

## Leader's statement

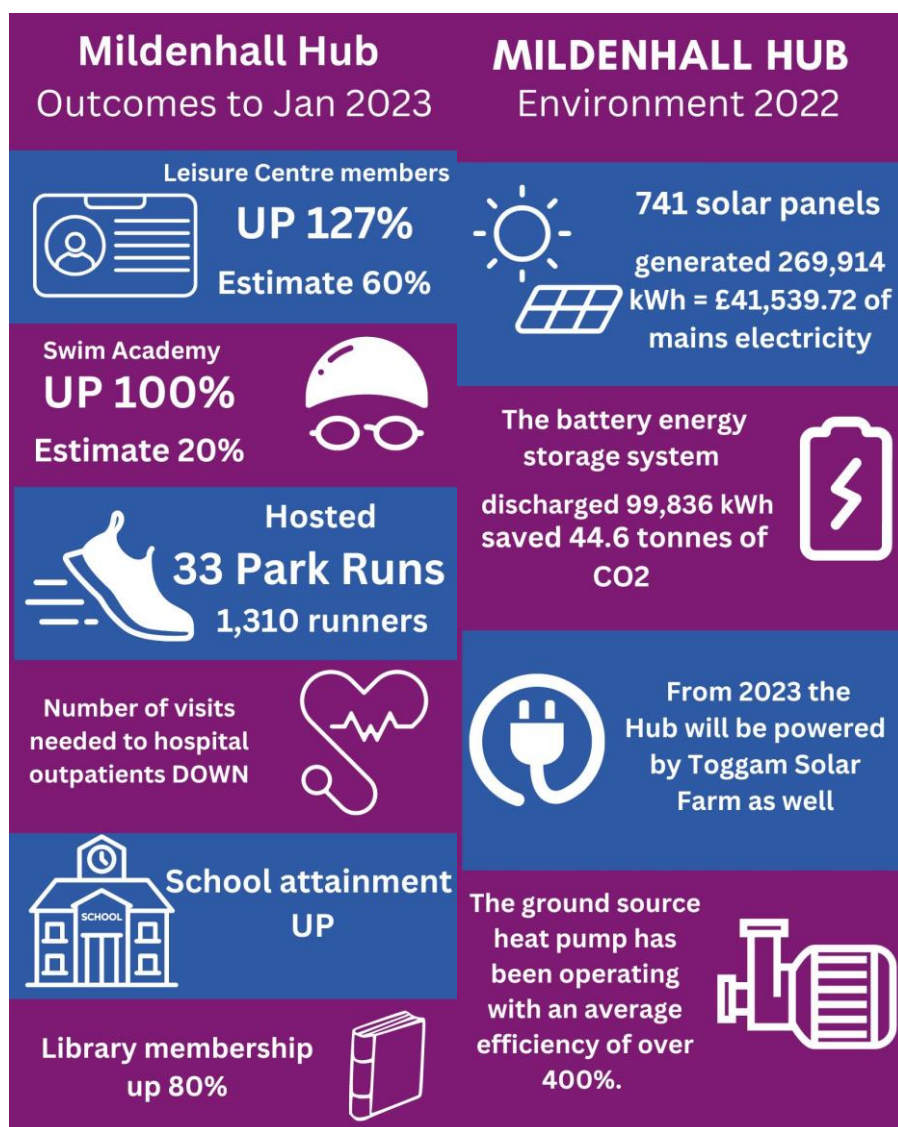
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<b>Documents attached:</b>	<b>None</b>	

### Leader's statement

1. Over some 20 years, I have written countless Leader's Statements (and updates) - first for St Edmundsbury and then West Suffolk - but this is the last one I will write for the first full term of West Suffolk Council, which was created in 2019.
2. During that time no one could have foreseen many of the issues we would be facing – most recently, the pandemic and the war in Ukraine and their consequences for us all.
3. However, whatever the challenges we have not only met them head on but, I believe, surpassed expectations.
4. Thanks for this are due to you, our officers and staff (and your and their predecessors) and we should all be proud to be part of what is now one of if not the best councils in the country.
5. Our hallmark has been not only improving and delivering high quality services but working together - and with others - to focus on and to meet the needs and aspirations of our communities and businesses. We have been ambitious, forward thinking and innovative - and broken down barriers to deliver better health outcomes, economic success and the future prosperity of the people (of all ages) we serve, while protecting the most vulnerable. At the same time, we have recognised the challenges of climate change and taken positive and effective strides in tackling this threat to enhance our unique West Suffolk environment.
6. You are of course also unique in being our first West Suffolk Council councillors. You, together with all our staff, did not hesitate despite many complex challenges and have driven forward this new authority for the benefit of our residents. The results I think speak for themselves, many of which I recently summarised and shared with you in "West Suffolk Council – Our Story So Far".
7. I will not therefore repeat this "story so far" but rather offer a few updates;

## Mildenhall Hub

8. The results of our efforts, lateral thinking and our ability to be ahead of the game have perhaps been best demonstrated in a report that recently went to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Mildenhall Hub.
9. This looked at the award-winning scheme to review whether it has achieved the strategic goals that we set for it as a council.
10. I am pleased to say the report shows that not only has it met these but, in many cases, far exceeded them; and that we are also well on our way to meet the five years break-even financial test we set.
11. Without detailing the results here, or the ten objectives now more than fully met, of the report (which I recommend to those of you who have not yet seen it) the graphic below perhaps describes what some of these look like in practice.



12. The main aim for the hub was not just to bring better facilities for Mildenhall but to improve access to services. The report proves the benefits of our working together with many partners and that we are already making a very positive difference to our residents' lives, with better outcomes in education, health and wellbeing as well as leisure participation inter alia.
13. Two integrated leisure and health pathways with NHS are in place which target frailty and pulmonary rehabilitation (which includes Long Covid). The Hub has hosted the Sporting Memories initiative for older people, the Catch 22 Suffolk Positive Futures initiative to reduce anti-social behaviour and a place-based physical activity pilot with the NHS. There is a cardiac rehabilitation programme in place using the leisure facilities while children attending the speech and language sessions also benefit by being able to go straight to the library to choose some books. The Hub is now also the fastest growing and one of Suffolk's top-ten busiest libraries.
14. I am also pleased to see school attainment is up and SEND students are able to use the conference room for exams amongst other benefits.
15. I should mention that this ground-breaking initiative certainly did not happen overnight and praise must go to those at Forest Heath who kicked off this vision over ten years ago, in 2012. That said, and alongside other hubs, this scheme was fully backed, developed and delivered firstly by the joint Forest Heath/St Edmundsbury administration and then West Suffolk Council.

### **Economic growth**

16. West Suffolk businesses are now being asked to take part in a new initiative to shape the future for the skills agenda.
17. The Norfolk and the Suffolk Chambers of Commerce are working with the Department for Education (DfE) to put employers at the heart of the skills agenda with the launch of the Norfolk and Suffolk Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP).
18. They want businesses to have a bigger say in what is needed in the workplace for today, tomorrow and the future.
19. The initiative will concentrate on a couple of key areas to run cross-cutting themes of Workforce Digital Skills and Soft Skills. They will focus on some key sectors where significant impacts can be made quickly, and are looking at agri-tech, food processing sector and climate adaptation, net zero. The Chambers have selected these key areas mainly due to the amount of work that has already taken place across Norfolk and Suffolk but also as they tie in with work underway at many of our education providers.
20. As these Council papers are being published, a workshop is being held in Bury St Edmunds on 15 March (at the Guildhall between 5.30pm and 7.30pm).

### **Warm Homes initiative**

21. Commendable efforts are being made across Suffolk to ensure the retrofit of energy inefficient homes.

22. While the Warm Homes Suffolk initiative and recent additional Suffolk Public Sector Leaders funding is ensuring that the most vulnerable households receive support while tackling environmental challenges, the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership is helping to address the shortage of trained installers in the county.
23. Almost 50 people have now been trained in retrofitting through Skills Bootcamps, providing a much-needed boost to the workforce needed for the delivery of warmer homes.
24. A Fuel Poverty Retrofit Team will also work with residents living in energy inefficient properties to address funding issues and ensure a consistent supply of installers.
25. This extension of the Warm Homes Suffolk Scheme is expected to lead to around £50 million worth of work and deliver almost £4.8 million in combined potential savings for households through insulation, air source heat pumps and the replacement of single glazing.

### **Makers Markets**

26. The popular monthly Makers Markets are returning to Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill, and Newmarket.
27. This was a new and now popular initiative brought in by West Suffolk Council to further encourage more people into our towns and to our markets as well as supporting local and growing businesses.
28. Throughout the year, shoppers are treated to a variety of stalls selling homemade products such as ceramics, sweet treats, hot food, woodcraft, original artwork, homeware, needlecraft, candles, and soap.
29. The first Makers Market of 2023 was held in Bury St Edmunds on Sunday, 5 March from 10am to 3pm with over 70 independent businesses and stalls for shoppers to explore.
30. Haverhill's Makers Market will start on Saturday 1 April from 9.30am to 3pm. Shoppers can also visit the regular Haverhill street market, with stalls offering everything from fresh produce to children's toys.
31. Newmarket's first Makers Market of 2023 will be held on Saturday 8 April from 9.30am to 3pm. The regular Saturday market will also be running, where many stallholders have been trading for over 40 years.

### **Energy Bills Support Scheme Alternative Funding**

32. Hundreds of West Suffolk residents who have previously not benefitted from the £400 of Government support towards their energy bills, can now claim money.
33. I would like to mention in passing that West Suffolk Council was one of four councils nationally who piloted the new scheme for just over three weeks

ahead of it being launched nationally on 27 February. We are also the first council in the UK to go live and put through applications for payment.

34. The Government now recognises that residents who don't directly pay their energy supplier have not been able to get the same support as others because they:
- pay for energy through a landlord, housing manager or site owner
  - live in a park home, houseboat or off the electricity grid. launched the Energy and that is why it launched the Energy Bills Support Scheme Alternative Funding (EBSS Alternative Funding).
35. Those identified by the Government as likely to be eligible for EBSS Alternative Funding include residents living in:
- Temporary or supported accommodation
  - Residential park homes
  - Care homes
  - Caravans or mobile homes
  - In a home that has a heat network communal or district heating
  - On a boat
  - Some tenants of private and social rented homes
  - Homes on a private electricity supply
  - Farmers living in domestic farmhouses
  - Other off-grid households.
36. While we are doing what we can to identify and write to people to encourage them to apply, residents shouldn't wait. If they think they are eligible, or know someone else in West Suffolk who may be, they can visit the Government webpage at [www.gov.uk/ebss-alt-funding](http://www.gov.uk/ebss-alt-funding) which has more information including how to apply.

### **International Women's Day**

37. As I write this, I want to reflect it was International Women's Day on Wednesday, 8 March. This also perhaps serves to remind us there is still more to be done in terms of equality which is, of course, something West Suffolk Council is very conscious of, and you will see in our papers that we have a report on the gender pay gap.
38. Nationally, in 2019, the average pay for full time female employees was 8.9 percent lower than for full time male employees. So, it is good to be able to report that for the period April 2021 to March 2022, our figures here at West Suffolk Council show that, while the numbers are close, on average female employees are actually likely to earn slightly more. This is a good position to be in, but we are not complacent and will continue to be consistent in ensuring that all aspects of people management and access to development opportunities and promotion are fair and transparent.

### **Additional stops at Kennett station**

39. I am delighted to say that Greater Anglia has agreed that from May there will be an additional stop at Kennett station in the morning and afternoon. This will greatly help youngsters travelling to school and people going to work and is something that has been lobbied for by us and others over many years. I want

to thank all those involved, not just in our council, but partners and local councillors too that have lobbied and worked with Greater Anglia to achieve this. Thanks also goes to Greater Anglia for listening to the arguments and changing their timetable etc.

### **Coronation**

40. I know many of you, like me, have been working with local communities and awarding locality funding to help celebrate the coronation of His Majesty King Charles III. We have information on our website that we will keep things updated to help individuals, local groups and organisations mark the occasion [His Majesty King Charles III's Coronation \(westsuffolk.gov.uk\)](https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk) and are directly working with other partners to help our communities celebrate.

### **And finally...**

41. I want to say a heartfelt thank you to you and our staff for the tremendous support, professionalism and dedication you have given and shown for our communities and businesses in West Suffolk over the last four years. We have delivered ground-breaking initiatives as well as our high quality services across the board in very challenging times which make a real difference every day to our residents. I believe we have also laid strong foundations to build an even better and more prosperous future for our lovely towns, villages and rural areas in West Suffolk..... thank you again all and I look forward to seeing you at our meeting.

With best wishes,

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