
Council



St Edmundsbury
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Title of Report:	Leader's Statement	
Report No:	COU/SE/15/020	
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I won't repeat in detail the message I gave at the annual council meeting at the Apex, other than to say again how honoured I am to have been re-appointed as Leader and to reiterate my hope that all councillors can work together over the next four years to meet the challenges facing our community. I am enjoying getting to know the many new councillors who joined us in May, as well as being delighted to see so many familiar faces. We should also not forget the contribution of those councillors who left us at the last election.

This is not only my first leader's statement of the new council term, but also the first under our new joint constitution. It is a new system in many respects, and we will need to refine it through practice. There are many ways that councillors, and the public, can keep themselves informed of what is on the horizon, or decisions made. As well as the usual agendas, reports, decisions plans and notices, we now have an open forum at Cabinet meetings and portfolio holders are being invited individually by Overview and Scrutiny to report on their activities and invite questions.

I know from the special council meeting which considered the constitution in detail that there was a genuine wish from councillors to work differently. I have already seen that appetite in the Cabinet's early conversations with the two scrutiny committees about their work programmes and their wish to help Cabinet (as a critical friend) to deliver our strategic plan for West Suffolk.

The scale of that task was also evident in the long Cabinet agenda on 23 June, some of which has fed through to the agenda for this meeting too. We are trying to manage huge pressures for growth in our wonderful Borough to the benefit of our community and local businesses, and also to work more efficiently, commercially and innovatively ourselves as an organisation. While this is exactly what our electors expect us to do, it won't always be easy, or non-controversial, and we will need to continue to make the kinds of bold decisions we took over the previous four years. Our close partnership with Forest Heath will be a key part of that.

We saw from the numbers of people who came to our Cabinet meeting for the debate on the West Suffolk Operational Hub that proposals for change can cause anxiety in our communities too. For that reason, Cabinet was pleased to support more consultation and information gathering before any planning application is submitted.

Looking more widely across the whole of Suffolk, I am pleased that Suffolk is a leader in the field of getting more powers devolved to rural areas, not just the cities and metropolitans. Suffolk Public Sector Leaders have all signed up in principle to working together on solid proposals for devolution to the Government in September.

This isn't just about getting more powers for St Edmundsbury, or West Suffolk, it's about making sure decisions are made at the most appropriate level. Whether that's at regional, county, district, parish or even more local community levels we have to encourage Whitehall to devolve responsibilities – and the funding that goes with them – to the level where we can make the most of local opportunities. Local power means quicker responses, without waiting for so many different organisations to take decisions and juggle budgets.

Nobody will be surprised by the huge challenges ahead but I am confident that between us – West Suffolk's councillors and staff – we have the skills, and the will, to tackle them on behalf of our families and communities whom we all serve.

Councillor John Griffiths
Leader of the Council