



Forest Heath & St Edmundsbury councils



**West Suffolk**  
working together

**DRAFT**

**West Suffolk**

**Strategic Plan**

**2016-2020**



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**FOREWORD FROM THE LEADERS OF THE COUNCILS**

[INSERT FOREWORD ENCOMPASSING KEY MESSAGES LISTED BELOW - EARLY 2016]

- West Suffolk is now established as a shared service, collaboration is now the baseline.
- We are moving forward to integration and devolution.
- Work to implement the Transformation Challenge Award project and developing the Suffolk response to the devolution agenda.
- We continue to work hard to improve life in West Suffolk through:
  - channel shift;
  - service redesign - Business Process Re-engineering;
  - increased asset utilisation, including further co-location;
  - driving the commercial agenda;
  - becoming an investing authority;
  - changing approaches to housing;
  - helping communities to help themselves;

work on local projects such as Eastern Relief Road and RAF Mildenhall.

**Councillor John Griffiths**  
Leader  
St Edmundsbury Borough Council

**Councillor James Waters**  
Leader  
Forest Heath District Council

## **Our strategic plan for 2016-2020**

Joint working and sharing of services is now the culture in both councils and shared West Suffolk priorities are being worked towards to ensure that joint benefits can be gained by delivering services differently while also cutting costs. We are now in an environment where the delivery of our priorities is as much about integration with other sector bodies as it is about collaboration between our councils.

### **A changing financial position**

We have seen a number of changes to the way local government is financed in recent years including a significant reduction in our funding from central government. This has led to a range of new local government financing mechanisms which are now embedded in the Councils' overall funding framework. For example:

- a share of business rates growth is now retained locally by the councils, and by a Suffolk "pool";
- the councils set council tax discounts locally, rather than eligible residents receiving council tax benefit;
- the New Homes Bonus; and
- the funding of Disabled Facilities Grants from the Better Care Fund.

It is expected that each of these mechanisms will continue into 2016-2020, although each is subject to further changes by central government. This change in approach has been built into the new plans set out in this document and is outlined in more detail in our Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2016-20, which is available here [[insert hyperlink](#)].

### **A changing environment for local authority governance**

We are involved in a programme of Suffolk-wide working, supported by funding from central Government, through the Transformation Challenge Award. This work aims to integrate work by public sector partners across the Suffolk "system" so as to improve the lives of Suffolk residents and achieve savings for council tax payers. As well as working with those within the public sector "system", we are also continuing to work in partnership with local communities, enabling them to support themselves.

[ADD MATERIAL ON THE SUFFOLK DEVOLUTION OFFER AND ANY MATERIAL ON FINANCIAL ASPECTS OF DEVOLUTION IN EARLY 2016]

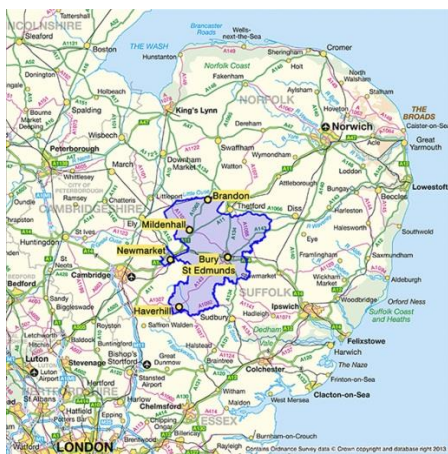
### **Working in partnership**

Partnership working and relationships with bodies outside the two councils is still a key theme for enabling the councils to deliver our priorities. The Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board, the West Suffolk Partnership, the Local Enterprise Partnerships, the Suffolk Public Sector Leaders Group, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Suffolk and Community Action Suffolk are all well established, and have set their own work programmes and priorities.

We have made sure the actions and projects in this document complement these partners' emerging agendas, as well as taking into account those of others such as the county council, parish and town councils, schools and colleges, housing providers, chambers of commerce, leisure trusts and many more.

Many of the priorities set out in this plan rely heavily on the work of other organisations, both existing and new, for their success, and so we have taken the opportunity to refresh our own plans in order to ensure we are working to support what others in Suffolk are aiming to achieve and that they are able to support us in achieving our vision and priorities.

## About West Suffolk



The area of West Suffolk comprises the council areas of Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury, two predominantly rural districts in the heart of East Anglia. Well-connected with London, the rest of East Anglia and the Midlands, West Suffolk is a safe and comparatively prosperous place in which to live. It also has some beautiful and accessible countryside areas, including grassland, heath and forest.

Forest Heath has three main market towns, Newmarket, Mildenhall and Brandon; St Edmundsbury has two: Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill.

Bury St Edmunds, the largest settlement in West Suffolk, has been a prosperous town for centuries, with people drawn to its market and Georgian architecture, shops, leisure and cultural facilities.

Newmarket, the 'home of horseracing' has more racehorses, trainers, stable staff, stud farms and racing organisations in and around the town than anywhere else in the world, with racing accounting for a significant number of local jobs.

Haverhill, Mildenhall and Brandon expanded significantly in the 1970s due to the construction of new housing to accommodate families moving as part of the Greater London Council's expansion programme.

Today, West Suffolk has a thriving, diverse economy, embracing a number of business sectors. These include tourism, food and drink, life sciences and advanced manufacturing. The local economy is also influenced by a significant number of military personnel based at both USAFE and RAF bases throughout West Suffolk.

In all of West Suffolk's towns and our rural areas, many of our residents benefit from a good quality of life. However, some areas have suffered more than others from the impact of the economic downturn, and others are facing issues such as rural isolation, a lack of skills or qualifications amongst young people, an ageing population with some in need of more specialist housing or care, poverty or health deprivation.

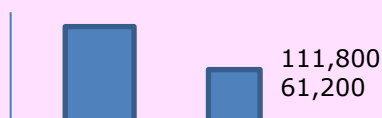
The charts on the following pages give a snapshot of the characteristics of West Suffolk. To see more statistics about life in West Suffolk, visit [www.suffolkobservatory.info](http://www.suffolkobservatory.info)

## West Suffolk – Key Statistics

N.B. The diagrams in these Key Statistics pages will be significantly improved through the graphic design process as in the 2012-2014 version.

### Population<sup>1</sup>

In 2013 the population of Forest Heath was 61,200 and St Edmundsbury was 111,800.



### Educational Attainment<sup>2</sup>

Educational attainment in SEBC was 2% below the England average for 5+ A\*-C at GCSE in state schools in 2012. In FHDC results were 21% below average.

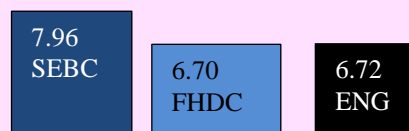
### Population Growth

The population of both districts is growing rapidly. Between the 2001 and 2011 censuses the population increase was:

13.06% SEBC  
7.54% FHDC

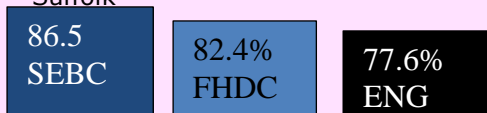
### House Prices<sup>3</sup>

The ratio of median earnings to average house prices was near the national average in FHDC in 2013 but above the national average in SEBC in 2013



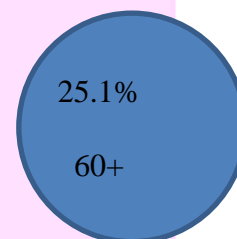
### Economic Activity<sup>4</sup>

The Proportion of economically active people aged 16-64 is high in West Suffolk



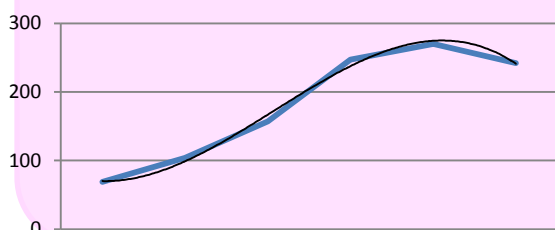
### Ageing Population<sup>1</sup>

West Suffolk has an Ageing population. In 2013 25.1% of the population were aged over 60, compared to an England average of 22.7%



### Homelessness<sup>5</sup>

The number of homeless has recently fallen, but it remains above previous levels.



### Life Expectancy<sup>6</sup>

Life expectancy in West Suffolk is above the average for England and Wales

	SEBC	FHDC	ENG
M	81.5	79.8	79.4
F	84.3	84.4	83.1

## Rural Life

40% of the population of West Suffolk lives in a rural area, compared with 18% of the population of England.

[add a visual representation]

## Economic Sectors<sup>7</sup>

In 2013 workers in Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury were employed in the following sectors:

	SEBC	FHDC	ENG%
Manufacturing	11.7%	9.5%	8.5%
Construction	3.3%	6.4%	4.3%
Services	83.5%	82.6%	86.1%

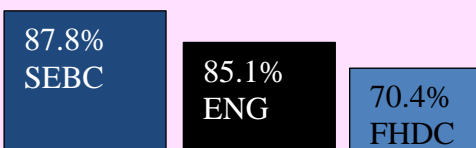
## Health and Wellbeing

The 2011 census told us the percentage of people who considered themselves to be in very good health.

47.3% SEBC  
48.1% FHDC

## Qualifications<sup>8</sup>

In 2014 the percentage of 16-64 year olds with NVQ level 1 and equivalent qualifications was:



## COUNCIL GOVERNANCE

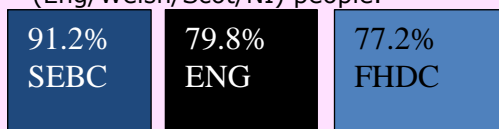
Since 2012, both Councils have been governed by a Cabinet model. Under Shared Services, more joint decision making arrangements and panels have emerged.

## Controllable Spend<sup>5</sup>

[Insert later]

## Ethnicity

Forest Heath is the most ethnically diverse district in Suffolk and has the smallest percentage of White (Eng/Welsh/Scot/NI) people.



## Political Make-Up<sup>5</sup>

[See pie charts on next page]

### Sources:

All data is from 2011 census, unless noted

1 ONS Annual *Mid-Year Population Estimates 2013 [REVISED]*

2 DFE, *GCSE and Equivalent results* (via LGA inform)

3 ONS, *Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings*, and HM Land Registry (via DCLG)

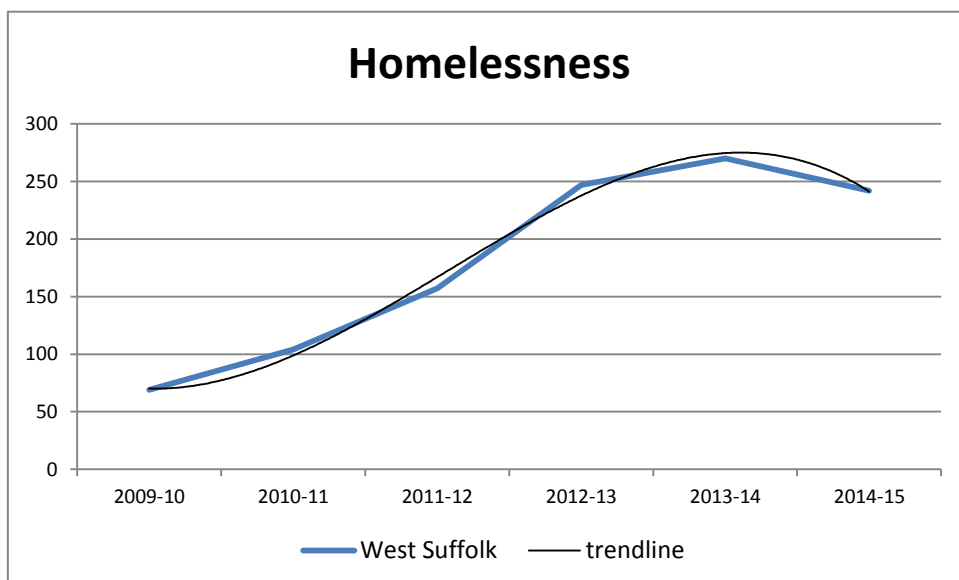
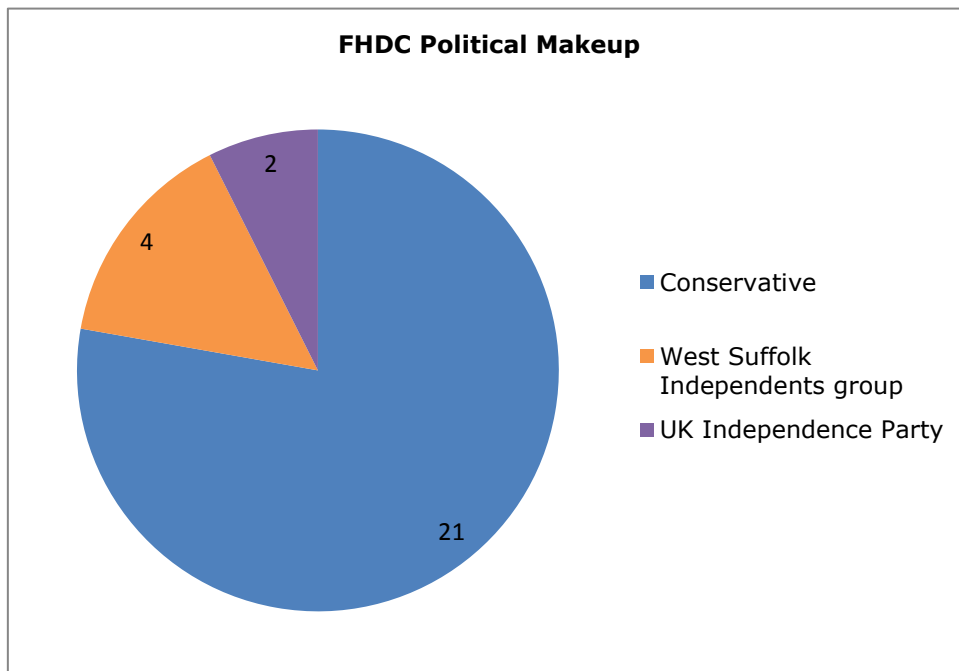
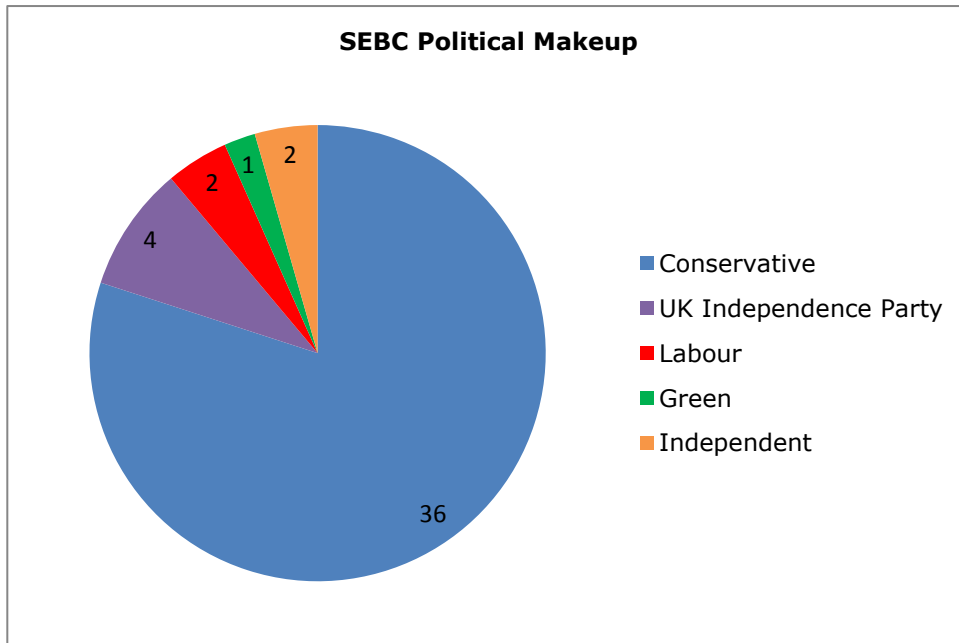
4 ONS, *Annual Population Survey Apr 2014 – Mar 15*

5 West Suffolk

6 ONS, *Life expectancy at birth and at age 65 by local areas in the United Kingdom, 2006-08 to 2010-12*



7 ONS, *Business register and Employment Survey*  
 8 ONS, *Annual Population Survey Jan – Dec 2014*



## **A vision and priorities for West Suffolk**

Councillors and staff at Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury are committed to working together across West Suffolk to achieve a shared vision.

### **Our vision:**

*"Working together, Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury councils will support communities to create the best possible future for people in West Suffolk."*

In practice, this will mean focusing our efforts and resources in those areas which are the biggest priorities for West Suffolk over the next four years.

### **Our priorities**

*Priority 1: Increased opportunities for economic growth*

*Priority 2: Resilient families and communities that are healthy and active*

*Priority 3: Homes for our communities*

The following pages of this document explain in more detail what we want to see achieved in relation to each of these priorities over the next four years. Many of the areas covered relate to commitments made in other policy and strategy documents, for example, local plan documents, housing and economic development documents or locality specific plans.

More detail about how each of the priorities, projects and actions will be achieved will also be set out in business plans produced by each of the service areas within the West Suffolk councils.

**West Suffolk’s Priorities – in detail**

<b>Priority 1: Increased opportunities for economic growth</b>	<b>Priority 2: Resilient families and communities that are healthy and active</b>	<b>Priority 3: Homes for our communities</b>
<p>We want to see:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. beneficial growth that enhances prosperity and quality of life;</li> <li>2. existing businesses that are thriving and new businesses brought to the area;</li> <li>3. people with the educational attainment and skills needed in our local economy; and</li> <li>4. vibrant, attractive and clean high streets, village centres and markets.</li> </ol>	<p>We want to see:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. a thriving voluntary sector and active communities who take the initiative to help the most vulnerable;</li> <li>2. people playing a greater role in determining the future of their communities;</li> <li>3. improved wellbeing, physical and mental health; and</li> <li>4. accessible countryside and green spaces.</li> </ol>	<p>We want to see:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. sufficient housing for current and future generations, including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- more affordable homes;</li> <li>- improvements to existing housing;</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. new developments that are fit for the future, properly supported by infrastructure, and that build communities, not just housing; and</li> <li>3. homes that are flexible for people’s changing needs.</li> </ol>

## **Achieving our priorities: West Suffolk's ways of working**

Much of the activity to achieve our vision will be done through the work that our customers expect from us each day: for example, emptying the bins, looking after our car parks, checking up on food hygiene and running elections. More details about our plans in these areas can be found on our websites under each section of the council's business.

But some of the things we need to do are not part of the day-to-day services that we offer, and require specific actions to be taken. These projects or actions are set out on the following pages.

The work of local councils is changing. The next four years will require us to change the way work in response to the drive from central government around savings, integration and devolution as well as changes taking place in the communities that we serve.

For example, we will be continue to work to **embed more commercial behaviours in our organisation**, and in some cases, taking on new commercial opportunities to ensure we are ready for any future reductions in government funding.

We will continue our work with our residents and communities to ensure we are **supporting them to help themselves**, rather than simply providing the same services in the same ways that we have always done. Our focus will be on prevention rather than cure.

In order to thrive, our communities need to be supported by strong local economies. As our priorities set out, **promoting local economic growth** and **making sure everyone has a safe and warm home to live in** will continue to be at the heart of our work.

All of these approaches may require **councillors and staff alike to learn new skills and ways of working**. Decision making being informed by evidence will require councillors and staff to acquire skills around the use and analysis of data and insight. They will also require us to build different relationships with a range of other groups and agencies, and most importantly, the families and communities who live in West Suffolk.

Over the period of this plan, we will need to **strengthen existing relationships** with other parts of the public sector, for example, Suffolk County Council, **and forge new relationships** that allow us to influence other areas of public policy, to provide support to groups who want to make changes to the places where they live, and to listen to our residents and respond to their views. The work around the **Suffolk-wide working**, supported by funding from central Government, through the Transformation Challenge Award will be a key stream for delivery of this partnership working.

Alongside all of this, we will continue to offer our residents the **highest possible level of customer service**. We will continue to redesign our services

to ensure that we improve the way in which customers can access our services, particularly our online offer.

In everything we do, we will be guided by our **commitment to promoting equality and diversity**, by seeking to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advance equality of opportunity; and foster good relations between different people through all aspects of our work across West Suffolk.

Where appropriate, we will assess the impact of our policies and projects as they develop, in order to ensure they support our commitment to equality and diversity. We have also identified some particular areas within the priorities on page 10 where focused action is needed to improve equality of opportunity for people in West Suffolk. These are shown below.

Through the achievement of these **equality objectives for 2016-20**, we want to see:

1. People with the educational attainment and skills needed in our local economy.
2. A thriving voluntary sector and active communities who take the initiative to help the most vulnerable.
3. Improved physical and mental health and wellbeing.
4. Homes that are flexible to meet people's changing needs.

## **Projects and actions to achieve our priorities**

### **Priority 1: Increased opportunities for economic growth**

We want to see:

1. growth that enhances prosperity and quality of life;
2. existing businesses that are thriving and new businesses brought to the area;
3. people with the educational attainment and skills needed in our local economy; and
4. vibrant, attractive and clean high streets, village centres and markets.

#### **Why is this a priority?**

Economic growth is at the heart of our vision for West Suffolk. A strong local economy is essential to underpin all of our other ambitions to improve the quality of life for people in West Suffolk, including the most vulnerable. West Suffolk has a relatively strong economy, but like all parts of the UK, needs to continually renew itself to remain competitive, attracting new enterprise to the area, expanding into new sectors, and making sure the local economy offers employment opportunities.

Economic growth is not just an activity but a philosophy that will affect the decisions made across a wide range of the councils' business. More details about West Suffolk's plans for promoting economic growth can be found in the Six Point Plan for Growth and Jobs available on our website [www.westsuffolk.gov.uk](http://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk)

#### **What will we do to achieve this priority?**

- Engage with businesses, especially local ones, to understand their needs and provide support ranging from improving access to procurement opportunities, helping them to export products and services and supporting business expansion.
- Create the right conditions for growth, ensuring sufficient employment land, supporting incubation (growing small businesses), assisting in implementing broadband and digital connectivity, providing small loans or grants or signposting other support agencies.
- Promote West Suffolk by developing an investment brand, setting out our Unique Selling Point, marketing and hosting a business festival.
- Create a brighter future for market towns through supporting town centre organisations, improving market provision, town centre regeneration projects and master planning.

- Build skills, attributes and employment opportunities through apprenticeship support, ensuring business skills needs are met. West Suffolk will demonstrate good practice, for example through taking on apprentices and offering work experience placements.
- Develop growth projects in key sectors of the economy including; tourism, food, drink, agriculture, life sciences, biotechnology, advanced manufacturing, financial services and digital and cultural creative industries.
- Create effective West Suffolk development management procedures, including an effective approach to planning enforcement.
- Develop waste infrastructure in West Suffolk working with Suffolk Waste Partnership.
- Promote energy and water efficiency measures to West Suffolk businesses.

We will be working on the following key projects:

**[INCLUDE CASE STUDIES ON:**

- Eastern Relief Road.
- A11 Corridor – development opportunities.
- RAF Mildenhall and RAF Lakenheath – Impact of changes on West Suffolk.
- Suffolk Business Park.
- Haverhill Research Park.
- West Suffolk Operational Hub
- Mildenhall Hub.
- FHDC Local Plan/Single Issue Review.
- Public Service Village II.
- Master Planning developments
- Newmarket Vision and Newmarket BID

**TO BE ADDED IN EARLY 2016 TO ENSURE THEY REFLECT THE CURRENT POSITION]**

## **Priority 2: Resilient families and communities that are healthy and active**

We want to see:

1. a thriving voluntary sector and active communities who take the initiative to help the most vulnerable;
2. people playing a greater role in determining the future of their communities;
3. improved wellbeing, physical and mental health; and
4. accessible countryside and green spaces.

### **Why is this a priority?**

Many of our residents face challenges on a daily basis associated with their economic, health, family or social situation. When these challenges become crises, it has become the usual practice that public bodies will step in and try to provide solutions. However, public sector staff and financial resources can no longer support this way of working so we need to help our communities to rely less on us and more on themselves. Working in partnership with Suffolk County Council and the West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group, the West Suffolk councils are investing in a new approach over the next four years. This will focus on preventing crisis situations arising by building resilience within families and communities, instead of only being there to pick up the pieces when things go wrong. This preventative work will take a number of forms, but will in the main focus on working with residents to help them to support themselves and the people around them. More details about our plans are included in our forthcoming West Suffolk Families and Communities Strategy available on our website.

### **What will we do to achieve this priority?**

- Work within our towns and villages to listen to local communities and to support them in developing their assets (both physical and social) to tackle local issues.
- Grow the capacity in our communities to help them to build on existing networks and, where appropriate, to branch out into new areas, for example, supporting money management advice services or helping new parents.
- Offer advice and support (including financial) to communities to take forward innovative projects that provide real and tangible improvements for local residents, including through community commissioning approaches.
- Develop a specific approach to working with families that, where necessary, challenges existing approaches to working separately with children or adults.



- Provide advice and support to families to enable them to respond to the changes introduced as part of the Welfare Reform agenda.
- Assess the need for sports facilities across West Suffolk and promote future provision where needed
- Develop a strategy for the refurbishment or replacement of our leisure assets, including increasing capacity for future growth.
- Investigate the establishment of a Destination Management organisation to co-ordinate tourism-related activities.
- Support the work of the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board and the Healthy Ambitions project, particularly around childhood obesity and Type Two diabetes.
- Review our local community assets, including play provision.
- Take a more commercial approach to our leisure and cultural offer.

We will be working on the following key projects:

**[INCLUDE CASE STUDIES ON:**

- Working with health and social care colleagues to develop a more preventative approach to customers with complex needs.
- Expanding the leisure offer at West Stow County Park.
- Transferring community centres to community groups.
- Work in localities as a Community connector supporting people/groups to connect with each other for common purpose and support.
- Investigate the establishment of a Destination Management organisation to co-ordinate tourism-related activities.]

### **Priority 3: Homes for our communities**

We want to see:

1. sufficient housing for current and future generations, including:
  - more affordable homes;
  - improvements to existing housing;
2. new developments that are fit for the future, properly supported by infrastructure, and that build communities, not just housing; and
3. homes that are flexible for people's changing needs.

#### **Why is this a priority?**

Maintaining a good supply of housing that meets people's changing needs is a top priority for West Suffolk. Good housing has close links to health and wellbeing so we need to ensure that people have access to housing in order to help them thrive and also stimulate economic growth. But as with many areas around the country, housing in West Suffolk is expensive, especially in the private rented sector, so we need to continue to try and secure more new developments in the area, or to revitalise empty properties, in order to improve affordability. However, we also need to learn the lessons from places where new development has not been properly supported by infrastructure such as schools, shops and roads, or has compromised on quality or adaptability. New development in West Suffolk needs to meet the needs of our residents now and into the future and to build new communities, not just houses. More detail about future developments in West Suffolk is available in our draft planning policies, available on the planning pages of our websites. We say more about our plans for improving all aspects of West Suffolk's housing in our Housing Strategy.

#### **What will we do to achieve this priority?**

Develop and implement a place-shaping approach to planning that is flexible and responsive and supports our strategic priorities, including:

- put in place up to date planning policies, including finalising the Core Strategy Single Issue Review (housing) and site allocations for Forest Heath, and Vision 2031 for St Edmundsbury.
- use the Major Projects Team to oversee development in West Suffolk
- use our lobbying and planning role to ensure new development contributes to infrastructure provision through our use of Community Infrastructure Levy and/or planning obligations (s106

Bring about an increase in the supply of housing for current and future generations, including a mix of size and types of housing, and sufficient affordable housing to meet future needs through:

- using our policies and plans to support the numbers of new homes needed and ensure there is enough land on which to build them.
- identify and deliver new housing funding models.
- provide advice and support to owners of empty properties to bring homes back into use, taking action where appropriate.
- ensure housing is recognised as a core part of other partners' agendas (e.g. Local Economic Partnerships, Health and Wellbeing Board and the West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group).
- support private sector and registered providers to build new homes and improve existing ones.

Provide advice and support to vulnerable households to alleviate fuel poverty.

Working with registered providers and private landlords to ensure that properties are put to best use and are allocated to those most in need.

We will be working on the following key projects:

**[INCLUDE CASE STUDIES ON:**

- The Core Strategy Single Issue Review (housing) and site allocations for Forest Heath, and Vision 2031 for St Edmundsbury.
- Use of Community Infrastructure Levy and/or planning obligations (s106 agreements).
- Housing Company proposals as they develop.
- Innovative housing solutions to support those in need, such as Lake Avenue, Bury St Edmunds.
- Implementing new Home Improvement Agency arrangements.
- Developing innovative ways of integrated working, such as the Suffolk Co-ordination Service and the work with the Design Council.
- New homes and improved existing ones.]

## **Resourcing our priorities**

[A pie chart and figures showing FHDC and SEBC's expenditure for 2014-15 will be included here, once they have been prepared for the Council Tax Information]

Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury are separate councils, with their own individual budgets and requirements. However the councils' response to managing their budgets over the period 2014-16, as set out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy [[insert hyperlink](#)] will focus on the following themes:

1. Aligning resources to the West Suffolk strategic plan and essential services;
2. Continuation of the shared service agenda and transformation of service delivery;
3. Behaving more commercially;
4. Considering new funding models (e.g. acting as an investor);
5. Encouraging the use of digital forms for customer access; and
6. Taking advantage of new forms of local government finance (e.g. business rate retention).

## **Measuring our progress**

We will use our performance management framework to track our progress through the life of the strategic plan. This framework covers monitoring the performance of individual members of staff; business plans for each area of the councils' business; budget monitoring; and regular reporting to the Joint Leadership Team (senior management) and the Performance, Audit and Scrutiny Committee (PASC).

Councillors on PASC will receive regular, publicly available, reports on progress in meeting the goals set out in this plan and our annual reports will give a fuller update of how we are getting on.

The West Suffolk councils will use this performance information to reflect on how we can continuously improve, and achieve even greater value for money for council tax payers.



**Forest Heath**  
District Council



*St Edmundsbury*  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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District Offices  
College Heath Road  
Mildenhall IP28 7EY  
Tel: 01638 719000  
Email: [info@forest-heath.gov.uk](mailto:info@forest-heath.gov.uk)

St Edmundsbury Borough Council  
West Suffolk House  
Western Way  
Bury St Edmunds IP33 3YU  
Tel: 01284 763233  
email: [stedmundsbury@stedsbc.gov.uk](mailto:stedmundsbury@stedsbc.gov.uk)

**Chief Executive:** Ian Gallin  
Tel: 01284 757001 / 01638 719632 email: [ian.gallin@westsuffolk.gov.uk](mailto:ian.gallin@westsuffolk.gov.uk)

**Links to partner organisations**

[www.stedmundsbury.gov.uk/partnercontacts](http://www.stedmundsbury.gov.uk/partnercontacts)  
[www.forest-heath.gov.uk/partnerorganisations](http://www.forest-heath.gov.uk/partnerorganisations)