

Leader's statement

Report number:	COU/WS/21/006	
Report to and date:	Council	22 June 2021
Documents attached:	None	

Leader's Statement

1. First of all, I want to thank you all for the fortitude you have shown in dealing with the ever-changing situations we all face and are likely to continue to do so going forward.
2. I have written to you all separately, but I also wanted to repeat my appreciation in this public statement, for all your support in managing the Annual Meeting and the associated particular challenges. This statement will be the first I will have delivered in more than a year with us all together in a room and I look forward to seeing you all "face-to-face". Due to the ongoing restrictions this will be in Newmarket as it is the only suitable and available venue that can accommodate us all, the public, officers and media while keeping to strict social distancing rules. Indeed, as I type this, there still uncertainty around what will happen with regard to further guidance, and possibly more freedoms or freezing of restrictions.
3. What I can guarantee is that we will continue to play our part and I would ask you to continue to encourage people to be vaccinated and test. To mix my metaphors while there is now light at the end of the tunnel, we are not out of the woods yet. I know for some of you there will be some hesitancy about being in a room for Council, even if socially distanced. I can completely understand this, and indeed after the year we have this is the feeling of many.....and while we have more freedoms than before, there is still much people can do by keeping to the guidance even if they have been vaccinated.
4. In my recent communications to you all I highlighted some of the things we have been doing during COVID-19. I hope you will indulge me as I repeat them here, to make sure they are on public record.

During last year:

5. We helped businesses access more than £107 million in grant and business rate relief. Some 600 food businesses were provided with advice on how to switch to takeaway and delivery services and around 300 hospitality businesses were assisted to ensure adherence with COVID-19 restrictions to protect local people. Of course, we also continued to deliver our ambitious

programme and services, often punching above our weight, while dealing with the pandemic.

6. We have also secured £205,000 from the Suffolk Inclusive Growth Investment Fund to aid recovery and bring new prosperity to West Suffolk's town centres.
7. We have supported the most vulnerable, working with over 600 volunteer groups and organisations as part of Home but Not Alone and our families and communities work – that's over 2035 calls handled on the Home but Not Alone telephone line and some 120 emergency food parcels delivered.
8. We continued to collect thousands of bins a week despite the challenges of COVID and, when safe to do so, opened our markets in all our towns seeing an increase in new traders. Our parks stayed open and not only achieved national green flag awards but were essential for people to help improve their well-being and mental health during the pandemic. All of this was valued by our communities and businesses who thanked us from social media posts to pictures on bins.
9. Secured £425,000 funding from a Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy grant will deliver a park home insulation scheme across three parks. Part of a £1.2 million bid of which West Suffolk was the lead authority to help achieve our environmental goals.
10. Completed the £2 million upgrade of Brandon Leisure Centre this year – part of multi million investment in health and wellbeing across West Suffolk.
11. Our Local Plan – due to the pandemic we innovated with online engagement which saw around 3,400 people giving written comments so far – more than we have ever had before and reaching people we had not engaged with so effectively before.

Continuing to deliver on our priorities

12. Despite the pandemic and our role, we have continued to deliver both our services and on our priorities. Some of this is within West Suffolk, others across boundaries and borders – but always with our residents in mind.

Cambridge Sub-Region

13. As you know West Suffolk is part of the Cambridge Sub-region, sharing a range of issues from economic, housing, health, and transport – to name but a few. While we are proud to be part of Suffolk our role in the Cambridge Sub-region is also important and ultimately benefits the UK economy. Following the results of the recent elections I have contacted Dr Nik Johnson, the newly elected Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to continue and strengthen our relationship with the Combined Authority. I am pleased to say we have had a very positive response and as things develop, I will of course keep you all informed.

Hubs

14. Many of you from Mildenhall and beyond will have now looked at Mildenhall Hub which is going through its phased opening. This is a flagship facility combining education, leisure, health, and public services. It is providing much needed modern facilities that will ensure the education of generations as well as their fitness, health and safety. Once fully open the Hub will offer a new school, two new pools, a gym, a 3G outdoor pitch, fitness studios and a sports hall, alongside a new town library, health centre, children's centre, and job centre. The Hub also features office space for the NHS, police, Suffolk County Council and West Suffolk Council with the Hub partners all due to complete their move to the Sheldrick Way site over the summer.
15. At the same time, we are closing our College Heath Road offices in Mildenhall which, along with the Council supported EpiCentre in Haverhill, have played important roles in the pandemic, and been used as vaccination centres. Both are now no longer needed as more places have opened up to get vaccinated
16. For full details of the Mildenhall Hub visit www.mildenhallhub.info
17. This is a nationally important facility and tonight we will also be discussing the phasing of the Western Way Development going forward in light of COVID, its impact and the lessons learned. One thing COVID has underlined is that working across geographical and organisational boundaries is vital as is finding better ways, such as the hubs, to achieve this. I will perhaps "keep my powder dry" for the debate, but I do want to say that, while we are leading the way nationally in delivering services in this fashion, the real prize is not plaudits from Government but better outcomes, health and prosperity for our residents and businesses.
18. Put simply and for this reason, have been investing millions in new leisure facilities across West Suffolk alongside partnership working around hub projects and the delivery of services as well as improving health.

Helping the most vulnerable

19. I am pleased to say hundreds of vulnerable people across West Suffolk will be able to receive support to carry on living in their own homes rather than having to go into hospital or care thanks to record funding.
20. Independent Living in Suffolk (ILS) has received £1.5 million for its work in West Suffolk from the Government's Better Care Fund.
21. The money will be available as grants to help pay for adaptations to people's homes in order to help them carry on living in their home. Adaptions can vary from a simple rail to more extensive works to provide access to facilities.
22. The Independent Living in Suffolk service was set up in December, with partner councils, after a previous contract came to an end. Enquiries are assessed by Suffolk County Council. West Suffolk Council then helps people

with the application process to support residents to carry out the work required.

23. Despite launching the new service during the middle of the pandemic we have paid out more than £700,000 in grants and helped more than 100 people between December and the end of March this year. With many of the people that need help from this scheme likely to have been shielding until they were vaccinated, it is anticipated that there is likely to be high demand for works and funding in the coming months.
24. Anyone wishing to enquire about Independent Living in Suffolk should call 0800 121 7711 or email ILS@suffolk.gov.uk
25. For more information visit www.suffolk.gov.uk/care-and-support-for-adults/how-social-care-can-help/independent-living-suffolk

Local Plan

26. Our work around the local plan continues with further engagement with shoppers and businesses. We are inviting them to have their say on how future development will best support local high streets and the economy.
27. This engagement will help inform the evidence we are creating to inform preparation of West Suffolk Council's Local Plan; it will help guide our policies and choices about future development in in our towns.
28. As part of the local plan – which has to meet a Government timetable and be in place by 2023, we want to further understand how our town centres work, how people use them to consider how the local plan might help manage the economic success of our town centres.
29. From last week, Monday, 7 June residents have been and continue to be selected at random to take part in a telephone survey, while town centre surveys will also take place with COVID security measures in place so households and shoppers can have their say.
30. It follows earlier COVID-19 safe consultation which saw more than 3,000 written responses – more than any other Local Plan consultation that the Council has carried out before.

Making a splash in Haverhill

31. One thing that has again been highlighted and strengthened by the pandemic is the importance of partnership working and the ability for everyone to take responsibility to achieve something greater, together. This has been clear with our work with Parish and Town Councils, and I trust this will continue and strengthen further.
32. One such project is in Haverhill where a major investment by the Town Council and West Suffolk Council will see a £230,000 splashpad built on Haverhill Recreation Ground this summer.

33. As part of the arrangement between the two councils, Haverhill Town Council will take on the management of the kiosk so that their staff can provide a proper oversight of the splashpad and play areas when it is open. Having staff on site will also provide a point of contact for visitors to one of the town's busiest public parks and ensure issues on site can be dealt with quickly.
34. This is part of Haverhill Town Council and West Suffolk Council's aim to listen to local residents needs and provide facilities for families to keep fit and healthy.
35. Works on site are scheduled to start this month and Ustigate have undertaken to have completed the installation in late July so that the facility is open for most of the school summer holiday period. Haverhill Town Council will be providing £180,000 and West Suffolk Council who owns the recreation ground have contributed £50,000 from local developer contributions.

Newbury Community Centre

36. I am also delighted to see that an ambitious community-led project to provide new homes and create a new centre, shaped by the residents who will use it, is expected to open towards the end of the year.
37. The project to build new homes and a new Newbury Community Centre on the Howard Estate in Bury St Edmunds is being led by the Newbury Community Association (NCA). It has been ably supported by West Suffolk Council and Suffolk County Council councillors and Havebury Housing Partnership and I would like to thank all those involved in the scheme.
38. Back in 2014, residents were invited to take part in the first of three engagement events about the activities they would like to see in their new community centre. Suffolk County Council also identified the opportunity to integrate the Carousel Children's Centre into the new facility. That then shaped the designs for the new building which is being paid for and delivered as part of a new Keepmoat Housing development of 79 new homes. The scheme has also been made possible through the availability of other developer contributions and a £670,000 grant from the Government's Land Release Fund.

Christmas in West Suffolk

39. You will have heard, I am sure, of the launch of the Christmas in Bury St Edmunds initiative. This has been launched by a range of local partners to benefit local businesses and the community to have the best possible festive period.
40. Partners from across Bury St Edmunds, and West Suffolk, are working together on a range of festive events and initiatives this Christmas which will last several weeks.
41. These will keep the area COVID safe and able to adapt to any further Government changes to guidance.

42. Last year the Christmas Fayre which is held over four days had to be postponed due to COVID-19 and the need to reduce the spread of infection. This year West Suffolk Council will be running an event as part of Christmas in Bury St Edmunds, but this will not be the “fayre” as such, due inter alia to the need to keep COVID safe and flexible as guidance changes.
43. Importantly this also means the Council is able and will look to work with partners across our area to see how other Christmas events can be put on to benefit everyone. I know this is something that has concerned councillors in the past.

Keeping and staying green

44. I have been proud of the way the Council has continued to work on a range of environmental issues to reach our aims during COVID. Much of this will be coming to Council later but I believe we are making good progress and have kept you up to date, as much as possible, with these initiatives since March last year.

Going electric

45. As part of our continuing work to address climate change, we have secured further investment to boost the availability of electric vehicle (EV) chargers.
46. The Council is committed to improving the charging infrastructure to support residents and businesses to have the confidence to switch to EVs or hybrid vehicles.
47. We have now installed our 46th charger – there are EV charge points already available at 15 locations across West Suffolk, and we are working to bring in more in the coming months.
48. The latest chargers which run on the BP Pulse network, have been placed at The Corn Exchange car park in Haverhill. The council is working to install chargers in Brandon later this year and how it can best deliver more across other locations.
49. The Government plans to end the sale of petrol and diesel cars in the UK by 2030 with new hybrid vehicles allowed until 2035. Here in West Suffolk, we want to make the choice easier for residents and businesses now.
50. We recognise that given that West Suffolk is a predominantly rural area, for some people, some journeys aren't always possible by any other means than by car. Another reason, while we continue to encourage people to walk, cycle, or use public transport, we are making charging points more readily available.
51. It is also worth remembering we offer a Greener Business Grant which will match fund a business up to £1,000 towards the cost of an electric vehicle or company charge point. All of this is part of our wider work around reducing air pollution, work which includes reducing vehicle idling and encouraging greater use of clean energy (particularly solar).

Spring Clean

52. One thing that was made clear by the taskforce and our wider work with partners is that improving our environment cannot be achieved by anyone alone – we must all do our bit.
53. This is why we took part in the country's biggest mass-action community clean-up this spring with communities across West Suffolk.
54. 2021's Great British Spring Clean launched at the end of May and is led by Keep Britain Tidy. The initiative encouraged local communities to tackle litter in their areas between 28 May and 13 June.
55. This year, organisers have set the Million Mile Mission, which involves individuals and groups pledging how much time they will spend litter picking, which is converted into miles in the hope that, by the summer, everyone can enjoy a cleaner, greener, litter-free environment. So far, more than 780,800 miles have been pledged. You can read more at Keep Britain Tidy
56. West Suffolk Council has lent its support by providing litter pickers and bin bags, as well as arranging for the waste to be collected from agreed locations that are accessible to vehicles. So far, we have given out around 1,500 litter pickers to those taking part in keeping West Suffolk tidy all year around.
57. Individuals can request litter pickers and bags by going to Arrange a litter pick as an individual . We ask that you then put whatever you collect in your wheelie bin. Or, if you are supporting a community group effort and need us to pick up the bags you have collected, please arrange this in advance by contacting customer services on 01284 763233, or send an email to volunteers@westsuffolk.gov.uk

Suffolk Hero's Awards

58. Suffolk MPs have launched "Suffolk's Heroes Awards" to celebrate Suffolk Day 2021.
59. Suffolk residents are asked to email their MP with a nomination of an individual they feel deserve to be recognised for their efforts. It maybe they were a volunteer helping deliver supplies to those shielding, supporting the vaccine rollout or phoning those who may be alone whilst isolating. Equally the individual may have been a key worker on the frontline, either in the NHS, in our supermarkets, pharmacies or many of our other vital industries.
60. If you would like to submit nominations, please email these to jo.churchill.mp@parliament.uk. The nominations close at 10am on 17 June 2021 and will be announced on Suffolk Day, 21 June. You are welcome to pass this information to other members in your community who may like to submit nominations too.

Parliamentary Boundary Review

61. As you are aware the Boundary Commission for England (BCE) has published their initial proposals for the new Parliamentary constituency boundaries.
62. While I am not going to use this statement to point out issues or what I think I would urge everyone of you to look at it yourselves, have your say, and please feel free to make sure your parish and town councils are aware.
63. Information about the review and the proposals can be viewed on the BCE website. The consultation is open until 2 August 2021 and responses can be submitted here.
64. If you have any queries regarding the review please contact the BCE team on 020 7271 1102, or email information@boundarycommissionengland.gov.uk

And finally...

65. The film, link below, was made on behalf of the Suffolk Communities Collaborative Board to say Thank you to the community groups who responded during the pandemic.
66. It was shared via Volunteer Suffolk for Volunteer's Week on Facebook as well as on social media and features our own staff who did such a wonderful job.
67. Please feel free to share it yourselves - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CzKFQwKTnQ>
68. I think it acts as a poignant reminder of all the good that was and continues to be done in and with our communities. So, on that upbeat note, thank you for your support and continued help.

Councillor John Griffiths
Leader of West Suffolk Council