

Leader's statement

Report number:	COU/WS/23/009	
Report to and date:	Council	20 June 2023
Documents attached:	None	

Leader's Statement

1. As this is my first Leader's Statement following the election, I am taking this opportunity to thank all candidates and councillors for standing. To do so shows your passion for championing and improving life for your communities and I applaud your willingness to do this – a hard job in the eye of public scrutiny when this may be your first time.
2. It would also be remiss of me not to thank the outgoing administration and the former Leader, Councillor John Griffiths in the way they worked collectively for the good of the whole district, taking views from across the chamber. Something I will touch on later.
3. Secondly, I am sure you will all join with me in thanking all the staff that have welcomed us as councillors and who ably carried out the elections, especially with all the new guidance around photo ID that I know they have had to take on board.
4. This administration, working together in partnership, is ready to face the challenges and seize the opportunities ahead. We recognise the needs and differences all our communities have that make West Suffolk such a great place to live, work and play. We will embrace these differences and I will outline how this administration will work with you and your communities to bring improvements, better understanding and engagement with your communities.
5. At the heart of this will be the Cabinet who I announced at the Annual Meeting but I want to repeat here.
 - Deputy Leader Councillor Victor Lukaniuk

Cabinet portfolio holders:

- Planning: Councillor Jim Thorndyke
- Housing: Councillor Richard O'Driscoll
- Resources: Councillor Diane Hind
- Families and Communities: Councillor Donna Higgins

- Leisure: Councillor Ian Shipp
- Growth: Councillor Indy Wijenayaka
- Operations: Councillor David Taylor
- Governance and Regulatory: Councillor Gerald Kelly

6. They bring a range of talent and experience be that as previous councillors or from their professional careers. But importantly, I look forward to working not only with Cabinet, but with all councillors, to really benefit the people and businesses of West Suffolk.

My invite to you

7. West Suffolk is such a vibrant area with many different communities and issues. As such, I am announcing my offer to all councillors the opportunity for either myself or my cabinet to meet and visit you in your ward so we can fully discuss and understand these issues and meet local organisations.
8. We serve the whole of West Suffolk and through local knowledge, will develop and improve upon our unique heritage from our towns and rural areas to our environment, businesses, country parks and history.

Priorities

9. These are early days. I and the Cabinet are meeting staff while also talking to councillors and partners. As this continues more detailed proposals and projects will be coming forward in the coming weeks as this new administration sets out its agenda. But I want to briefly outline the priorities that will set the framework for this.
- Sustainability and the climate change crisis – We are in a climate crisis and everyone has a part to play in tackling this. West Suffolk Council will be far more ambitious in its work around sustainability and net zero for the whole of the district. This mean putting our own house in order as well as helping support and encouraging West Suffolk communities and businesses do more themselves. We will learn from others and put in the right facilities or information so we all can do our bit to tackle this urgent global issue.

That is why Cabinet has agreed* the formation of a new West Suffolk Environment and Sustainability Working Group to review the progress that West Suffolk Council has made in delivering its action plans and move to Net Zero. It will also make recommendations to Cabinet on West Suffolk Council's future role in protecting and enhancing the environment, both in the way in which it carries out its operations and through wider work with our local businesses and communities.

- Families and communities (cost of living) – The cost of living and rising prices continues to be a challenge for the council and for local communities. I believe we have a moral duty to help where we can. We and other public services have done a great job of working with partner organisations to be a safety net for the most vulnerable. But it's so much better if we can help people from falling in the first place. While our communities, councils and organisations have rallied to provide food banks it is damning that they are needed in the first place. We need put more effort into our work with partners and other

organisations to try and break the cycle and lobby our MPs and Government to find better solutions.

- Growth for all – The economic wellbeing of West Suffolk is vital and has to bring benefits for all. We are the gateway from Cambridgeshire and the rest of the country into Suffolk as well as being part of the UK economic engine that is the Cambridge Sub Region. West Suffolk, its businesses and communities, all need to benefit from this and the area must play its role in the success of the local and national economy.
- Housing – making sure we have the right development in the right places to support healthy communities and businesses is vital. People need affordable homes with the right facilities to have healthier and more enriching lives with the ability to access jobs and new skills. This new administration will look at ambitious options for the delivery of homes that not only meet the needs of our communities but will be more than just boxes but homes for people. Some of this is in the control of national government but we need to use what powers we have and where we don't have them to call on the Government and influence national change.

Debate not hate

10. I am pleased that all West Suffolk leaders are working together to sign this council up to the Local Government Association Debate Not Hate campaign. In today's world there are far too many faceless keyboard warriors or people forgetting the difference between critical debate and personal attacks. Indeed, national and local politicians have seen the consequences of this spill into physical assaults. This should not be tolerated; it is not good for democracy or encouraging people to become councillors and champion their area.
11. Residents expect us not to engage in petty politics but to act in a responsible and credible way to tackle the issues they face every day. I expect within the cut and thrust of debate there will be disagreements and strong points put across on all sides. This is welcome, this is normal and through this I hope we can collectively achieve better outcomes. But this can be done with courtesy and professionalism to get the right result for West Suffolk communities.

Making our voice heard

12. From local issues such as the state of the highways to nationally fairer funding for public services and easier access to health services - there are many issues that we will champion and lobby for. We will work with other councils and partners to make sure they know these are priorities that must be solved in order for West Suffolk communities and businesses to truly have the opportunity to thrive.
13. Equally we will look at strengthening the way we engage with residents and businesses to help them understand the issues faced in West Suffolk, what the Council is doing and have their say. In addition, we will look at ways to support and empower all councillors in your work in engaging and communicating with your communities.

Mutiny In Colour

14. I want to end this first Leader's Statement by also paying tribute to some of the good work that has gone before, and the way councillors have worked together. One such project I was delighted to be at the launch of is the Mutiny In Colour Modern Art exhibition which is being held through work with partners in Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill and Newmarket. This is one of the largest and most exciting exhibitions of contemporary art happening in the UK this summer which some of us got a sneak peek at in Newmarket. It includes a world first with the bringing together of seven-life sized high-res images of Banksy's work in Ukraine. The council and its partners have kept ticket prices low and the exhibition is being held in venues across West Suffolk. Not only can people enjoy great art and visit our beautiful area but importantly have the chance to donate to an appeal to help the people of Ukraine. Many of which have joined our communities and become our friends and neighbours in recent months. I would urge you all to come join the mutiny.

Councillor Cliff Waterman Leader of West Suffolk Council

**Note that Cabinet will consider the proposal to establish the new West Suffolk Environment and Sustainability Working Group on the evening of Tuesday 13 June 2023 which will be after the publication of this Leader's Statement on the Council's website. Should Cabinet not agree the proposal, an update will be provided at the Council meeting on 20 June 2023.*