

West Suffolk Risk Management Approach and Principles

What is 'risk'?

We define risk as being uncertainty of outcome, whether relating to 'positive' opportunities or 'negative' threats / hazards.

How has risk been dealt with in the past?

In the past, risk has sometimes been used as a reason not to do something or to keep doing something instead of stopping it: the greater the risk, the less likely we have been to act. This approach has often allowed risks to blind us to opportunities, and the lack of a clear evidence base for our assessments of risk has prevented us from having an open debate about risk.

Why do we need to change the approach?

As West Suffolk changes direction, begins to operate in new ways and seeks new opportunities, the type of decisions we are now having to make will feel unfamiliar, more complex and could carry greater risks. We therefore need to be more confident in our approach to identifying, appraising, managing and monitoring risk.

What is the new approach?

Our new, positive approach to risk is based on context, proportionality, judgement and evidence-based decision making that considers risk on a case by case basis and is documented at all stages. We will be joined-up in our decisions, and will draw on one another's skills and experience to take responsibility for sound and reasonable decisions about the use of public funds, avoiding a blame culture when things go wrong.

How do we make the approach a reality?

Our approach to risk is based on these core principles –

- **A positive approach.** We will find creative solutions rather than ruling things out.
- **Contextual decision making.** We will set each decision about risk in context. Circumstances are constantly changing and we will make each decision on its own merits.
- **Informed risk-taking.** Our decisions will be based on an appropriate range of information and evidence about the implications of both taking action or not taking action. This will include historical data from a variety of sources about what has and hasn't worked before.
- **Proportionate.** The size or importance of the decision will be reflected in the level of scrutiny and assessment of risk that we will apply and the level within the organisation at which the decision is taken.
- **Decision risks vs delivery risks.** The risk of proceeding with a particular course of action may be reduced by the *way in which* we implement the decision.
- **A documented approach.** We will record and keep our clear and justifiable rationales at key stages in the decision making process where appropriate for example, lessons learnt or accountability. We will record the different perspectives, issues and solutions that were considered, as well as any legal issues discussed.
- **Continuous improvement.** We will continue to learn from, reflect on and critique the way in which risk has been dealt with in our decision making. We will take time to share experiences and learn from one another, and to be self-aware about our successes and failures. This will help us to increase in our understanding and our confidence for taking decisions in the future.