

Leader's statement

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Leader's Statement – February 2021

1. While many of us have had to, rightly, stay at home the Council has never been busier. We continue to deliver high quality services – for example, emptying around six million bins last year while helping more than 500 potentially homeless households find homes. We continue to determine planning applications and our families and communities work continues helping local organisations and lifelines, such as Life Link. But on top of that we continue to play our role, with partners, in tackling COVID-19. We have redeployed staff once again to help administer business grants for our local companies and our enforcement teams have been helping makes sure business owners have the right advice and support. Our staff have been working in the Home But Not Alone initiative, assisting people to get their medicine, food and help, as well as advising where to go for vaccines. Our cemetery team have stoically been working throughout this time and helping, as much as they can, those who have lost family and friends through this difficult time and the restrictions that govern funerals and many other things.
2. The situation is fast moving and ever changing. New vaccines and tests, as well as the organisation that is needed to deliver them, seems almost a daily occurrence. We have been alongside our partners in Suffolk throughout this to help, where we can, provide every possible assistance. You will know from my updates that this can be not only be a daily occurrence, but an hourly one as new facilities and initiatives are announced. Our Council continues to work at pace and I know both councillors and staff are, and have been, at the heart of this since the beginning last year. They deserve our gratitude.
3. Many, understandably, are finding things hard but I'm sure you will join me in giving my thanks for the continued efforts, in many cases superhuman, to help tackle this pandemic and hopefully recover from it as soon, and well, as possible. Our Council has recognised, and I believe risen to, this challenge from the beginning, ensuring that help is in place for those who are struggling.

4. There is of course hope on the horizon, the number of vaccines being administered is impressive and while we still have far to go, the light at the end of the tunnel gets closer and brighter every day. This is a testament of how almost everyone in the country and Suffolk has been playing their part, and while it is tempting to resume daily life as before we must all stick with it for a while longer. We also have a role to play in encouraging people to have a vaccine when it is their turn, and for everyone to stick with the guidance. Thank you all for continuing to help make sure our services keep running and doing the very best we can for our communities and businesses.

Budget

5. We will be discussing the budget later and therefore I will not say much here. I do however want to highlight the great work by both councillors and staff that has gone into presenting a balanced budget at this most challenging of times. We have played our part and should be proud of what we have and are doing during COVID. But this comes at a cost, and while Government has provided some much needed funding, we will continue to be impacted for years to come. This is partly due to the nature of Local Government funding where nationally councils are asked to fund services through income generation as well as Council Tax (of which West Suffolk Council only receives under 10 percent of the total bills, and this only covers around 20 percent of our costs). Through prudent financial management we are actually in a better position than many councils, which enables us to not change our plans on council tax that were agreed and announced last year. Moreover, we have made the prudent proposal to make a provision of £2 million in respect of COVID in next year's budget, and that's on top of allowing for a further £1.4 million to replenish the general fund and the impact of what had to be taken from this reserve this year.
6. I think it is fair to say Government has recognised the importance of Local Government and we have been put nationally at the forefront of many initiatives, such as business grants and helping the most vulnerable. Our ability, and perhaps unique position, to tailor measures locally, and an in-depth knowledge of our area and residents, has meant we have been able to take decisive action. Government has also largely recognised the cost of this, and some welcome funding provided but it does not cover all our losses and is not sustainable. That is why I hope you will join me in continuing to lobby for fairer funding from national Government for Local Government.

Business

Business grants

7. Once again we have been quick in helping businesses access millions of pounds in grants covering a range of issues that traders and others are facing due to tighter regulations. This has been a complex area, as guidance changed during the past few months since we last met, and required a lot of due diligence and work to help businesses. Our team, which has included redeployed staff and input from across the Council from various services, has used the knowledge and expertise gained through the year. This has meant we have so far been able, as I write

this, to deliver more than £8.9 million to well over 1000 West Suffolk businesses since January, and a total of £85 million in grants and rate relief since the pandemic began. These grants are a lifeline to many, but just one of the many ways we are helping.

8. We continue to play our part in giving businesses advice and support on what they are required to do, how they can operate safely, and whether or not they can be open. We are also carrying out enforcement action where necessary though our focus is always on the side of helping businesses looking to recovery ahead, while ensuring they do not break the law and help us all reduce the spread of COVID.
9. The Council has also been playing its part countywide, taking part and helping lead campaigns encouraging people to shop locally and responsibly, for example, as well as giving advice to supermarkets, traders visiting homes and the construction industry.
10. We are also working with the Business Improvement Districts (BIDS) and other local groups to continue to deliver the best possible tailored solutions for, and in, West Suffolk.

Markets

11. The markets have continued to operate with stalls selling essential goods, continuing to play their role in supporting our local High Streets.

Local Councils

12. I wanted to pay tribute to the work of Parish and Town Councils, alongside other local groups, who are and continue to play their part so well during this time. They largely recognise the issues we and the public sector are facing in supporting our communities and businesses, and we have also evolved the way we have been working to share responsibilities, or to bring other organisations in, so we can together reach common goals. Examples include making High Streets COVID safe, engaging with local businesses, giving street furniture a much needed facelift, or working with volunteers to get help to the most vulnerable. West Suffolk, and indeed Suffolk, is well known for working in new, different and better ways and the pandemic has, if anything, cemented that work and brought forward new initiatives to help people directly in their local communities. I am sure you will all join me in hoping that this not only continues, but strengthens further.

Environment

13. The proposed budget will also allow us to continue our wider strategic aims, including reducing our impact on, and protecting our environment. Even during the pandemic we have been able to progress both locally and countywide many environmentally friendly initiatives and campaigns.

Decarbonisation

14. In this regard, I am pleased to say West Suffolk Council has secured £1.43 million from the Government's Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme to help deliver a range of energy efficiency, decarbonisation and

battery energy storage projects as part of our climate emergency action plan.

15. The overall value of the work being carried out is £1.8 million, with the Council providing 20.5 percent match funding to secure the grant. This is an investment which will deliver energy savings and when fully operational generate income and cost savings estimated at £80,000 per year across six council owned properties.
16. The ability to deliver quickly was key to our successful bid, and I was delighted that the work already undertaken by our teams put us in such a strong position.
17. One of the first things we did when West Suffolk Council was created in 2019 was to declare a climate emergency, and since then we have produced and been delivering within a plan, not just for the Council, but to support others in our district working towards being carbon neutral by 2030. Investment in energy efficiency not only saves money, it is an investment in all our futures and environment, and an approach that I trust is shared by all residents, communities and businesses.
18. In addition, West Suffolk Council is supporting Haverhill Town Council in preparing their own bid for the Arts Centre, which aims to replace their aging boiler plant with an air source heat pump.
19. The funding mentioned above will result in:
 - replacing gas with air source heat pumps at Nowton Park, Bury Bus Station and Haverhill House
 - installing solar PV to reduce demand for grid supplied electricity at The Apex, Bury Bus Station, Vicon House and Provincial House
 - improving the thermal performance by installing cladding, roof insulation and double glazing of Haverhill House and Provincial House
 - installing a 1MW battery at West Suffolk House to support the Western Way Development heat and power network development
 - installing energy efficient controls of heating systems at Nowton Park, Bury Bus Station and Haverhill House.

Campaign

20. A new campaign has been launched in Suffolk to help people improve their recycling.
21. Each year more than 10,000 tonnes (about 20 percent) of recycling from Suffolk homes is rejected due to the wrong items being placed in Suffolk's recycling bins. This is the same as one in five lorries full of recycling going to waste. The cost of sorting and disposing this spoiled recycling is more than £1 million. That is of course money that could be better spent and certainly waste that could be recycled.
22. The new awareness campaign launched by the Suffolk Waste Partnership is called Together We Can Get Our Recycling Right. It included a leaflet to all households with the do's and don'ts of what can easily be recycled at home, plus tips on how to recycle other items not accepted in home

recycling bins. The campaign is supported on the Suffolk Recycling website and social media channels.

Food Savvy

23. Waste and recycling vehicles in West Suffolk and across the county are now displaying new artwork to help deliver food savvy message and cut food waste across the county.
24. Over 50,000 tonnes of food is apparently thrown away in Suffolk every year, and an estimated average of £730 of edible food goes to waste per household each year.
25. The fleet of 24 vehicles display the new banners, which have three simple messages and advice for people.

Green Energy

26. We alongside other Suffolk authorities have been supporting the national campaign to help people cut their fuel bills. This includes getting advice on their energy usage, as well as helping them to get any financial support they might be entitled to.
27. Big Energy Saving Week, 18 to 24 January 2021, concluded a three-month campaign run by Citizens Advice Bureau, Energy Saving Trust and Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.
28. January is a difficult month financially for many, coming after the expense of Christmas and as cold weather pushes up heating bills. In addition, many of us are of course spending more time at home due to COVID-19 with reports of much more energy being used to heat homes.
29. The Council has been helping people get the support available, (both financial and guidance) to improve their home's energy efficiency. The free Suffolk Climate and Energy Helpline is 0800 0288 938 and there is another helpline for those most in need of additional support or helping a vulnerable relative or neighbour. The Warm Homes, Healthy People scheme number is 03456 037686.
30. It is perhaps also worth noting that the Citizens' Advice Bureau provides help to those struggling to afford gas and electricity bills with links to grants and benefits, and on how to deal with energy suppliers.
31. In West Suffolk, the Council has already helped people living in park homes and in rural homes to get Government and energy sector funding to improve energy efficiency. Working with EDF Energy, the Council has also hosted virtual workshops organised with the help of the local councillor to inform rural residents with oil and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) heating systems about a subsidised hybrid air source heat pump system. The pilot run with Gazeley and Moulton residents is now being reviewed to see how it can best be rolled out to benefit other villages and hamlets. Park homes in rural areas have also benefitted from the council securing Green Homes Government funding to apply exterior wall insulation, improving energy efficiency. This funding is also available

direct to households and details are available at www.greensuffolk.org and through the Suffolk Climate and Energy Helpline on 0800 02 88 938.

Public Space Protection Orders

32. Residents have now been consulted on bringing in or removing legal orders designed to help Police in West Suffolk target enforcement against antisocial behaviour and use of alcohol.
33. Since we last met and following the last Cabinet meeting consultation on changes to or new public space protection orders (PSPOs) have been launched.
34. PSPOs give powers to enforce against antisocial behaviour and specific issues such as use of alcohol in targeted locations and must be reviewed every three years.
35. Members of West Suffolk Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee backed the plans for the consultations which run from January until 22 February 2021.
36. One resident's association has asked for the new order designed to help the police clamp down on antisocial driving in Moreton Hall. This is supported by the Police who report that antisocial driving is a longstanding concern of residents within the estate. The Police reported that although COVID-19 has had an impact and reduced the number of vehicles in the area, concerns are still being expressed by residents.
37. Also residents had their say on removing the Tudor Court area from the existing Public Space Protection Order for Haverhill (restricting the consumption of alcohol within the specified area). When the PSPO was made the area was recreational land but it is now residential. Haverhill Town Council has asked for it to be removed from the order.
38. PSPOs have to be reviewed regularly and any new ones or changes have to be consulted upon and must meet strict evidenced criteria. In September 2020, Cabinet agreed to extend existing West Suffolk PSPOs for a further three years but to look at the changes in Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill. It was also agreed to consider a new PSPO for Moreton Hall and variation of the Haverhill PSPO, both of which require consultation to provide robust evidence to support a final decision due to be made in March.
39. The results of the consultations will be examined by West Suffolk Cabinet when it meets in March 2021.

Census

40. Households across West Suffolk will soon be asked to take part in Census 2021. But, of course, due to COVID-19 this will be very different, and councillors will have a role to play in helping promote this where possible.

41. The census is a once-in-a-decade survey that gives us the most accurate estimate of all the people and households in England and Wales. It has been carried out every decade since 1801, with the exception of 1941.
42. It will be the first run predominantly online, with households receiving a letter with a unique access code, allowing them to complete the questionnaire on their computers, phones or tablets.
43. Iain Bell, deputy national statistician at the Office for National Statistics states: "A successful census will ensure everyone from local government to charities can put services and funding in the places where they are most needed. This could mean things like doctors' surgeries, schools and new transport routes. That's why it is so important everyone takes part and we have made it easier for people to do so online on any device, with help and paper questionnaires for those who need them."
44. Census day will be on 21 March 2021, but households across the country will receive letters with online codes allowing them to take part from early March.
45. Results will be available within 12 months, although personal records will be locked away for 100 years, and kept safe for future generations.

Community Chest

46. Community initiatives providing counselling, support, and improving the health and wellbeing of West Suffolk residents, are to receive Community Chest funds.
47. This has been something the Council has invested in and is not part of our statutory work, but I think vital to helping our local organisations.
48. I want to thank all those involved in the process and I know much consideration went into the decision making and that help is available for all those that applied in one form or other.
49. West Suffolk made £466,733 of Community Chest funding available for 2021 to 2022 and the Council received a record number of applications. More than 30 community groups, charities and voluntary organisations are to receive funding, which was agreed at Cabinet this February. Since it first launched in 2015, Community Chest has already invested more than £2.5 million in community initiatives designed to help our residents. This figure does not include 2021 to 2022 funding.
50. A Grant Working Party had to hold three meetings totalling some 12 hours to consider the 62 applications based on the information submitted and the scheme criteria. It then made recommendations to Cabinet for Community Chest grants totalling £466,733 to be made to 33 of these organisations.

Lord Lieutenant’s special Certificate of Merit

51. While I think all our staff and services are stars and deserve special mention it is pleasing to see our efforts in maintaining critical essential services during the COVID-19 pandemic have received more recognition.
52. I am extremely proud to report that the work of the Council’s waste team has been recognised by Clare Countess of Euston through her Lord Lieutenant’s special Certificate of Merit. This certificate, given to the Waste Disposal Team, is a reflection of the hard work of everyone keeping services running and also reflects the gratitude of residents.

New street outreach guidelines feature West Suffolk

53. West Suffolk has been used as a case study in good practice guide for the NHS called The Homeless and Inclusion Health Service Standards for Commissioners and Service Providers (‘The Standards’).
54. This is produced by [The Faculty for Homeless and Inclusion Health](#) as a framework for the commissioning and provision of health services for excluded people.
55. They draw upon the latest evidence of best practice and provide quality assurance for supporting vulnerable and excluded patients with multiple and complex needs, commonly referred to as inclusion health patients.
56. Our Multi-Disciplinary Rough Sleeper Team and their work is featured with a case study as good practice. The team brings together various disciplines and partner agencies to offer wrap-around support to rough sleepers, covering most of their needs or being able to help access services much faster. The expertise, knowledge and experience of the team as a whole has helped to achieve a deeper understanding of the issues faced by rough sleepers and how to work with them.
57. The aim of the street outreach guidelines is to assist services to plan new health related street outreach projects, and/or to review services’ existing outreach. Homeless health services cover a range of locations, and the demographics of people sleeping rough in these areas may differ widely. This outreach document is designed as a flexible tool for sharing best practice and innovative ideas, allowing services to use them as appropriate to their areas.

Councillor John Griffiths
Leader of the Council