

### **DRAFT WEST SUFFOLK ANNUAL REPORT 2021 to 2022**

The West Suffolk Council Annual Report 2021 to 2022 covers the period from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022. The report highlights the progress and achievements of West Suffolk Council over the past year in working towards our vision and priorities. Through this time, we have continued to support local businesses and communities as we respond to and recover from the impacts of the pandemic and this support is highlighted through this report.

This report presents our key accomplishments in a series of infographics that are categorised under the three priorities that we set out in our [Strategic Framework 2020 to 2024](#).

Our priorities are focused on growing West Suffolk's economy, fostering resilience in families and communities that are healthy and active and ensuring there is increased and improved provision of appropriate housing in both towns and rural areas. Also attached at Appendix 1 are highlights from our Environmental Statement 2021 to 2022.

In February 2022, the Government published its Levelling Up White Paper, in which it announced plans to address inequalities across the United Kingdom through its programme of 'levelling up'. The Levelling Up agenda is supported by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, from which West Suffolk has been allocated £1.93 million. Work began during 2021 to 2022 on how the council should implement the Government's Levelling Up missions in West Suffolk, and how best to use the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to support this.

## Growth

- Local businesses received £16.3 million in COVID-19 business grants during 2021 to 2022, which were distributed by the council to nearly 2,500 businesses on behalf of the Government. This takes the total amount of COVID-19 business grants distributed to businesses throughout the pandemic to £71.2 million.
- Ratepaying businesses who previously did not receive COVID-19 support were awarded nearly £1 million in business rates reliefs through the COVID-19 Additional Relief Fund (with further funding allocated in 2022 to 2023), through partnership working by the council and Anglia Revenues Partnership.
- Through Anglia Revenues Partnership, West Suffolk's entire allocation of £1,037,690 from the Government's COVID-19 Hardship Fund has been distributed, with a further £224,936 from the Discretionary Hardship Fund distributed to help residents with rent shortfalls to remain in their home. Additionally, £820,000 has been distributed to support 1,640 residents with COVID-19 to remain at home.
- West Suffolk's six town centres were given a spring clean and benefitted from projects undertaken to encourage shoppers back into town centres and support local businesses, with £250,000 of Government 'Welcome Back' funding used to encourage shoppers back into town centres to support local businesses.
- £590,000 was invested in partnership with MENTA, New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership and through development contributions to extend the MENTA Business Centre in Hollands Road, Haverhill, to support entrepreneurs, start-ups and those considering self-employment.
- Through working in partnership with MENTA, the Harvey Adams Business Centre in Brandon became a business, skills and employability hub providing advice from MENTA, as well as offering additional support from West Suffolk College and the Department for Work and Pensions. Supported by a £25,000 grant from the council, MENTA took on the day-to-day running of the centre which will now not only provide space to businesses based in the centre, but also offer advice to new, small and medium sized businesses, as well as to those seeking employment and new skills. The £25,000 grant is a re-allocation of existing funding and will support these services over the next three years.
- In support of the work being done to help develop the Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering sector in West Suffolk, the council has agreed to develop a brand new incubation centre at Suffolk Business Park, to support this key sector. It is proposed that the centre will initially provide 40,000 square feet of start-up and incubation space just outside Bury St Edmunds.

- West Suffolk high streets continue to perform strongly, with only 6.83 per cent of commercial units across the six market towns being vacant as of 31 March 2022, compared to the UK average of 11.70 per cent.
- We have continued to provide careers inspiration to hundreds of young people over the past year, for example through activities such as mock interviews, careers talks and events.
- Extensive construction and renovation work was continued on 17-18 Cornhill in Bury St Edmunds, to safeguard the former Post Office building and develop the site into two ground floor commercial units and 12 residential units above, due for completion in summer 2022.
- West Suffolk markets continued their recovery from COVID-19, with successful additional initiatives such as Makers Markets, a sustainable produce market, and support for the Young Market Trader of the Year competition. Meanwhile, an Overview and Scrutiny Review Group considered the future of the markets, including running a survey in which 428 local people gave their views.
- Through a successful partnership between the council and other local organisations, over 100 events were advertised under the umbrella brand of 'Christmas in Bury St Edmunds', with the new 'Illuminabbey' event at the heart. All 8,000 tickets were sold for the December 2021 event.
- Following the Issues and Options consultation on the new West Suffolk Local Plan in 2020, which received more than 3,500 responses, preparations were made during 2021 to 2022 for the Preferred Options consultation stage which is due to run from May to July 2022. These preparations were supported by the Local Plan Working Group and Cabinet, who reviewed the responses and contributed to the drafting Preferred Options stage.
- 45 major, 264 minor and 965 other planning applications were granted during 2021 to 2022, compared to 52 major, 236 minor and 791 other in 2020 to 2021. A major application is characterised by consisting of 10 or more dwellings or at least 1000 square meters of new floorspace, a minor application by consisting of one to nine dwellings or less than 1000 square meters of new floor space, and an other application includes change of use, listed building consent, householder development and adverts.
- More than two million bins from West Suffolk households were emptied during the year, resulting in 39,000 tonnes of household waste being sent for processing at the Energy from Waste facility in Great Blakenham.
- More than 34,000 households subscribed to the garden waste collection service, through which 13,000 tonnes of garden waste were collected and composted locally. This represents an increase of 1,500 subscribers and 2,000 additional tonnes of waste collected compared to last year.

- During 2021 to 2022, the council responded to almost 500 reports of environmental crime from residents and businesses, involving abandoned vehicles and fly-tipping. This resulted in 60 tonnes of waste being removed and a range of enforcement actions.
- The new ground source heat pump system at West Stow, enabling the Anglo-Saxon village to cut its carbon emissions by 70 per cent, was shortlisted for six national awards.
- £1.8 million invested into energy efficiency schemes across the council's property estate through the Government's decarbonisation scheme, including £22,000 to replace a gas boiler with an air source heat pump at Nowton Park that serves the café and toilets.
- Four, seven-kilowatt electric vehicle charge points were installed at the George Street, Brandon and Corn Exchange, Haverhill car parks, meaning an additional 16 spaces can be served at any one point across both sites.
- Nine million pounds of investment was agreed for 2022 to 2025 as part of the council's budget process in a range of green initiatives to help reach West Suffolk Council's ambition of carbon neutral by 2030.

## Families and Communities

- In June 2021, the Mildenhall Hub officially opened, bringing together a range of services for the benefit of local people. In the time until January 2022, the leisure facilities at Mildenhall Hub, managed by Abbeycroft Leisure, saw a positive increase in use compared to pre-COVID levels, with footfall up by 51 per cent on pre-pandemic levels, centre membership increasing by 82 per cent, swimming lesson participation up by 59 per cent and casual swimming use up by 109 per cent. The library, located in the heart of the main atrium and managed by Suffolk Libraries also experienced a positive increase in use. There was a 48 per cent increase in items issued and a 54 per cent increase in new library members, this equates to over 700 new members in this period, with new membership increasing daily.
- The new Brandon Leisure and Health Hub opened in November 2021, following a £2 million investment by the council. As well as a reshaping of the existing town leisure centre, it now includes upgraded fitness facilities and community health facilities. This built on the previous work at Newmarket Leisure Centre in 2020.
- In February 2022, £466,733 in community grants were announced to support 30 local charities and community groups through the council's Community Chest. Additionally, £204,347 of support was distributed through locality budgets.
- 122 West Suffolk community group and sports club projects were supported through the Government's Community Restart fund and the Sports Club Restart programme, allocating £207,305.63 for COVID specific projects. This included £1,700 for Wickhambrook Parish Council to purchase outdoor equipment to support social distancing at community engagement events and £1,989 for Worlington Cricket Club to purchase additional equipment for junior players and for qualified coaches to adhere to COVID guidance.
- Through the Holiday Food and Activity Programme (HAF), funded by the Department for Education, the council enabled 995 HAF spaces to be filled on activities, sports, and community Christmas events. 202 food parcels were supplied to eligible families across West Suffolk and 40 additional families attended Family Park Cooking days and also received a food parcel. More activities are planned for school holidays in 2022.
- A new splashpad in Haverhill opened in summer 2021, providing play opportunities for local children and families. The council invested £50,000, alongside £180,000 from Haverhill Town Council, who will run the facility.
- The successful Moments exhibition at Moyses Hall museum in Bury St Edmunds saw 200,000 visitors, including 900 school students, and a boost of up to £350,000 to the local economy. The exhibition included original

works by international artists such as Banksy, Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin, Rachel List, Pure Evil and My Dog Sighs and attracted visitors from as far and wide as Cardiff, Edinburgh, Cornwall, Cumbria, and the Isle of Wight.

- The first trees in West Suffolk's Platinum Jubilee tree-planting initiative were planted in Newmarket at the George Lambton Playing Fields, as part of a successful joint bid with Suffolk County Council for £29,500 from the Government's Local Authority Treescapes Fund (LATF).
- More than 50 West Suffolk primary schools were invited to participate in the first virtual Crucial Crew, giving year six pupils the opportunity to learn valuable and potentially life-saving skills.
- In January 2022, the newly built Newbury Community Centre opened in Bury St Edmunds, following the transfer of the former centre to the community by the council. The development was part of a new housing development providing 79 new homes, including 23 affordable homes.
- Procurement began in 2021 to 2022 for a new contractor for the Western Way Development site in Bury St Edmunds, which will see new state of the art leisure facilities and a nationally ground-breaking way to deliver integrated public services for communities.
- Continuing the journey to improve digital access to services, more than half of all customer contact with the council is now online, representing a large reduction in phone and face to face contact over recent years. In June 2021, 61 per cent of all contact was online, compared to just 26 per cent in June 2017.
- West Suffolk Council has delivered social prescribing in partnership with the West Suffolk Alliance since 2017, providing a service to 1463 users across the six primary care networks during the year. Additionally, 575 Impact Investment Fund fast-track calls have been made to support local health networks. This service has acted as a successful incubator for change and the council will continue to support the service in the future as this transitions into the West Suffolk Alliance space.
- In July 2021, a joint Alliance vaccine inequalities post was established within the council to address vaccine hesitancy in seldom-heard communities. This role will use public health data to bring coordinated resources to communities, while addressing existing and unknown health inequalities.
- In collaboration with West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust, 816 referrals were made to Abbeycroft Leisure which has helped improve the health and wellbeing of local residents. Within the first 12 weeks, 61 per cent of those referred experienced an increase in their wellbeing. In addition, from week one to week 24, on average those referred saw an overall increase in the number of minutes spent exercising, and a decrease in time spent sitting.

- Over the past 12 months, West Suffolk Council has worked with partners to provide settled accommodation under the Government's Afghan resettlement scheme. In addition to providing accommodation across the district, we have also worked with Suffolk Refugee Support to assist communities and enable access to appropriate advice and information. This includes housing advice, translation services, access to community groups, GP services, education and training as well as benefits and employment.

## Housing

- 865 units of housing were delivered in West Suffolk during 2021 to 2022, of which 257 were affordable units, the council therefore delivered some 30 per cent affordable units compared to overall homes delivered.
- The annual Housing Delivery Action Plan was completed, through which the council works to find opportunities to increase the supply of housing in the district. This included commissioning Community Action Suffolk (CAS) to deliver a one-year pilot that assisted our work with several parish councils to bring forward affordable housing in rural areas. Outcomes included the production of a housing needs survey to evidence the need for additional housing in two parishes.
- The Housing Needs Assessment was finalised. This provides an understanding of the amount and type of housing that is needed across West Suffolk.
- Since the new Independent Living Service was introduced in December 2020, the number of Disabled Facilities Grants approved has increased to 194 in 2021 to 2022 compared with 72 in 2020 to 2021. The average time taken to complete a Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant has reduced from 40 weeks in 2020 to 2021, to 25 weeks in 2021 to 2022.
- 181 households in West Suffolk were assisted through the provision of 187 Disabled Facilities Grants, of which, 131 were assisted by the Independent Living Service to remain independent in their homes through the provision of aids and minor adaptations.
- During this year, 76 proactive investigations of houses in multiple occupation and 65 routine inspections were undertaken.
- Two new bungalows were completed in Brandon as temporary accommodation for people with special needs as well as four properties for social rent. The council provided Havebury Housing with £240,000 of financial support towards the accommodation. Furthermore, the land was gifted by the council by removing the existing covenant.
- Approximately £1.3 million was spent making disability adaptations to almost 200 homes through the Disabled Facilities Grant. This spending contributed to the delivery of 3,693 items of mobility aids and equipment through our contribution to the Suffolk County Council equipment budget.

- A review of the Lettings Policy was completed, with a revised and fit for purpose policy adopted across the Cambridge sub-region in summer 2021.
- 31 landlords signed up to the West Suffolk Lettings Partnership following our efforts to work more closely with local partners and provide incentives to landlords.
- 1232 households who were at risk of homelessness were provided with advice and support.
- In 2021 to 2022, Barley Homes, the council's wholly-owned development company, built its first two developments. All 37 homes at the Westmill Place development in Haverhill have been sold, with 30 per cent of them being affordable homes.
- 14 units of temporary accommodation for former rough sleepers were provided by the council in Bury St Edmunds with funding from the Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP), 11 of which are being delivered in partnership with Sanctuary Housing.
- An innovative personalised healthcare service has been in place for one year in partnership with the West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group, health outreach and Sanctuary Housing for rough sleepers in supported accommodation. There has been an improvement in health outcomes for clients, opportunities for holistic support and reduced demand for emergency services.
- Rough sleeper numbers reduced from thirteen to nine in one year.

## **West Suffolk Council Environmental Statement 2021 to 2022**

The pandemic has affected the council as it has other organisations globally, resulting in our offices operating with reduced occupancy. However, many services still required vehicles and equipment with staff also continuing to work in our communities. These changes to operation and occupancy are reflected in the marked decrease in environmental impacts when compared to historically reported figures.

The statement shows how we have continued to work to achieve net zero. With progress being made in areas such as electric vehicle charging provision, tree planting, and renewable energy production.

Council officers and members of Cabinet have been part of a Suffolk wide approach to tackle climate change and have also supported local businesses, voluntary groups and other organisations in their climate change efforts.

Moving forward, the council will continue to learn from the effects of the pandemic and look for further opportunities. We hope to continue to improve our performance and lock-in the benefits of the lessons learned.

- Six parks maintained their Green Flags status.
- West Suffolk Council has planted 318 trees and 560 hedge plants during 2021 to 2022.
- Energy consumption has increased compared to last year, with electricity consumption rising by 25 per cent and gas by 35 per cent, which has resulted in an increase in emissions. However, the increase in consumption can be attributed towards a phased return to our offices, an increase in the number of buildings being supplied with electricity and the move from electricity to gas to heat West Suffolk House.
- Water consumption has increased by 18 per cent compared to last year, but it has decreased by 35 per cent compared to 2019 to 2020. This has resulted in a 453 per cent drop in emissions compared to last year.
- The amount of fuel used for West Suffolk Council vehicles and equipment has increased by four per cent on last year, resulting in a four per cent increase in emissions. However, emissions have decreased by five per cent compared to 2013 levels.
- The number of miles travelled by officers and members in their own vehicles has increased by 46 per cent on last year, with emissions increasing by 43 per cent. However, the number of miles travelled is down 51 per cent compared to 2019 to 2020 and 68 per cent compared to 2010 levels.
- The percentage of all waste generated across West Suffolk Council offices that is recycled rose by nine per cent compared to last year, resulting in an

increase to 82.34 per cent. Additionally, the amount of waste generated is down 58 per cent on 2010 levels.

- The amount of renewable energy generated by West Suffolk Council projects is up 28 per cent on last year, which equates to a 138 per cent increase compared to 2012 levels. The amount of power now being generated could power 201 average homes for one year.
- 67 electric vehicles can now charge simultaneously as a result of council-installed chargers, which is up from 41 last year. These charges deliver the equivalent of 353,170 miles of power, which is up 192 per cent on last year.

## **Further information**

If you would like to know more about the achievements described in this annual report, or any of the other work and activities of the council, please contact the relevant [Cabinet member](#).

Cabinet members are often known as 'portfolio holders'. This is because each Cabinet member has a range of responsibilities, which together make up a portfolio. The areas of responsibility for each Cabinet member are included in the link provided.