

## Leader's statement

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<b>Documents attached:</b>	<b>None</b>	

### Leader's Statement – September 2022

1. It is with a heavy heart that I write this statement following the sad announcement of the death of Her Majesty The Queen. Her presence has been a constant in our lives and her dedication to public service, duty and our communities is an inspiration to us all. Her Majesty was a friend to West Suffolk and a regular visitor, especially in Newmarket, where she watched her beloved horses race. Indeed no one can be failed to be moved by the flowers left by residents at her statue by the entrance to the racecourse.
2. As, like many, I have watched the coverage of her life and have reflected on her dedication to bringing people together to improve the life of others. A motto I think we all try to live by for our communities and something we continue to strive to do as a council. Indeed, I hope to highlight briefly in this statement some of the work which reflects this ethos.
3. I want to thank all councillors and our staff who have been involved in supporting our communities to mourn, reflect and show their respects. Delivering the national protocols on this sad but momentous occasion has required much planning and close working with a range of partners, especially parish and town councils. From organising the reading of the Proclamation of Accession, to providing books of condolence to places to lay flowers this has been a solemn duty performed to the best of all abilities.
4. It seems wrong today to write a glowing statement on our many achievements so I will keep this brief and hope to update you more at our meeting. Indeed, you will have read in our regular newsletter a long list of positive achievements, initiatives, and issues we are dealing with, so I do not intend to go over those here.
5. However, I hope you will forgive me though, if I do update you on just a few issues and news that we have.

### Rural England Prosperity Fund

6. We have welcomed the news of additional funding from Government which was announced on 3 September. This is a national £110 million pot of capital

funding for rural councils to support rural businesses and countryside communities – known as the Rural England Prosperity Fund or the 'Rural Fund'.

7. Subject to submitting a successful application to DEFRA by 30 November 2022, West Suffolk Council will receive a share of the funding of over £753,701, to cover the period 2023-2025.
8. The funding is a top up to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and is a successor to EU funding in a similar way to UKSPF. The aims of the fund are to:
  - “support new and existing rural businesses to develop new products and facilities that will be of wider benefit to the local economy. This includes farm businesses looking to diversify; and to
  - support new and improved community infrastructure, providing essential community services and assets for local people and businesses to benefit the local economy.”
9. West Suffolk Council’s application will need to set out how it is proposed to allocate the funding locally, in line with 11 ‘interventions’, and drawing on the issues identified in the UK Shared Prosperity Fund engagement work. The funding must be used in areas the Government has designated as ‘rural’, which in the case of West Suffolk, means all areas outside Bury St Edmunds.
10. Once officers have digested the detail of the Fund process and criteria, a timetable for agreement of the council’s submission to DEFRA will be developed.

### **Mildenhall Hub**

11. By the time we have met it will be the first birthday of Mildenhall Hub officially opening. As I have already commented bringing people together for a common good was at the heart of Her Majesty’s ethos, and the same can be said for Mildenhall Hub.
12. This nationally award-winning project has now been held up by Government as an exemplar case study in the launch of its new national Property Strategy. This new Government strategy is designed to reduce taxpayer spend on buildings and drive efficiencies using the One Public Estate initiative as a basis of good practice. The Hub is being held up as a good example of this One Public Estate work, driving better outcomes for our communities, easier access to services and savings bringing greater value for money for our residents.
13. This has all been achieved by bringing organisations together to achieve a common aim. Indeed, the hub has brought together a new school, new gym, fitness studios and 3G pitch, swimming pools and sports hall, a new town library, health centre, children’s centre, Citizens Advice West Suffolk, and Job Centre. The Hub in Sheldrick Way also includes office space used by the NHS, Police, Suffolk County Council and West Suffolk Council.

## **Community Chest – Cost of Living**

14. Community groups, charities, voluntary organisations, faith groups and social enterprises only have weeks left to apply to West Suffolk Council's Community Chest fund.
15. This vital fund, which invests in initiatives that support residents' health and wellbeing, has been increased by West Suffolk Council this year to help with the cost-of-living crisis. More than £500,000 is available, up by 10 per cent on previous years.
16. The deadline for applications to the Community Chest fund is 6pm on 30 September and I would urge councillors to make sure their residents and local groups are aware of this opportunity.
17. West Suffolk Council, through Community Chest, has already invested more than £3.2 million over the past seven years in supporting community led initiatives to help our residents.
18. That includes funding for work to support and empower families dealing with trauma, the building of various support networks to offer greater community resilience, and to work to help break patterns of abusive behaviour. Initiatives to tackle loneliness, social isolation and help people feel more connected and involved with their local community, have also received Community Chest funding. Money has been invested in helping with people's physical and mental health, as well as providing advice and advocacy services and targeted community activities.
19. During the pandemic, the council worked with and supported many of these groups in their efforts to get shopping and medicine for vulnerable people who were shielding at home, as well as providing a friendly voice at the end of a phone to those who were alone.
20. Now the council is looking to support the work of many of these voluntary organisations once more, to help people through the cost-of-living crisis.
21. The minimum amount that can be applied for has also been raised from £1000 in previous years, to £2500. Councillor locality budgets can support smaller applications throughout the year. The final change to the fund sees applications only being available for funding for 2023/2024.
22. Successful grant applications will be awarded in February 2023 and paid in April 2023.
23. To apply for Community Chest funding, view the guidance and then complete the online application at <https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/community/community-grants.cfm>

## Local Plan

24. I want to thank everyone for their continued role in helping to deliver and comment on West Suffolk's Local Plan. The latest round of consultation is now finished and officers as well as members will be looking at the comments received. I am pleased to hear the engagement has gone well and elicited a range of in-depth and detailed contributions which is what this element of the process is aimed at achieving.

## Anglia in Bloom

25. I am delighted to say that West Suffolk has once again done well in the Anglia In Bloom competition reflecting immense hard work from local organisations and volunteers.
26. Again, this is a great example of communities, organisations, local councils and individuals coming together, working hard through the year, to achieve a shared aim. These beautiful floral displays not only encourage and foster pride in the places that take part but help encourage visitors and economic growth.
27. I am particularly pleased to hear Brandon has done so well, achieving several top awards. This included Gold awarded to Brandon in Bloom for their 'Queen's Jubilee Display' at The Wedge on Thetford Road. This display was also awarded best in category with Brandon taking home the trophy.
28. The Friendly Bench, located on Bury Road, took the top spot in the 'Best Garden for Special Needs' which was given for addressing loneliness.
29. I was also pleased to hear that Brandon was recognised as a 'Gold Town' as best in category for a medium town. I believe Councillor Victor Lukaniuk summed it up, and I paraphrase slightly, "we beat the big guns". I hope Councillor Lukaniuk you will pass on our congratulations to all involved and thank you for sharing your appreciation for the work the Council teams had done. This will be passed onto them, and I know they work hard too across the district with similar groups.
30. In addition, congratulations to Bury in Bloom as well as the volunteers and individuals that have put on such a great display in the town. Bury St Edmunds picked up the Gold Award at Anglia in Bloom in the Large Town category which is also hotly contested across the Anglia region.
31. It also scooped:
- Gold Award and Trophy Wildlife and Conservation Category – Bury Water Meadows Group
  - Award winner and Trophy Best Community Project 'Bury in Plume Peacock in the Park' – Crafty Foxes
  - Gold Award and Trophy in Cemeteries and Crematoria Category – West Suffolk Crematorium
  - Silver Gilt Award Parks Category – Abbey Gardens
  - Silver Award Care Homes Category – Glastonbury Court Care UK
  - Silver Award Parks Category Nowton Park

32. I think we can all agree these awards are great achievements for our communities. I know there are other 'In Bloom' groups across West Suffolk and want to say a massive thank you to them too. The dedication of bringing communities together to engender pride and community spirit in an area is something we should all applaud.
33. I look forward to seeing you all again at our next meeting when hopefully we can continue in the legacy that Her Majesty The Queen has set for us all as public servants. In addition, we look to the future and while sending our new monarch, His Majesty King Charles III our deepest condolences, we also send our support and very best wishes for his reign. Like his beloved mother we also look forward to warmly welcoming him as a continuing and regular visitor to West Suffolk.

With best wishes,

**Councillor John Griffiths**  
**Leader of West Suffolk Council**