

Borough Councillors Annual Report 2017/18

Listed below are some of the highlights of 2017/18

- We are on our way to creating a new **West Suffolk Council** after receiving support from the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in February 2018.
- We are a step closer to delivering better school and leisure facilities for our growing population of residents in and around Mildenhall after the **Mildenhall Hub** was approved by Forest Heath District Council's Development Control Committee.
- We planned to invest **£1.5 million in sporting facilities in Haverhill** using the council's Leisure Investment Fund.
- We celebrated the first birthday of **Toggam Solar Farm** in August 2017. During the year, the solar farm generated 11,682MWh of electricity, bringing in £1.2 million of income and £308,000 net income.
- The Bury St Edmunds **Eastern Relief Road** officially opened in September 2017, unlocking a 67-hectare area for business development.
- We purchased the **former Post Office and DHL buildings in Bury St Edmunds** as part of our long term investment plan to help generate income and support the future delivery of public services.
- Our **legal service**, shared between four Suffolk councils (Babergh, Forest Heath, Mid Suffolk and St Edmundsbury) had a successful first year and came in on budget.

We opened a **winter night shelter** from December to the end of March to help the most vulnerable when temperatures plummeted. We also **expanded our housing options team** to help meet the increased demand on the service

The vision and priorities that underpins the work of the council are set out in the West Suffolk Strategic Plan. A new strategic framework was published in December 2017 covering 2018-20.

As I reported last year our **3 main priorities** remain the same.

1. Increased opportunities for economic growth.

We recognise that we cannot work in isolation and what happens on our borders affects us all. Whether it is our major transport links or working with the local enterprise partnerships to increase investment in our Borough.

Working with Suffolk county council and Suffolk Chamber's No More A14 delays in Suffolk campaign two funding bids were submitted to Highways England for improvements to A14 junctions 37, 43, 44 and the A11 at Fiveways. A funding decision is expected in 2019

The Eastern Relief Road is attracting inward investment to the Suffolk Business Park. The foundation of the new Treatt building is underway, this is a major investment in our area by an expanding international business and rather than relocate elsewhere they have chosen to stay in West Suffolk building a new Headquarter facility on over 10 acres on the Suffolk Business Park.

Small Business grants. Grants of up to £1500 can be awarded to help new businesses or those still within their first year and in 2017/18 eight grants have been awarded. A wide variety of businesses including an electric car technology business and a lamb charcuterie enterprise.

West Suffolk Greener Business Grants for energy efficiency improvements. This year 12 businesses have accessed this grant and between them invested £34,000 into energy efficiency improvements which will result in total annual savings of £8,129 through their energy bills.

Across West Suffolk we own over 350 industrial, commercial or retail units. We have experienced a growing demand from businesses and during 2017/18 new leases have been secured in 11 properties which are expected to generate a combined total annual rental income in excess of £120,000.

In addition we own approximately 400 operational properties and assets. This coming year we shall be undertaking a strategic review of how we manage land and property assets to set out our priorities for the next 5 to 10 years.

Developing staff. We currently have 32 apprentices working towards an apprenticeship qualification. Four out of five apprentices who completed their programme this year have been offered employment within the Council. Of our current workforce 49 started their careers as an apprentice with West Suffolk Councils.

2. Resilient families and communities that are healthy and active

A total of £593,264 Community Chest grant funding was awarded to voluntary groups and organisations across West Suffolk in 2017/18 in addition to our Rural Initiatives Grant and our locality budgets. I have been pleased to fund a variety of local projects with my locality grant.

East Town Park, the Abbey Gardens, Nowton Park and West Stow country park have all retained their Green Flag awards in 2017. We were also successful in the Anglia in Bloom completion with our partner Bury in Bloom and are through to the National finals later this year.

We installed new play areas in Howe Road Haverhill, Severn Road, Oakes Road and Bedell Close Bury St Edmunds.

We were successful in our application for an Arts Council Grant and received £108,000 which will be used for improvements to our museums. We have started installing Info-active software in Moyses Hall so that entire collections can be accessed along with details on various research data.

We have supported two new health projects this year. A social prescribing pilot in Haverhill. This two year pilot aims to combat the high percentage of GP appointments which are for social needs rather than medical. It aims to give people support to cope with anxiety and low mood through socialising with community groups and help structure their lives to improve wellbeing. In Barrow

the Buurtzorg nursing team has begun a trial with funding of £200,000 from the Transformation Challenge award together with matched funding from the 4 key partners, West Suffolk Hospital Trust, Suffolk County council and West Suffolk CCG. The team will focus on prevention and early intervention with mainly elderly clients.

Homes for our communities

St Edmundsbury has a complete and up to date Local Plan. Our vision document 2031 allocates 11,480 homes for the period 2012-2031. Forest Heath Local Plan is at an advanced stage of preparation and the site allocations were submitted to the Secretary of State in March 2017 the examination was held in September and the council is waiting for the Inspectors report.

Between 2012 and March 2017 1,613 dwellings have been completed in St Edmundsbury and 1,655 across Forest Heath. We continue to work with registered providers and private developers to secure affordable housing with 254 built in 2017/18 to maintain our target of 30% affordable units.

In response to concerns over the size of some new properties being built in West Suffolk the council approved a technical guidance note setting out the minimum space standard it expects housing developers to build. In due course this will be introduced as a policy in the Local Plan when it is revised.

Bringing empty homes back into use. We continue to take a pro-active approach to the challenge of empty homes in West Suffolk. In addition we work with landlords to improve standards in the private rented sector. The Housing and Planning Act gives councils the option to impose civil penalty fines, rent repayment order and banning orders for non-compliance with certain housing offences as an alternative to taking a prosecution for the worst landlords. We will be enforcing the new sanctions which are due to be approved this month. That said, in West Suffolk we generally have good landlords.

We currently have 215 HMO's on our inspection programme, the majority of which are up to standard, although some are not managed particularly well. We have a risk rated inspection programme with high risk properties inspected every 6 months. In 2018/19 we will be bringing in extended licensing for 300 more HMO's. During 2017/18 we accepted 241 homeless cases compared with 238 in 2016/17. The most common reason for homelessness across West Suffolk is the termination of a tenancy in the private rented sector. This emphasises the importance of early interventions, something that the Homelessness Reduction Act, which came into force in April 2018, seeks to address. We spent a net total of £40,088 on bed and breakfast accommodation down from £86,677 in 2016/17. We have invested in further temporary accommodation to be run with partners to reduce our reliance on bed and breakfast. We set up a temporary night shelter with support from Havebury which catered for up to 16 rough sleepers keeping them safe and warm with access to shower facilities during this cold winter it also enabled them to engage with support services.

Civil Parking enforcement. Considerable effort went into working with partners to agree the introduction of civil parking enforcement. Unfortunately the latest letter from the secretary of state for transport has announced that the Parliamentary timetable means that it will not be possible for the legislative order to be passed for our deadline of April 2019. This is incredibly disappointing and we continue to lobby for this to be agreed by 2019.

Locality budget. I have been pleased to support our villages with £2,500 locality money in the following ways. Rougham playing field repair of play equipment £500. Stanningfield community association Fun on the Green £150 and storage facility at village hall £500. Bradfield St George village hall purchase of a projector £300 and funding towards bonfire night £350. Bradfield St Clare village hall emergency repairs £800.

Finally **3 major issues** have dominated our work this year.

Single council. Plans to create a new West Suffolk council were supported by the Secretary of State for communities in February 2018. Work is progressing to ensure this is in place for the 2019 elections. There will be an overall reduction in the number of councillors from 74 to 65. It is quite a challenge but I am confident our staff and councillors will make it a smooth transition for our residents.

Boundary review. This year our boundary review has coincided with the move to a single West Suffolk Council and the reduction in overall numbers of councillors will mean a new set of wards. Each councillor will represent 2056 (+/- 10%). Due to the limited time constraints between the new council being created and the May 2019 elections, it has been necessary for the Councils together with the Ministry for Communities and The Boundary Commission to develop a set of ward proposals. This must be submitted by 4th May 2018. However, this still provides opportunities for communities to input into the process with the Boundary Commission and the final warding pattern will be their decision. Residents will remember that the Rougham Ward changed after the last review and encompassed Stanningfield and Bradfield Combust. Once again it is going to be a difficult ward to agree to given our boundaries with Mid Suffolk and Babergh.

Managing our finances. Our medium term financial strategy highlights the change in relationship between central and local government through the increase in local funding from business rates, council tax and other revenue streams with a reduction in central government grants. The Government's revenue support grant will be phased out by 2019/20. Despite this the Council were able to recommend that there was no increase in The Borough's element of council tax for 2018/19.

Finally, I would just like to thank you for all your hard work and commitment to our parishes. It is a real pleasure to attend village events and a privilege to represent our villages, thank you for your continued support.

Sara Mildmay-White

