice.
36. I was able to see for myself how electricity from streetlights is being used by residents to recharge electric vehicles outside homes, as part of a new trial by West Suffolk Council.
37. The innovative scheme, part of the Council's continuing work to protect the environment is supported by the Office for Low Emissions (OLEV) and Suffolk County Council.
38. West Suffolk Council has invested £11,400 in the project and secured £34,200 of Government funding from OLEV. Suffolk County Council, which manages the streetlights, has given its approval to the scheme which will not impact on the performance of the lights.
39. The scheme has initially seen 22 charging points installed on lampposts across West Suffolk. The Council has written to residents in the area who can register to use the chargers and pay for the electricity they draw.
40. Their use at each location will be monitored and if there is a need identified elsewhere, the Council can either apply to OLEV for more funding for additional charge points, or it can relocate any that are being underused.
41. This is a trial scheme but we look forward to embracing more initiatives such as this. Friends of the Earth named West Suffolk as one of the top areas in the UK for tackling climate change and supporting the environment late last year but we always recognise more can be done.
42. By working with our partners, we are improving the EV infrastructure to give people more confidence to switch to EV or hybrid vehicles, cut pollution and help both the environment and our health. Earlier this summer, we brought an EV rapid charger to Newmarket, our second in West Suffolk.
43. West Suffolk Council already operates EV chargers in many of its car parks including Rapid Chargers, capable of significantly recharging an EV in 30 minutes, in Bury St Edmunds and Newmarket.

44. By switching to EVs people are helping reduce air pollution which in 2017, Public Health England said cost the country £42.88 million in health and social care costs.
45. All of the locations so far selected are where off-street parking is not available and where lampposts are suitably located at the kerbside.

Great British September Clean

46. West Suffolk Council has also pledged its support for this year's Great British September Clean.
47. The campaign, which was postponed in early spring due to Covid-19, will be running from 11-27 September 2020. It encourages the public to take part in small, socially distanced clean-ups to remove litter from streets, parks and beaches across the country.
48. West Suffolk Council is supporting litter picking with advice and equipment on a first come first serve basis. Those following our social media will have seen this has been successful building on the already strong band of volunteers we have , helping to reduce waste and keep our beautiful district tidy.
49. Again, this is part of our work to reduce impact on the environment and work with communities. Although the campaign will have ended by the time we meet we already work with volunteers throughout the year on similar litter picks as well as recycling schemes. I know many councillors themselves have taken part.
50. The Great British Spring Clean, is run by environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy, brings together individuals, community organisations, businesses and councils to show they love where they live and in 2019 more than half a million #LitterHeroes collected more than 900,000 bags of rubbish.

Construction of new community centre set to start

51. I welcome the news that the construction of a new community centre and homes on the Howard estate in Bury St Edmunds is to begin in the next two months.
52. Over the last few months, Keepmoat Homes has been getting the site ready for development and has now completed the final stages of the previously agreed land acquisition from West Suffolk Council and Suffolk County Council.
53. Keepmoat will be building the community centre and the first phase of these homes in tandem. Subject to any further impact Covid-19 may have on construction, this would see the community centre open by the end of next year at which point it will be handed into the ownership of the Newbury Community Association to manage going forward.

54. Keepmoat will then demolish the existing Newbury Community Centre to complete the second phase of homes. In total the development will deliver 79 new homes of which nearly a third will be affordable housing. This is on land that belonged to the former school as well as the site of the existing community centre and children's centre owned by Suffolk County and West Suffolk councils.
55. As well as having the support of all local councillors, the local MP and the Havebury Housing Partnership, the project was shaped by three stages of public consultation led by the Newbury Community Association which leafleted every home on the estate inviting residents to a drop in event to have their say on the kind of events and activities they would like to use the new centre for. The NCA have then led the design process for the new centre on behalf of their community.
56. Again, a great example of working with our communities to bring forward much needed facilities and affordable homes. I would like to thank all involved, and of course the hard work put in by councillors and staff to help make this a reality.

Work begins at Cornhill

57. As you read this the start of construction on a major West Suffolk Council redevelopment in the heart of Bury St Edmunds town centre should have begun.
58. The work on 17-18 Cornhill, the site of the former Post Office, will keep the original front while the rest of the building will be demolished and replaced with two ground floor business units and 12 flats above. This in turn will enable the Council's and the public's ambition to widen the pedestrian walkway at Market Thoroughfare as well as creating a new front onto St Andrews Street South.
59. The redevelopment is in line with the aspirations of the town centre masterplan which was shaped by 8,000 public comments and follows hugely positive feedback from a public exhibition of design concepts in 2018. Throughout the design process, the Council has continued to work closely with town centre partners, whose input has further shaped the scheme.
60. Market Thoroughfare will have shut from Monday 21 September to ensure pedestrian safety during the works. People can access the arc and the historic town centre via Brentgoval Street, Central Walk and Woolhall Street.
61. Central Walk will become two way once more. Social distancing will be managed with people encouraged to stay to their left-hand side as they travel between the arc and the historic town centre. Barnes will put up hoarding at Cornhill and St Andrews St South that will help direct people around the town centre and will also include design images showing the final development.

62. As announced last month, The Council has also secured external funding providing additional cost certainty to achieve the public benefits of the scheme.
63. The construction is scheduled to be completed in 2022.
64. Works such as this and the investments we have made in our other towns and villages is just part of our ambition for the future recovery, and prosperity, of our area. Some of the work we are doing is immediate and others require further long-term investment and vision.

Businesses

65. During this time we have been working with a number of organisations and partners across West Suffolk to help businesses recover and our High Streets open.
66. Our markets have returned and are going from strength to strength with existing stall holders returning and, equally importantly, new traders starting businesses too.
67. Indeed, two market traders in Bury St Edmunds have signed up to the Government's Healthy Start scheme, enabling vouchers to be exchanged for fresh fruit and vegetables.
68. Healthy Start vouchers are available to people who are pregnant or have children under four years of age. The scheme allows vouchers to be exchanged not just for fruit and vegetables, but also milk including formula milk.
69. The idea of the scheme is to provide a nutritional safety net for pregnant women, new mums as well as young children in low income families, helping them to get off to a healthy start by eating better and developing good habits for the future.
70. There has been a range of initiatives across the area to help businesses and our communities, including us fast tracking permits for some traders to use the highway. This Safer Places work, which has been passed from Government to local authorities can be challenging and we have to react to both local circumstances and changes in national guidance. But it has worked well overall in West Suffolk thanks to the good relationships with business and local representatives and groups.
71. I am also pleased to say we will be supporting an announcement from Haverhill Town Council to run a campaign to shop local in this great and vibrant town. This is part of a range of measures in Haverhill to help keep people safe and local businesses to use a multi-agency approach. There are some great examples of organisations working together on this and, sticking to my theme, this is clearly the way forward for the future, and we all have a role to play.

Testing

72. We continue to play our role in responding to the pandemic and instigating initiatives to help our communities and businesses. I have circulated the guidance put out by Public Health, who lead in Suffolk, on testing and I hope you found that useful. As members will be aware, West Suffolk Council has made available sites for mobile testing units at various locations throughout the summer, and we will continue to respond to requests from the Suffolk Resilience Forum, often at very short-notice, for as long as is needed.
73. The above covers just a few examples of the very many things going on at West Suffolk Council. There is no doubt that very considerable challenges remain and indeed, looking forward, we are perhaps at a particularly critical stage - both nationally and locally.
74. I would end by thanking you again for your continuing support and hard work in these exceptionally busy times and I hope you, and yours, will stay safe.

Councillor John Griffiths
Leader of the Council