

West Suffolk Council's
Strategic Priorities
2024-28

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Foreword from the Leader and Deputy Leader

Our ambitious vision and priorities, outlined in this document, are designed to make sure West Suffolk Council continues to address the needs of our communities and of future generations, and that the voices of local people are at the heart of shaping what we do.

We are proud to represent and champion West Suffolk and share a strong commitment to serving all residents, communities and businesses, addressing common challenges and improving prospects and quality of life for all.

Our vision is that:

Working across West Suffolk, we will support the district to flourish by focusing on the delivery of:

- **affordable, available and decent homes**
- **environmental resilience**
- **sustainable growth**
- **thriving communities**

Our plans will enable more people to find the right home in the right place in West Suffolk, with opportunities to improve their health and wellbeing. Through our work with partners, residents will be able to gain the education, skills and jobs they need to succeed. Our work will also help grow a sustainable economy that supports existing and new businesses. At the same time, we want to preserve what we currently have that is good – stunning countryside areas and parks, and communities who support one another.

We are committed to listening to people from towns and villages across West Suffolk, and from all backgrounds, to make sure our decisions are shaped by their knowledge and experience. Over the coming months and years, we want to hear about the needs and aspirations of local communities, and to work together on shared solutions that make a real difference. More about our plans for engaging are set out later in this document.

We also recognise that communities rely on us getting the essentials right. It is vital that we carry on delivering, in ever-challenging financial times, high-quality services that residents and communities rely on every day. Which is why this also forms an essential part of the council's strategic priorities and how we ensure fair, thriving and sustainable future for West Suffolk.



Cllr Cliff Waterman
Leader of West Suffolk Council

Cllr Victor Lukaniuk
Deputy Leader of West Suffolk Council

A shared way forward

– making our plans together

In this document, we set out the vision, priorities and values that drive everything we do. But it will be the voices of our ward councillors, residents, businesses, communities, partners and other stakeholders that will shape the detail of what is delivered over the next four years.

It is vital that local residents' insights, perspectives and experiences of life in West Suffolk are at the heart of our development work, feeding into our all of our policies and plans.

We will gather this insight through surveys, meetings, drop-ins and other engagement – both digital and face to face - and we will work together to design solutions to local issues and seize opportunities for improvements.

We will be establishing councillor-led advisory panels during 2024, building on the success of the Environment and Climate Change Reference Group and with the aim of ensuring broad input to policy-making from across the council. These groups will cover:

- environment and sustainability
- towns and high streets
- health
- the horse-racing industry
- transport

These advisory panels of councillors will be led by the relevant Cabinet member, and will engage with residents and stakeholders, as well as taking account of the best-available evidence.

Our wider engagement activity over the coming months will also include:

- developing our strategy for housing
- engaging with stakeholders on our Local Plan which sets out the location and nature of future development in the district
- families and communities – locality-based initiatives
- reviewing our working relationships with towns, parishes and other community groups
- our policy on street trading
- future policy on taxi licensing
- the five yearly review of our gambling policy
- plans for improving our town and village high streets and town centres, including markets
- a range of strategic growth projects
- how to provide support for the most vulnerable to pay Council Tax

We will act on the insights we gather through this engagement and report back on how this has shaped our decision-making. The council will also take the issues raised and ensure West Suffolk's needs and ambitions are heard at the regional and national level.

About West Suffolk: current challenges and opportunities

The priorities in this document are focused on responding to the issues and challenges we face, while building on the strengths of our local area.

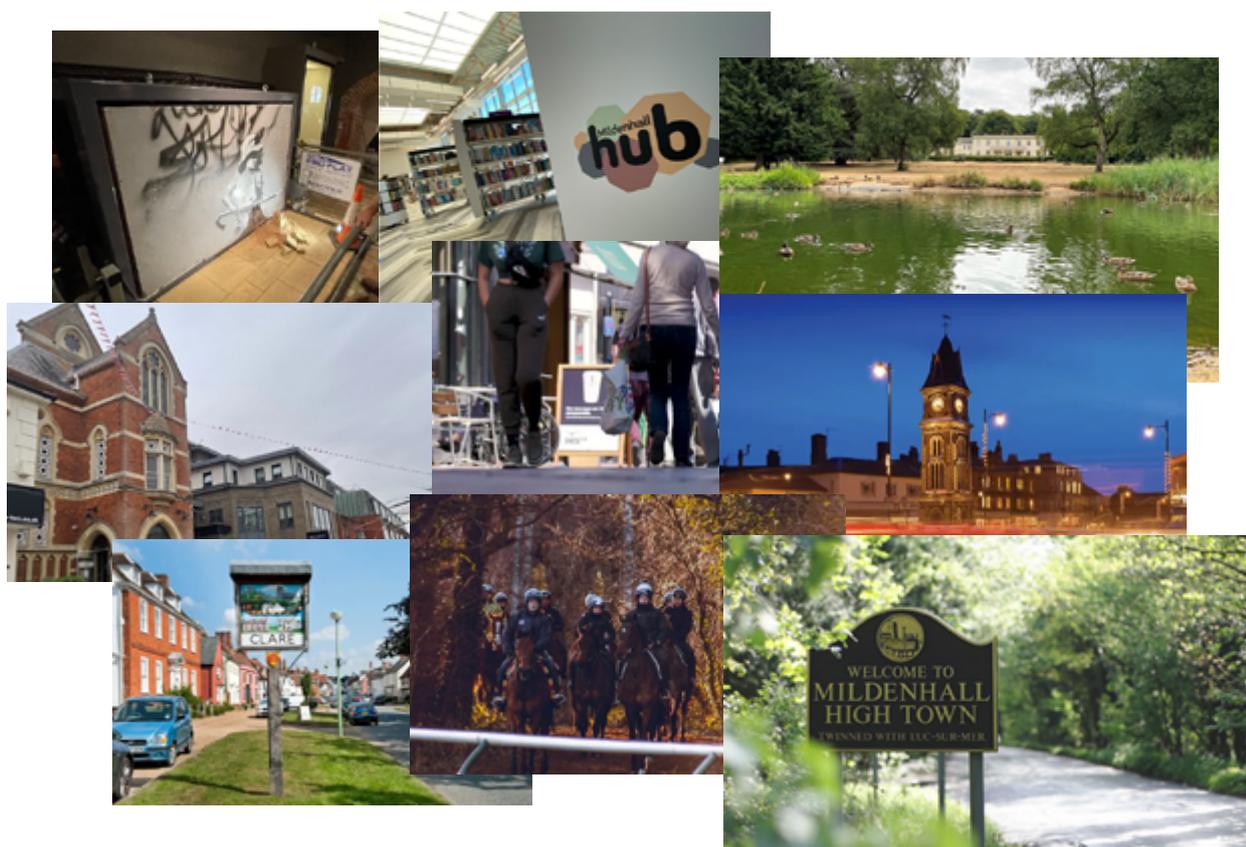
West Suffolk is a large district in the East of England with six market towns and strong rural communities. It has a diverse economy, currently dominated by manufacturing, retail and services, but with the potential to capitalise on its agricultural heritage and strong local businesses in order to grow further in areas such as agri-tech, food and health.

The international home of horseracing industry in and around Newmarket, the two major US air force bases and significant heritage assets are also distinctive features of the district.

West Suffolk is part of the Cambridge sub-region and Cambridge-Norwich Tech Corridor – both national economic engines. The district's two major roads are the A11 and A14 which are international trade routes and connect the district with Cambridge, London, the Midlands, Freeport East and the rest of the country. The strategically important M11 and A12 are also close by.

While the district as a whole is comparatively safe and prosperous, there are significant numbers of neighbourhoods where residents face deprivation and barriers to accessing opportunities. The infographics on the following pages illustrate some of the key challenges and opportunities facing West Suffolk.

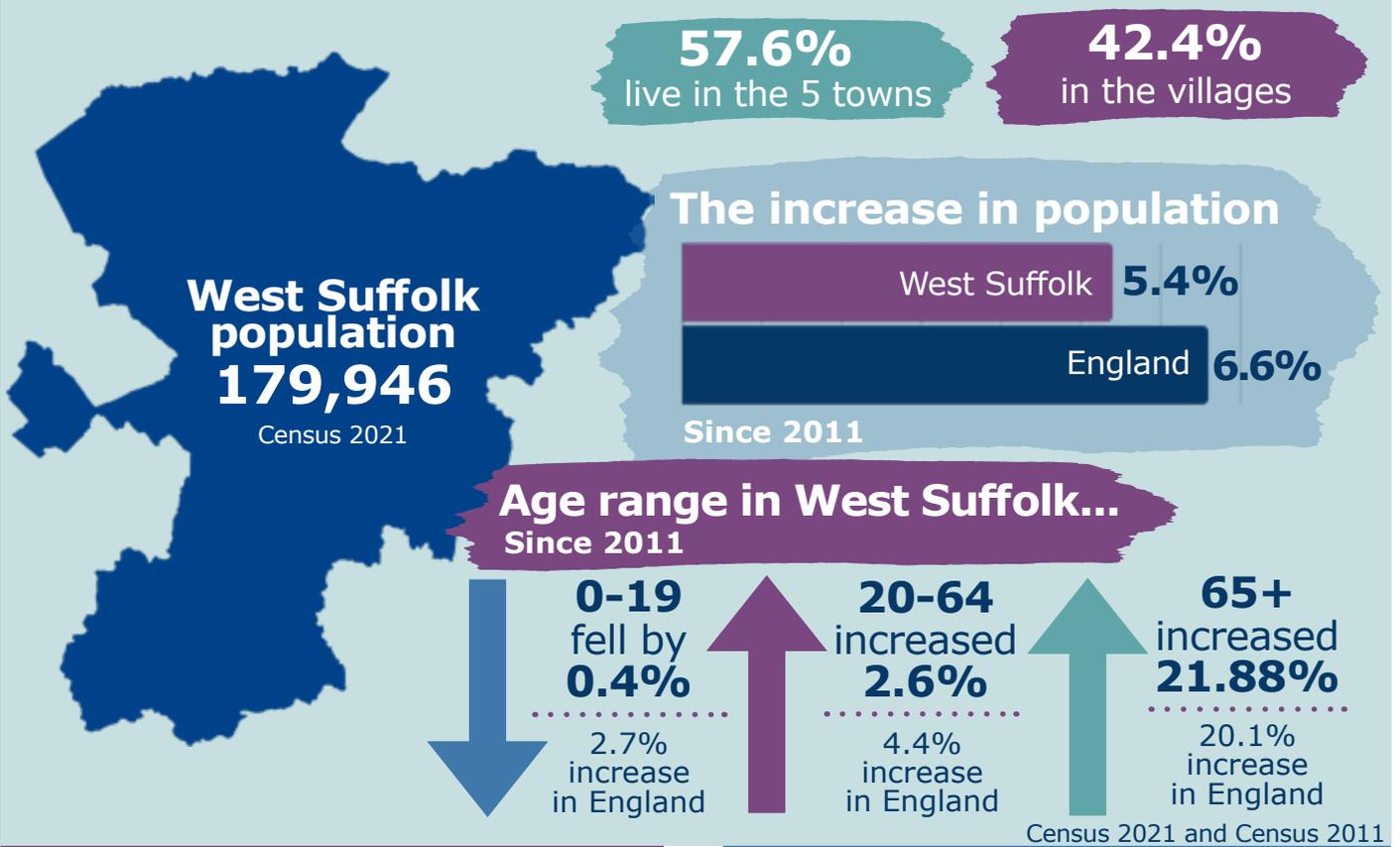
More detail about West Suffolk and the issues and challenges faced can be found at [Suffolk Observatory](#) and in West Suffolk Council's [Ward reports](#).





Population

West Suffolk has an ageing population, but also significant local variations in the make up of the population, driven by rural-urban differences and local employment patterns.



Future population change

↑ **86% increase**

= 10,500 people

is predicted in the population aged 85+ in West Suffolk between 2020 and 2040 (70% in England)

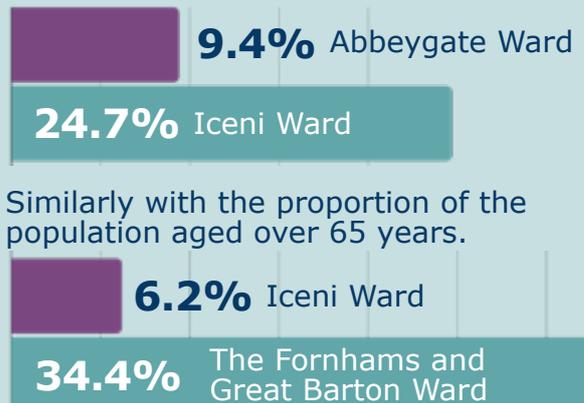


The **age group 65+** is the only age group projected to increase over the next 20 years. The proportion of people of working age is projected to decline.

Office for National Statistics (ONS), Sub-national population projections - 2018 based

Local variations

The proportion of the population aged under 16 varies considerably across the Wards of West Suffolk.



Similarly with the proportion of the population aged over 65 years.

Census 2021



Housing

Many West Suffolk residents face difficulties in affording homes to rent or buy, given high average prices and low local wages levels. We have also seen an increase in homelessness in recent years in the district, as in other parts of the country. This is in spite of ongoing work to increase housing delivery and to prevent and relieve homelessness.

Need for more homes

Between 2011 and 2021, the number of households in West Suffolk increased by

10.60%,
compared to
an increase of
6.20%
in England.



Census 2011 and 2021

Affordability of housing

The ratio of lower quartile earnings to lower quartile house prices in West Suffolk in September 2022 was **9.46** times compared to **7.36** times in England.



Office for National Statistics – ratio of house price to resident based earnings

Cost of renting a home

The average (mean) cost of renting a 3 bedroomed home per month in West Suffolk in 2022-23 was **£1,171** in West Suffolk, compared to **£1,039** in England as a whole.

Office for National Statistics private rental market summary April 22 – March 23



Rates of homelessness

7.49
households

1000
in West Suffolk
were
assessed as
homeless

(relief duty owed)
between April 2021 and
March 2022, compared
to 6.06 in England.



DLUHC data



Sustainability

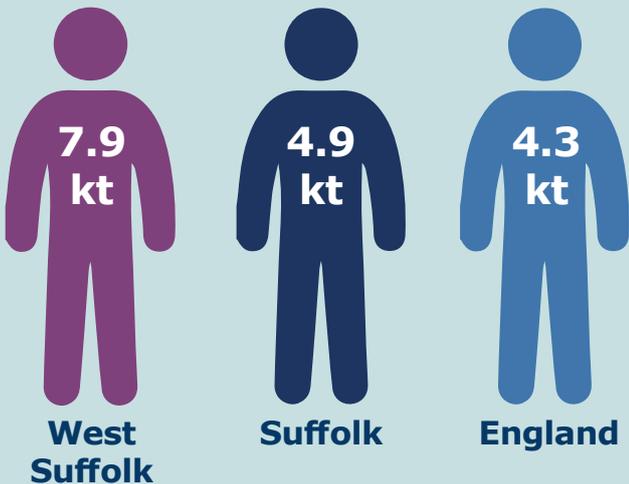
West Suffolk Council declared an environment and biodiversity emergency in 2019 and is working to reduce its own negative environmental impacts and emissions as well as encouraging partners and stakeholders across the district to reduce theirs.

Emissions from council operations



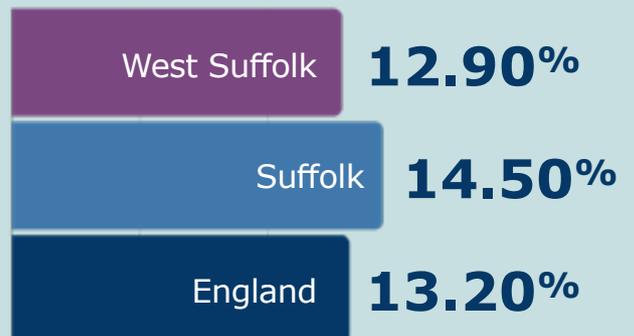
CO2 emissions per person

Total CO2 emissions per person (kilotonnes)



Fuel poverty

Percentage of households in fuel poverty - Low Income/Low energy Efficiency (LILEE) (2020)



Growth

West Suffolk has relatively high employment and benefits from a diverse economy. The main sectors are business administration and support services, health and manufacturing. West Suffolk also hosts specialist sectors such as horse racing. Meanwhile, average wages and qualification levels are below the national average.

Unemployment

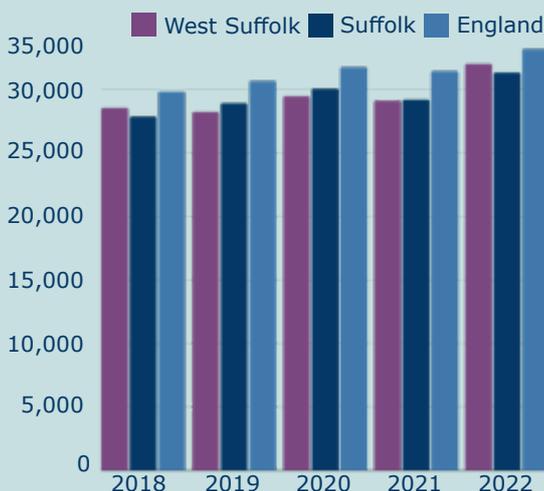
Unemployment levels are lower in West Suffolk than Great Britain.



Note: numbers and percentage are for those aged 16 and over. Percentage is a proportion of economically active. (Source: ONS Annual Population Survey)

Wages

Average wages in West Suffolk are below those for England.



Annual survey of hours and earnings-resident analysis. Full time workers. Median annual gross pay 2018-2022

Skills

Percentage of residents aged over 16 with at least NVQ Level 1 or equivalent qualifications.

83.1% West Suffolk : **87.7%** England

Nomis Annual Population Survey (APS) Jan-Dec 2021

Employment sectors

West Suffolk's main industrial sectors are business administration & support services, health and manufacturing.

Percentage of employees working in



Nomis Business Register and Employment Survey 2022 (BRES) : open access



Thriving communities

There are big disparities in the health, wellbeing and deprivation of different communities and neighbourhoods within West Suffolk. These can sometimes be hidden when data for the whole of the district are used.

Health

Percentage of people who considered themselves to be in very good health.



47.7% West Suffolk : **48.5%** England

Census 2021

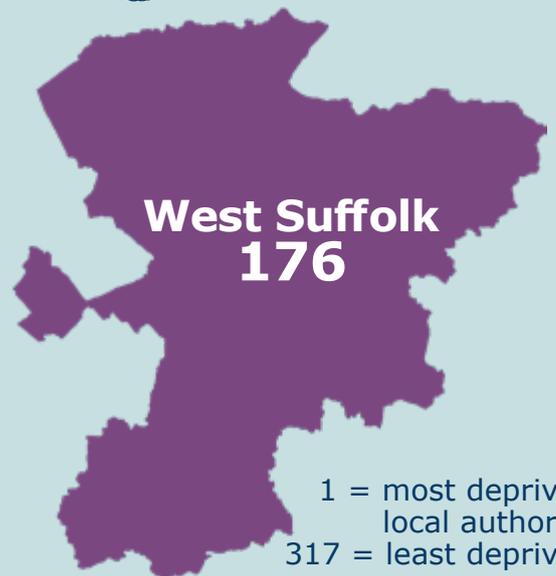
Crime

The crime rate (per 1,000 people) is consistently lower in West Suffolk than in England.



Crime - LTLA | West Suffolk | Report Builder for ArcGIS - Suffolk Observatory

English deprivation rankings



English indices of deprivation 2019 - GOV.UK

Mental health and wellbeing

Responses to: "Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays? Where 0 is 'not at all satisfied' and 10 is 'completely satisfied'".



"Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday? Where 0 is 'not at all anxious' and 10 is 'completely anxious'".



Personal well-being in the UK: April 2021 to March 2022

West Suffolk Council's values

These values will be at the core of everything West Suffolk does.

Collaborative

Both within the council and across West Suffolk's communities, we will work in a collaborative way, recognising the different strengths and roles of ourselves as councillors and our partners in tackling common issues. This involves listening, being clear about our respective priorities, and taking an active role in delivering for West Suffolk residents.

Fair and inclusive

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

Our equality objective for 2024-28 is:
To continuously improve access to our services for all members of our community, by learning from best practice and listening to feedback.

Championing local places

West Suffolk is made up of a large number of diverse communities across our villages, towns and rural areas. Our plans, policies and investments will respect these local differences, opportunities and needs. We will reflect on what is unique about each of our localities, ensuring fairness in the outcomes achieved for each place.

Innovative

In order to address the complex challenges we face in West Suffolk, we will not shy away from finding innovative solutions, in order to ensure we secure the best possible future for our residents.

Practical

As a local authority, West Suffolk's priority is to deliver 'change on the ground' for local businesses, communities and residents. This means being practical, getting the right people and resources together and pressing ahead with local delivery.

Financially astute decision making

In the context of an increasingly challenging financial environment for councils and residents alike, we will ensure that our decision making is financially astute and makes the best use of public money. For example, we will make investment decisions that both secure better outcomes for communities but also a financial return that can be reinvested into council services.

Strategic priorities

Over the next four years, our focus will be on delivering against our vision by taking action in the following four priority areas



Affordable, available and decent homes

- Use planning powers to significantly increase the supply of affordable housing in West Suffolk, particularly for social rent, and explore other options for increasing provision.
- Investigate options to address the specific market conditions in West Suffolk that make it challenging for local people to afford to buy or rent.
- Use the council's planning, regulatory and other powers to ensure all housing is of good quality and sustainably built and has minimal environmental impacts, including noise.
- Work with communities to ensure all housing is supported by the right infrastructure.

Environmental resilience

- Bring about environmental improvements that support progress to net zero, including by working in partnership with businesses, residents and others.
- Work together to implement actions to adapt to climate change in West Suffolk, in line with the third National Adaptation Programme.
- Promote improved public and active travel opportunities in West Suffolk and work to reduce the impact of heavy goods vehicles in communities.

Sustainable growth

- Support new and existing businesses to grow, for example, through start-up support and skills development.
- Work to ensure West Suffolk is an attractive place for businesses, in order to ensure growth is supported by employment. This will have a particular focus on attracting higher-skilled enterprises to support wage growth.
- Continue to support West Suffolk's local high streets and markets as the vibrant centres of thriving local communities
- Seek to develop infrastructure that supports growth.
- Maximising what makes us distinctive.

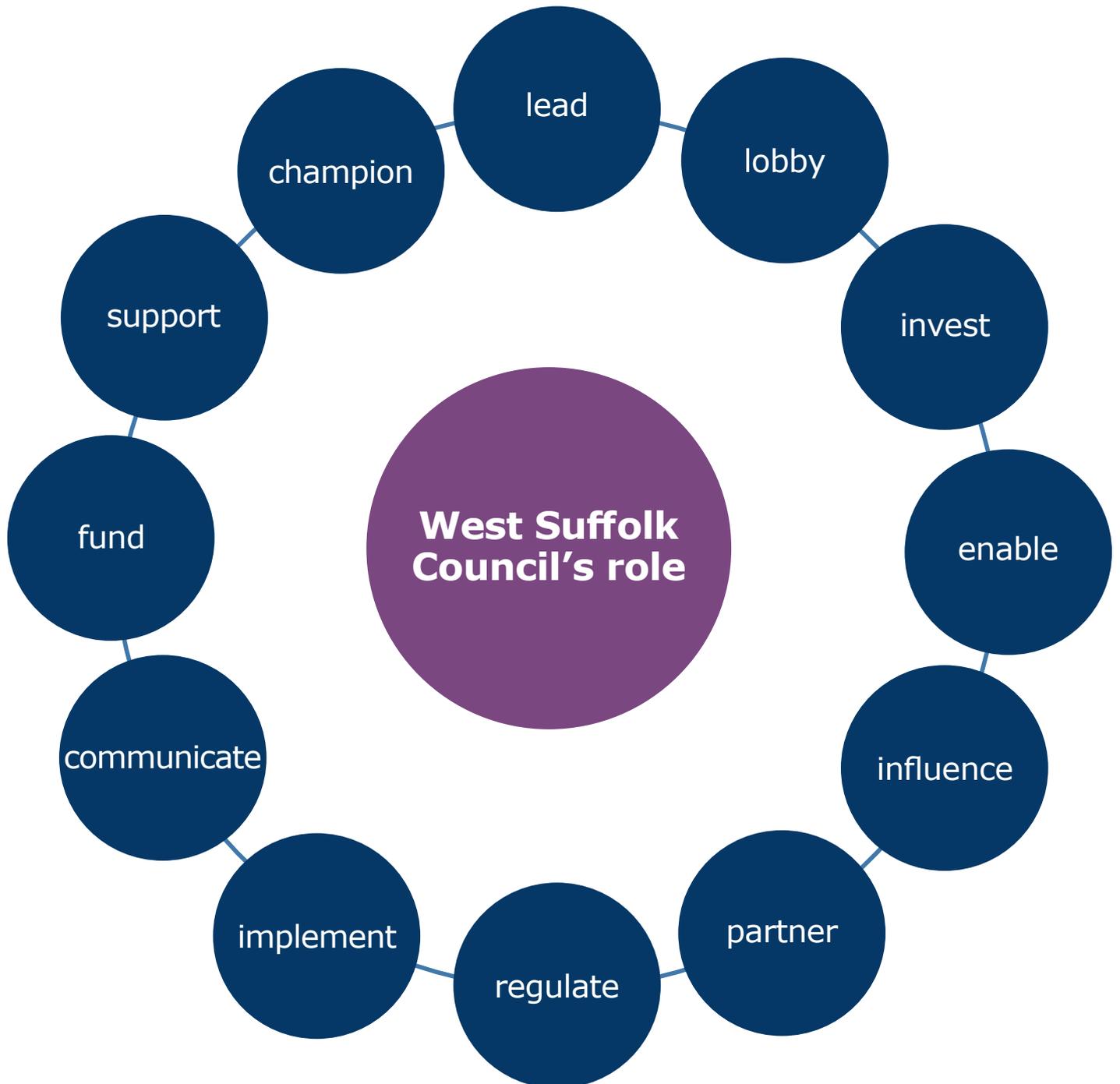
Thriving communities

- Ensure all West Suffolk residents are able to access appropriate services, benefits and support.
- Enable West Suffolk residents to improve their physical and mental health and wellbeing through sport, physical and cultural activities, as well as access to health services. In particular, protect and develop parks and open spaces for the benefit of both residents and visitors.
- Work with partners to prevent and reduce crime and antisocial behaviour in the district.

The council's role

West Suffolk Council is uniquely placed to make a difference because of the powers, assets, knowledge, finances and connections it holds, strengthened by the local expertise, democratic mandate and leadership role of its elected members.

When working to address the different priorities outlined in this document, the council will take a variety of different roles.



Affordable, available and decent homes

In order to deliver on our strategic priority of affordable, available and decent homes, we will:

- increase the requirement in the draft Local Plan for the amount of affordable housing that is required on new housing sites, from 30 to 40 per cent on larger greenfield sites, subject to viability
- work to understand and address the unique issues and affordability pressures facing West Suffolk residents in the local housing market
- work with partners to bring forward opportunities for regeneration on brownfield sites
- explore the role of different housing models such as custom build-to-rent, to diversify our housing and address housing need
- build on the work of the county-wide private rented sector pathway project. This project makes better use of data to improve our responses to hazards and non-compliance in poor quality housing and to enhance engagement and communications with tenants, landlords and communities
- ensure good management and standards in houses in multiple occupation through proactive inspections and licensing
- support the work underway to enable safe and warm homes and to facilitate necessary aids and adaptations to enable residents to continue to live safely and independently within their own homes
- take opportunities to build affordable homes for sale and rent, including through Barley Homes
- take further opportunities to acquire more temporary and move-on accommodation to support households
- strengthen our strategic partnership with Cambridgeshire and participate in the Suffolk Housing Board to drive forward improvements in the availability and quality of housing and associated support in the county
- increase access to good quality private rented housing including meeting the challenge of empty homes.



Environmental resilience

In order to deliver on our strategic priority of environmental resilience and our ambition to be net zero by 2030 as a council, we will:

Reduce the impact of West Suffolk Council's activities. To do this, we will:

- implement the recommendations from the [Environment and Climate Change Task-force](#), in particular:
 - take action to reduce the environmental impact of our buildings, fleet and operations
 - promote the wide diversity of work that the council delivers across the energy and environment agenda to our residents, communities and businesses and use campaigns to support behaviour change.

Work in partnership with organisations to reduce West Suffolk's environmental impacts. To do this, we will:

- promote and support schemes to decarbonise existing homes and promote the highest possible environmental standards in new-build properties and housing developments
- support initiatives that reduce the carbon emissions from transport, and improve air quality, for example, the increased provision of electric vehicle charging and promoting cycling and walking
- improve the renewable energy portfolio, through solar and renewable energy sources including wind and hydrogen
- investigate instances of environmental crime, for example fly-tipping, and where possible take action against those responsible
- identify and implement greenspace and waste and streetscene improvements
- provide strategic direction and explore funding opportunities to manage planned enhancements and protections for our district's biodiversity, parks and green spaces
- make the most effective use of our drainage infrastructure and avoid increased flood risk, as well as reducing pollution and looking at opportunities to improve the quality of our water and reduce consumption.

Work in partnership with organisations to reduce Suffolk's environmental impacts. To do this, we will:

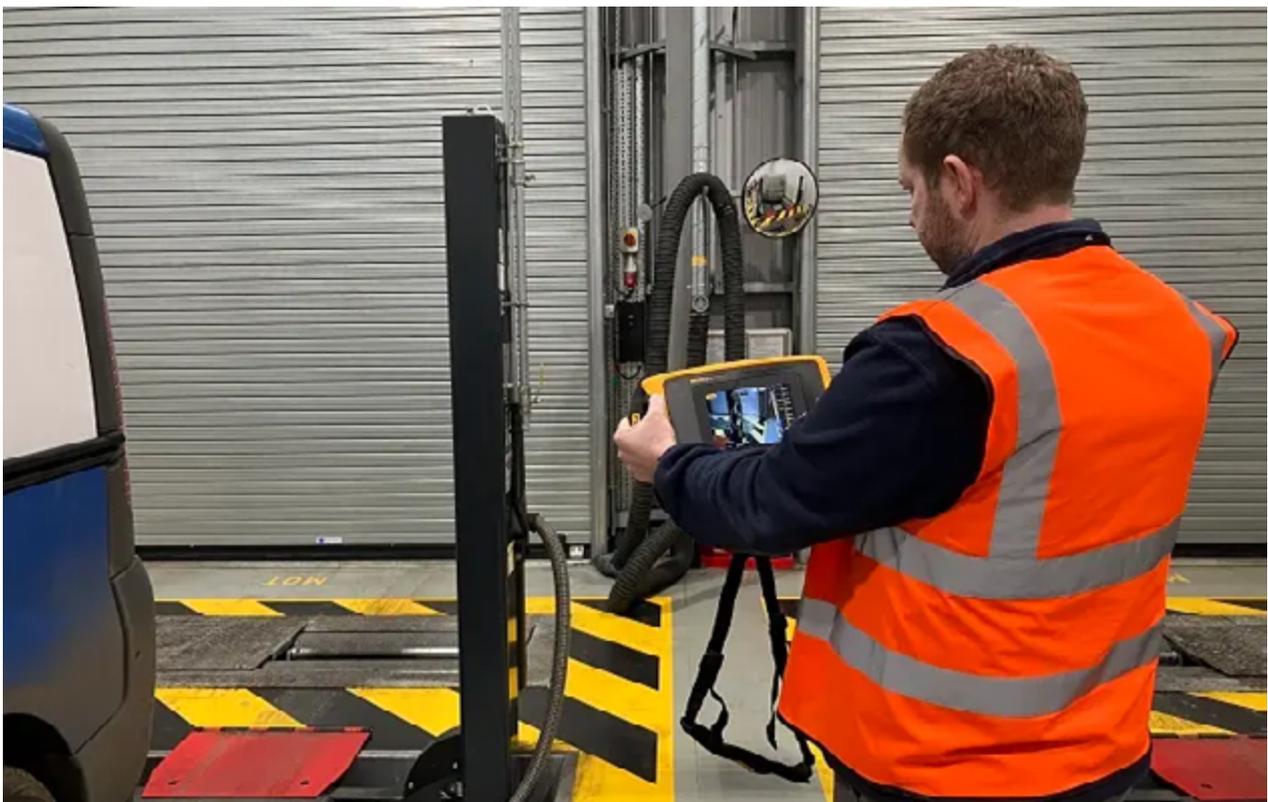
- work in partnership with local and national organisations to achieve our goals of restoration, biodiversity net gain and ecosystem services through a Suffolk-wide Green Infrastructure Strategy
- work alongside county colleagues and partners to deliver the actions within [the Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan](#).
- work with colleagues through the Suffolk Waste Partnership to ensure the changes required through the Government's policy on simpler recycling work for the benefit of both Suffolk residents and the environment.



Sustainable growth

In order to deliver on our strategic priority of sustainable growth, we will:

- work with our partners to explore and deliver opportunities for sustainable economic growth
- anticipate and respond to longer-term opportunities for economic growth in the next 30 years by maximising the economic potential of the A1307, A11 and A14 corridors
- seek to maximise the benefits of West Suffolk's proximity to, and links with the Cambridge sub-region, with its high economic potential
- work with town councils and Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) to support the development of West Suffolk's town centres
- work with rural areas to maximise their potential
- work with our partners to increase overnight visitors to West Suffolk
- establish a commission to positively address housing growth and the future economic potential of Brandon, while recognising and protecting the unique character and biodiversity of the town
- regenerate Haverhill town centre including the High Street to maximise the town's potential
- use our influence to ensure all new development in West Suffolk is supported by the right infrastructure, including exploring how new settlements could overcome infrastructure challenges and support our growth ambitions.



Thriving communities

In order to deliver on our strategic priority of thriving communities, we will:

- develop and improve access to a programme of activities and advice for residents facing challenges as a result of the cost-of-living crisis
- develop a network of youth engagement opportunities, activities and support across the district
- build on cross-Suffolk work to ensure residents have access to food
- develop opportunities for residents to participate in health and wellbeing activities through sport, leisure, culture and community initiatives
- work alongside community and voluntary groups to build their capacity and access funding and support
- improve community safety, including working in partnership to tackle antisocial behaviour, County Lines and criminal exploitation
- build on the success of our diverse and award-winning green spaces in providing access to the natural environment, and improving physical and mental health and wellbeing
- improve access to leisure opportunities for all residents, including through the improvement and development of leisure facilities and development of sports clubs and associations
- develop the potential of events across the district, through a cultural plan, to enable all sectors of the community to experience a diverse range of educational and recreational opportunities, as with the Mutiny in Colour exhibition
- review the role of different public and voluntary sector organisations in supporting local places and communities, to ensure services are delivered at the most appropriate level.



Getting the essentials right

West Suffolk's businesses and residents rely on the council to get the essentials right every day.

We will make sure we continue to deliver to a high standard everyday services like grounds maintenance, waste and recycling collections, dealing with residents' queries, processing applications and paying invoices on time.

The council will continue to improve, by listening to feedback about how we are doing and monitoring our own performance.

One of the ways we do this is through the use of key performance indicators (KPIs), which portfolio holders from cabinet monitor regularly, and which are reported publicly to Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee whose role is to independently scrutinise them.

Every year, we also publish an annual report on our progress in delivering our priorities across the council's areas of responsibility, including a specific environment statement which sets out our progress towards net zero by 2030.

Residents and stakeholders can access information about our performance through our committee reports, which are made public, and through our website and social media channels, including our transparency and performance webpages.

Over the last year West Suffolk Council



Blue and black household bins emptied 4.3 million times



Determined 2495 planning applications



Carried out 839 food safety inspections



Assisted 236 West Suffolk households with adaptations to their homes through Disabled Facilities Grants at a cost of £1,879,394



Between March and October 2023 West Suffolk Council carried out grass cutting operations in approximately a three week cycle across 308 hectares (761 acres) of public open space. This included trialling new ways to encourage biodiversity.

West Suffolk

Council

