

Leader's statement

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Leader's Statement

1. It may have been the summer, a time of putting up your feet and going on holiday, but I know councillors – no matter on which side of the chamber you sit - have been working hard during this time for their communities.
2. Equally our staff have been working to keep delivering services, including during the recent record temperatures. Our residents have been very understanding too and have helped where they can, for instance getting their bins out early. Thank you everyone for your dedication to keeping West Suffolk running smoothly.
3. Since my last statement there has been much work and conversation between the new administration with partners and other councillors as we look at the reviews we are carrying out and how we are going to deliver on our priorities.
4. We have also been looking at the financial challenges which are putting massive burdens on public services and in some instances have overwhelmed other authorities.
5. I want to reassure West Suffolk communities we are not in that position. But like our residents who are suffering under the cost-of-living crisis we must take prudent steps to ensure a tight hold on our finances against current and future challenges.

Western Way

6. I will not dwell on this until we hold the debate in Council and as I write this I am looking forward to the discussion in Cabinet. However, I am clear that we have to make decisions on the challenges we are facing now and not in the past and make sure we have certainty over the council's finances. Providing leisure services and better health and wellbeing outcomes is a priority for us and I believe we can achieve that while ensuring we have certainty and reduced risk for our budget. I believe the solution being proposed means we can achieve this while protecting ourselves from reduced national funding, soaring inflation and the increased cost of living and materials. This means we can do more with our money and be in a good financial position.

Talking to our partners

Health

7. I have been meeting with partners and health colleagues for the Community Connect event hosted here in Bury St Edmunds with the West Suffolk Alliance. This was a great opportunity to hear about the good practice that is going on in West Suffolk and a showcase of initiatives we and partners are involved in to deliver.
8. The good health of our communities is not just the responsibility of our GPs or hospitals – the Alliance and West Suffolk Council knows we all have a role to play. Not only is prevention better than cure but also to make sure the right support is there in the community when people come out of hospital they can continue to live and stay well in their communities. This is not only better for those who need care, makes stronger more resilient communities and makes the public service pound stretch further to do more good. This is needed even more during this time of cost-of-living crisis. The Alliance recognises this and that by sharing the same aim we can break down boundaries – both organisational and geographic.

Business

9. I was really pleased to talk at the West Suffolk Forum meeting held by the Suffolk Chamber of Commerce at the EpiCentre in Haverhill. A vibrant town, like the rest of West Suffolk, which is full of good prospects for economic growth.
10. I spoke of how West Suffolk Council has a clear vision – a vision of stable and sustainable growth and economic prosperity for our communities and businesses. I talked about West Suffolk being in an ideal position to be part of the national economic engine and an active part of the Cambridge Sub-region. But we also need to deal with the challenges of moving people, goods and data about freely – such as improving rail and transport links like the A14 and A11.
11. This can only be achieved by working together and we started a vital two way conversation with businesses about the future direction for West Suffolk. My main message was we are listening, and we want to work and engage with you. This conversation is helping us further understand the opportunities and challenges businesses face and they are learning the issues we have too. We are using this to help form the right course of action and then deliver speedily. I also want to ensure that we not only provide the right measures and facilities for businesses themselves but vitally for their employees. Making sure that West Suffolk remains not only a great place to have a business but to live in.

Business Festival

12. As such I am looking forward to the Business Festival, which is in its thirteenth year, and runs from 2 October to 13 October under the theme of 'the future of work.' With over 20 events across the two weeks this year's festival includes a showcase of the amazing West Suffolk College XR lab, a session on AI, future

supply chain opportunities at Sizewell C, a young traders' market, skills escalator days which bring school children into contact with industry, as well as many more events, finishing with a bang at the Bury Free Press Business Awards.

Business Support

13. We, along with Suffolk's other councils (Babergh District Council, East Suffolk Council, Ipswich Borough Council, Mid Suffolk District Council and Suffolk County Council) as well as the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), have partnered to invest in business support and development services, including advice to reduce carbon emissions.
14. By working in partnership, over £1 million will be invested in Suffolk business support to March 2025. The initiative has combined local authority funding of £632,047 from the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, which aims to improve pride in place and increase life chances across the UK by investing in communities and place, supporting local business, and people and skills. In addition, £153,407 will come from Suffolk County Council and £300,000 from New Anglia LEP.
15. Suffolk's economy is primarily composed of micro and small enterprises, accounting for 98.1 per cent of all businesses. The partners recognise that to unlock their potential, tackle challenges and significantly boost economic growth, these businesses require targeted support.
16. The funding will see a team of experienced business advisers from the New Anglia Growth Hub offer a free, impartial service across Suffolk. The services will be accessible to any business that is located within Suffolk, including social enterprises. There will be a range of support and advice offered, including business resilience, business growth, access to funding and marketing.
17. Additionally, an intensive three-month programme providing wrap-around support will be available to small and medium-sized businesses looking to scale up.

Opportunities

18. Two jobs, skills and wellbeing fairs are being held this autumn in West Suffolk for people to attend, where local businesses and training providers will be advertising their vacancies and courses.
19. Mildenhall has already hosted the first fair on Wednesday 13 September at The Jubilee Centre. The second fair will be in Bury St Edmunds on Wednesday 4 October, 10am to 12.30pm, at The Apex as part of the West Suffolk Business Festival.
20. Both fairs offer the opportunity to meet and speak with representatives from an abundance of local employers and providers, all in one place. West Suffolk Council's support for these events is part of our drive to support our residents in learning new skills and finding employment. The council is also keen to ensure that our area continues to punch above its weight across all

employment sectors, and these fairs help our local businesses who share this ambition to recruit to their workforce.

21. Both fairs are being delivered in partnership between West Suffolk Council and the Department for Work and Pensions.

Changing Places

22. I am pleased to hear that upgraded conveniences with Newmarket's first Changing Places facility are now open following the £330,000 upgrade of the Guineas public toilets.
23. The toilets have been refurbished and new facilities have been added including the town's first public Changing Places toilet with external access. Councillor Hind visited the new facilities and I am sure can tell you more about the scheme. The project is not only about helping people access Newmarket and attracting more visitors but making facilities more energy efficient and kinder to the environment.
24. The project has been run in close association with the Guineas and other town centre organisations, to minimise disruption. I'm pleased that residents and visitors to the town for the autumn meetings will be able to use these high-quality facilities.

Cost-of-living

25. I would like to remind you all that by the time you read this and we meet for Council there will only be days left for people to apply for the Community Chest fund.
26. The council is again looking to help projects that will also support residents through the continuing cost-of-living crisis. Our local organisations are vital in supporting our communities through this financial crisis which is set to get worse.
27. West Suffolk Council opened applications for its annual Community Chest on 12 July with more than £460,000 made available to invest in work that will support West Suffolk residents. Community initiatives to help residents' health and wellbeing and support people through the cost-of-living crisis, only have until 6pm on Friday 29 September to apply.
28. Charities, community groups, voluntary organisations, faith groups and social enterprises can all apply.

Environment

29. Doing more to tackle climate change has always been a priority for me and the new administration. It is not just about what the council can do ourselves but how we encourage our communities, businesses and local organisations.

30. Which is why I am pleased to see proposals to pick up the pace and do more with residents and businesses to reduce carbon emissions and tackle climate change will be heard at Cabinet.
31. I am in the unenviable position of writing this before a decision is made by Cabinet so I cannot say what has been agreed but hopefully the plans will be in front of you at Council. I do want to thank the Environment and Sustainability Working Group, which includes councillors from across the chamber, for their work on this and understanding the vision and goal we want to achieve.
32. The proposals include a range of initiatives to help people and businesses do more, save money and reduce the council's own impact on the environment.
33. You will have also seen from the papers the proposal for a £1million decarbonisation fund to support third-party organisations to reduce their net power consumption. The first call on this fund would then be for parish and town councils to upgrade their remaining streetlights to LED in order to obtain the environmental benefits.
34. While the Council was on track to meet its commitment to be Carbon Neutral by 2030 it needed to accelerate schemes to stay on target.
35. The recommendations include a new action plan building on the consistent progress being made towards carbon net zero on the council's own activities and highlights some specific opportunities:
 - Businesses to be supported to meet the challenge of increasing utility costs and reduce carbon emissions through a business plan to increase the scope of the Solar for Business scheme which installs fully funded PV systems on organisations roofs.
 - Residents are to be supported with:
 - Housing to be helped to become more energy efficient by ensuring the Housing Strategy addresses environmental performance, by investigating further support for the current Warm Homes Suffolk scheme and by using the opportunities in the emerging Local Plan to enhance the performance of new homes, including a minimum biodiversity net gain.
 - Communications campaigns to engage effort on reducing waste, increasing recycling of what waste is left, promoting local food production and increasing biodiversity.
 - The council's activities will come under tighter environmental focus. Decisions councillors are asked to make will be assessed for environmental impact, and paperless working and the use of virtual or hybrid meeting will continue.
 - The council's leading role in renewable energy would be expanded to investigate opportunities in wind and hydrogen energy sources.

36. I think there are excellent steps forward in bringing more pace and action to our ambitions to tackle climate change. It's our intention to keep the Environment and Sustainability Working Party going even after this report, so that it can both review our performance on a regular basis and also keep developing ways in which we can improve our performance in this area. Full details of this will be brought to council for approval very shortly.

Mutiny In Colour

37. If you have not seen it, I would urge you to join the 18,000 people who have visited or bought tickets for the Mutiny In Colour exhibitions.
38. There's not long left to enjoy the work of internationally renowned contemporary artists including Banksy, in this exciting exhibition which had spanned three West Suffolk towns.
39. It is currently on at our own Moyse's Hall Museum in Bury St Edmunds, and the National Horseracing Museum in Newmarket with each venue offering different, exciting pieces to see, all in their own unique setting.
40. The exhibition, which launched in early June, has been supported by John Brandler of Brandler Galleries who owns much of the artwork displayed.
41. The exhibition has now left Haverhill Arts Centre where more than 100 works of modern art were on show.
42. It is the final month to see Mutiny at Moyse's Hall and the National Horse Racing Museum when the exhibition ends on Sunday, 1 October. Moyse's Hall is the only place that you can see the original Suffolk Banksy, Sandcastle Child while the NHRM is the only place where people can see life-sized, high-resolution photographs of all seven pieces of Banksy's work in the Ukraine, much of which has since been destroyed in the war there.
43. I want to thank everyone who has been involved in bringing and hosting this internationally important exhibition. It has meant people from across West Suffolk and beyond could experience art that would normally be curated in this way in major cities. At the same time it has brought visitors and supported local businesses.

MPs

44. I will be meeting with local MPs to raise issues brought up at the meetings we have had already over the summer as well as challenges and barriers that are keeping West Suffolk from reaching its full potential. There are many things Government and its agencies can do or unlock to help our area including certainty over funding, making clear announcements on what councils will be expected to do about new recycling and waste policies as well what budget will come with that. We all feel frustrated about having to wait for the long overdue government legislation to be brought in to allow us to reduce waste and improve recycling. Rest assured I will be making our case in the strongest terms.

45. There are many ways that our influence as a council extends beyond our day to day activities, and I just want to give a little flavour here of some of the things I am doing as leader. As a council we are a full member of the East of England Local Government Association, and I have been appointed as chair to the Local Government Employer Panel and the associated Regional Joint Council, one of the three boards which the organisation runs.
46. There are also many local organisations which we work with, and I have been meeting as many as I can over the past months and will continue to do so.
47. I'd also like to take this opportunity to say a few words about the new Cabinet. The administration has been in office for just over the famous 100 days now, and in that time, we have been able to deal with the challenges we have to face, set our priorities and put the building blocks in place to deliver our vision.
48. For example, the decision to discontinue using glyphosate-based weed killers which was taken last year with the overwhelming support of council has led to problems with weeds and untidy verges. Cabinet has taken this task on, and a small working group under Councillor Shipp's leadership is now working on durable and workable solutions to make sure we are properly managing our green areas.
49. In addition to strengthen the role of scrutiny and oversight by councillors we have reinstated the regular quarterly meetings between the leader, chief executive and chairs and vice chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny and Performance and Audit Scrutiny committees. The first one for many a long year was held last month.
50. There is also an enormous amount of work being put in behind the scenes by all the members of Cabinet, and you will see the evidence of this in the coming months and years. To recognise this enormous amount of work, we have now instigated a Cabinet and Leader's Office in this building, and at any given time you are likely to find myself or members of the cabinet in there.

And finally....Christmas

51. It feels too soon to talk about Christmas. However, I would like to take this opportunity to say a magical, memorable experience is set to entertain families of all ages in West Suffolk this Christmas.
52. As I type this, we are on our way already to selling nearly 1,000 tickets just in the first week for the event set in an all-weather auditorium in the stunning Abbey Gardens. Children and adults alike will enjoy an Oscar winning modern retelling of Peter and the Wolf, accompanied by live performances from the fantastic Orpheus Sinfonia.
53. Ticket prices have been kept low and children under five can go for free, although they must have a ticket and be accompanied by an adult. In total, 16 performances will take place from Thursday 7 December to Sunday 10 December, with screenings each day at 1pm, 3.15pm, 5.30pm and 7.45pm.

54. Peter and the Wolf is being organised by West Suffolk Council as part of the Christmas in Bury St Edmunds partnership of events and activities as well as our drive to support our communities, businesses and town centres.

I hope to see you all there.

Councillor Cliff Waterman
Leader of West Suffolk Council