Thriving West Suffolk

Annual Report 2025 to 2026

West Suffolk Council

Foreword

This annual report shows how we are delivering on our vision for a Thriving West Suffolk. It is a snapshot of the many achievements we have made in the past year. It marks the progress made in 2025 to 2026 on our collective journey toward a Thriving West Suffolk.

It highlights how we are directly improving the lives of local communities as well as the health of our economy and environment.

It shows a picture of West Suffolk Council continuing to deliver and invest in communities, championing the area nationally and locally with schemes that make a real difference on your doorstep.

One important example, is how we listened to West Suffolk residents when it came to Local Government Reorganisation. Communities were clear they wanted local unitary councils to better represent them and drive tailored solutions to meet the unique needs of our communities. We went to Government and argued the case which has now become the basis of the reorganisation of Local Government in Suffolk and the creation of three separate unitary councils to cover the three areas of the county. Our area will become the new Unitary West Suffolk Council.

The achievements highlighted in this report are delivered as part of our four strategic priorities: affordable, available, and decent homes; environmental resilience; sustainable growth; and thriving communities. We also recognise the importance of the day-to-day services that we deliver and that residents, businesses and other local organisations rely on.

But while it is good to look back on what has been achieved our eyes are very much on the future. Our priority is to ensure West Suffolk residents, businesses and environment continue to thrive now and in the future.

Cllr Cliff Waterman,
Leader of the Council

Cllr Victor Lukaniuk,
Deputy Leader and leader of the Independents

Introduction

West Suffolk Council's four strategic priorities are:

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

These priorities continue to provide the framework for the council's work, shaping how we use our powers, resources and partnerships to improve quality of life for residents, support businesses and communities, and protect and enhance West Suffolk's environment. Alongside this, the council is committed to getting the essentials right, ensuring that all activity is delivered efficiently, on time, and in a way that maximises value for money for our communities.

During 2025 to 2026, highlights of the council's work included the adoption of the West Suffolk Local Plan, continued work to support affordable, available and decent homes, and to prevent and support people who become homelessness, investment in town centres, skills development, support for health and wellbeing, and further action to progress the council's work to support residents and businesses to save money by cutting carbon emissions.

Our 2024-28 strategic priorities in more detail

Affordable, available, and decent homes

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

- using planning powers to significantly increase the supply of affordable housing in West Suffolk, particularly for social rent, while exploring other options to increase provision
- investigating options to address the specific market conditions in West Suffolk that make it challenging for local people to afford to buy or rent
- using the council's planning, regulatory and other powers to ensure housing is of good quality and sustainably built and has minimal environmental impacts
- working with communities to ensure new housing development is supported by the right infrastructure.

Environmental resilience

To deliver on our strategic priority of environmental resilience and our ambition to be net zero by 2039 as a council, we are:

- bringing about environmental improvements that support progress to net zero carbon emissions, including work in partnership with businesses, residents and others
- working to implement actions to adapt to climate change in West Suffolk
- working with partners to negotiate and lobby for improved public and active travel opportunities in West Suffolk and work to reduce the impact of heavy goods vehicles in communities.

Sustainable growth

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

- supporting new and existing businesses to grow, for example through start-up support and skills development
- working to ensure West Suffolk is an attractive place for businesses, with a particular focus on attracting higher-skilled enterprises to support wage growth
- supporting West Suffolk's local high streets and markets as the vibrant centres of thriving local communities
- seeking to develop infrastructure that supports growth
- maximising what makes us distinctive.

Thriving communities

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

- working to ensure all West Suffolk residents can access appropriate services, benefits and support
- enabling 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
- nurturing and protecting parks and open spaces for the benefit of both residents and visitors
- working with partners to prevent and reduce crime and antisocial behaviour in the district.

Engagement

During 2025 to 2026, the council undertook consultation and engagement on the draft West Suffolk Local Plan, street trading matters, and the Culture and Heritage Strategy. Public engagement also continued the next stage of plans for the new West Suffolk Hospital site. In Haverhill, the council worked with Haverhill Town Council to launch engagement activity on town centre revitalisation, including projects on public realm lighting and signage to help shape a safer, more welcoming and distinctive town centre.

During the year, councillors and officers engaged with a wide range of groups and partners to understand local needs and how the council can work together with others. This included Abbeycroft Leisure, district and county council partners, Homes England, private sector landlords, registered providers, the wider Suffolk system, the United States Air Force, the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership, Transport East, and the horseracing industry.

Highlights of the council's work during 2025 to 2026

Affordable, available, and decent homes

799 new homes were built on sites across the district by the end of 2025 to 2026 (compared with 562 in 2024 to 2025). Developments providing over 10 homes were required, under the previous Local Plan, to provide 30 per cent affordable homes. In addition to this, a further 22 affordable homes were secured on these sites.

The West Suffolk Local Plan 2024 to 2041 was formally adopted on 15 July 2025. The plan strengthens affordable housing delivery by requiring 40 per cent affordable homes on greenfield developments of 10 or more dwellings.

The future development of new homes at the Bury St Edmunds West site was successfully negotiated following an appeal submission. The development will deliver a new relief road, up to 485 homes, including market and affordable homes, contributions to education, NHS, library and waste services, up to 15 hectares of parkland and several new active travel links on and off the site.

Through Barley Homes, the council entered a partnership with Havebury Housing Partnership to deliver over the mandatory 40 per cent of affordable housing scheme on the former College Heath Road site in Mildenhall. Earlier in the year, plans were submitted for 40 new affordable homes on the site.

The council was identified as eligible for £300,000 of Council Housebuilding Support Fund revenue funding in 2025 to 2026. This will support the council's priority to increase affordable housing and progress a future pipeline of sites.

£1,121,800 of Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) was awarded to the council in this year to purchase six units of accommodation including four units of temporary accommodation in partnership with local registered providers.

The council has completed the purchase of an additional 24 units of high-quality temporary accommodation to support people who have become homeless, two of which have been delivered in this year using LAHF. This includes emergency provision and accessible units in Haverhill and Bury St Edmunds with a spend of over £2,242,066.

A capital budget of £955,000 was approved to facilitate the purchase of five flats in Newmarket to increase the availability of suitable temporary accommodation to accommodate West Suffolk families who have become homeless.

High-quality, affordable accommodation for older people in the Newmarket area will be delivered by the council in partnership with Anchor housing association following a successful change of use application for The Silks site.

The West Suffolk Housing Pathway service was launched in April 2025 to help vulnerable people with support and accommodation, furthering our work to prevent and reduce homelessness. The service is tailored to individual need, helping people to sustain accommodation or maintain independent living. In its first year, 193 people had been referred to the service and 36 of those had accepted accommodation. The aim is both to prevent homelessness and to support people to sustain accommodation successfully over time.

Low-Income Family Tracker data is being used by financial inclusion officers in the Families and Communities team to better understand residents' needs and identify opportunities to provide support through early intervention and preventative work.

£120,869 in additional Homelessness Prevention Grant funding was received by the council alongside the Government's Plan to End Homelessness. The council is responding through the development of actions linked to its Housing, Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

Safe Suffolk Renters, a partnership between East and West Suffolk councils has continued to support tenants and landlords. This included work to engage with landlords and provide support to them and tenants in readiness for the introduction of the Renters' Rights Act. The council supported a landlord event attended by around 200 landlords in October 2025, and a further landlord conference took place in February 2026.

Following continued engagement during the year, another 36 landlords joined the West Suffolk Lettings Partnership. This represents a further 40 properties made available to support housing need in West Suffolk.

38 inspections were carried out by environmental health officers, where data or intelligence indicated a property might be a house in multiple occupation (HMO). 54 inspections of licensed HMOs were undertaken this year.

Since the Independent Living Service was introduced in December 2020, the number of disabled facilities grants (DFGs) approved has risen. 204 fast-track DFG applications were approved, alongside 12 mandatory DFG applications approved and 11 paid in this year.

The council successfully intervened to prevent 225 West Suffolk households from becoming homeless (compared with 173 in 2024 to 2025), it also supported another 230 homeless households through temporary accommodation during 2025 to 2026 (compared with 334 in 2024 to 2025). During the year it helped 163 households out of temporary accommodation and into a more settled and permanent place to call home. As of 31 March 2026, 77 households were being supported in temporary accommodation, including emergency accommodation.

The national snapshot figures for rough sleepers decreased from ten to seven in West Suffolk. The figure is based on a single-night snapshot and can fluctuate daily as people are accommodated or become homeless.

Further early education, life skills development and training opportunities will be delivered through training sessions at local schools following a successful pilot in this year, aimed at increasing resilience and preventing homelessness.

Work to progress the development of additional rural housing continued this year, through rural exception sites and community land trusts. Five parishes have undertaken housing needs studies, with more in progress. Two parishes are currently investigating site opportunities; one is working with a registered provider. The Strategic Housing Team presented to the parish forum in February 2026. 25 new affordable homes were delivered in rural locations in 2025 to 2026.

When the Housing, Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy was adopted in 2024, a commitment was made to present a formal annual review of progress against the strategy and action plan. This has been set out through the pages of this annual report with **Appendix 1** presenting further key statistics and case studies to highlight what has been achieved this year.

Environmental resilience

A fuller summary of the council's environmental performance can be found in the Annual Environmental Statement, with selected highlights given at **Appendix 2**. In May 2025, the council approved a revised and costed route map to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2039. Other environmental initiatives include:

The council and Abbeycroft Leisure reduced carbon emissions down to 5,443 tonnes of CO_2e in 2025 to 2026. This compares to 8,215 tonnes in 2010. At The Apex gas heating and associated gas systems were removed and replaced with a combination of air source heat pumps and other systems as part of a wider decarbonisation programme.

During the year, decarbonisation work at Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill leisure centres progressed as part of the council's leisure centre decarbonisation programme. Solar canopies have also been installed at Mildenhall Hub, alongside other projects supporting the council's 2039 net zero route map. This funding for the Haverhill and Bury St Edmunds leisure centres came from gaining a public sector decarbonisation grant of £4,749,212, West Suffolk Council will need to make a minimum contribution of £555,212.

During 2025 to 2026, Toggam solar farm, owned by the council, generated 12,526 megawatt hours of renewable electricity, which was 10 per cent above target for the year and equates to the annual electricity use of 3,000 to 4,600 typical UK homes for one year.

The Solar for Business programme installed 364.8kW of solar panels, bringing the total installed to 8.8MW. There are now 116 businesses benefiting from the scheme, saving a collective 2,100 tonnes of carbon emissions each year while also making financial savings on their electricity bills.

A major shift to paperless billing also reduced the council's environmental impact. This year Anglia Revenues Partnership sent 96,000 more e-bills than the previous year, achieving carbon savings of around 289kg CO_2e (carbon dioxide equivalent). This also delivered financial savings of around £83,000 during annual billing time with a further £260,000 of savings anticipated over the coming financial year. In West Suffolk, over 24,000 residents signed up to paperless billing over the previous 12 months, contributing to partnership savings of over £20,000 at annual billing and an estimated £77,000 across the year. 50 per cent of West Suffolk residents received their annual bill by email this year, compared with 22.7 per cent last year.

The council is working with Suffolk County Council to deliver additional electric vehicle charging infrastructure through the Government's Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) Capital Fund. This programme will support the rollout of on-street and community-based charge points across Suffolk. This is aimed particularly for residents without driveways or other off-street parking, helping to support them should they wish to switch to an electric vehicle and reducing air pollution from vehicle exhaust emissions.

The reverse vending machines in Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill and Newmarket collected 10,122 items between April 2025 and April 2026. Between February 2024 and January 2026, the scheme recorded 5,600 transactions with 32,187 single-use drink containers recycled, saving over 1,160 kilograms of carbon emissions.

Twenty-four new Recycling on the Go bins were launched across West Suffolk to help increase public recycling of bottles and cans. Waste surveys estimate the bins generated around 1.476 tonnes of recycling in their first year.

West Suffolk is improving recycling services through the Government's Simpler Recycling scheme which is being delivered locally as Better Recycling. This features changes to recycle more items from people's household waste. Preparations continued during 2025 to 2026 for the new service, with delivery of bins in spring 2026 ahead of launch in June 2026. Further information on this initiative is included on page 13 of this report.

The council also secured Material Focus funding for 18 small electrical recycling banks across the district. The first round of emptying, which started in January 2026, generated 3.09 tonnes of electrical waste for recycling. The total for January 2026 to March 2026 is 17.97 tonnes.

The council participated in the Great British Spring Clean at West Suffolk House and Mildenhall Hub while also supporting communities who took part in litter picks across the district.

The council retained six Green Flag awards for the sixth year running in 2025 for the Abbey Gardens, East Town Park, Brandon Country Park, Aspal Close Nature Reserve, West Stow Country Park and Nowton Park.

61 standard trees and 345 whips (saplings) have been planted by the council on its own sites 2025 to 2026 (compared with 7 standard trees and 150 whips in 2024 to 2025).

Sustainable Growth

The West Suffolk Local Plan, adopted on the 15 July 2025, provides a clear and up-to-date framework for sustainable growth across the district, including land for employment growth and stronger policies on infrastructure and environmental protection.

Greene King's new facility in Bury St Edmunds will enable the brewery to improve and extend its brewing operation. The new brewery is expected to open in 2027. Alongside this, Greene King and the council have signed a Memorandum of Cooperation on the future of the current Westgate site, with the council helping to validate local needs evidence and provide engagement support to help shape future options for the benefit of the town.

The council's plans to redevelop the former household waste site at Rougham Hill, Bury St Edmunds, progressed during 2025 to 2026, with a planning application submitted in July 2025 and a revised application submitted earlier this year. The proposed development includes a new supermarket and a drive-through restaurant, with national operators Aldi and Wendy's identified as tenants, having agreed to lease the buildings, subject to planning approval. The project is expected to deliver around 80 jobs.

Work to support skills development, and in particular raise aspirations among young people, continued during 2025 to 2026 through a variety of initiatives with partners. For example, we have worked with the Eastern Education Group to deliver the Choose Hospitality project, which includes a Junior Chef programme and adult employability hospitality workshops. We continue to deliver jobs and skills fairs across West Suffolk, in collaboration with the Department for Work and Pensions. Working with local schools and businesses, we support careers fairs and mock interview days. We have supported local construction businesses to deliver their social value initiatives, which has opened up opportunities for young people to have hands-on experience in the world of work. We continue to work with the Eastern Education Group to deliver their Skills Escalator Days for primary students in all West Suffolk towns.

The Independent Commission on the Future of Brandon finished its work in late 2025. The commission's Building a bright and bold future for Brandon and the Brecks report made 52 recommendations to help shape a sustainable future for Brandon. In response, the council backed a package of short, medium and long-term initiatives in February 2026, including lobbying on the policy constraints affecting Brandon, creating the Better Brandon reference panel at an appropriate time, improving local facilities, exploring housing opportunities, supporting skills and employment initiatives and investigating potential improvements to Brandon Railway Station. The council also identified £100,000 to support deliverable projects and help attract further investment.

The council has been working with Haverhill High Street Enhancement Steering Group and consultants to develop proposals for the previously allocated £693,000 of funding. The scheme aims to improve town centre experience by increasing footfall and dwell time, enhancing first impressions and perceptions of safety and quality, supporting business confidence, and enabling a stronger evening economy. Current concept proposals have been shaped by stakeholders and initial public engagement, focusing on improved public realm lighting to highlight key assets and encourage evening use, alongside improving wayfinding that reinforces local identity and celebrates Haverhill's heritage.

In October 2025, West Suffolk Council and its partners were proud to hold the 15th West Suffolk Business Festival. The festival, which started in 2011 and is the largest business focusses partnership event in West Suffolk, was held between 30 September and 10 October 2025. The festival, which once again attracted more than 1,500 visitors, saw a varied programme of events and networking opportunities aimed at helping businesses with their growth ambitions.

37 applications to the West Suffolk Start-Up were completed during the period between 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. 27 were approved, totalling an investment by the council of £31,916 and signalling a total investment by those businesses of £66,405.

The West Suffolk Manufacturing Group which supports the local manufacturing and engineering sector saw continued strong support from our local businesses. The group which is now in its seventh year continues to be a key element of the wider New Anglia Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering Group (NAAME), which encompasses a number of other groups and businesses through Suffolk and Norfolk.

Significant progress was made on the Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering Centre (AME) at Suffolk Business Park. Following planning permission in July 2025 and approval of a £17.25 million capital investment, construction officially commenced in March 2026. The centre will provide 17 flexible workshop units together with shared meeting and conference space, supporting business growth, innovation, skills development and supply chain strengthening.

As of March 2026, West Suffolk Council had nine apprentices working across Learning and Development, Health and Safety, Governance, Cemeteries, Housing, IT, Families and Communities, Property and Parks.

In the face of national pressures on high streets, West Suffolk town centres continued to perform comparatively well, with lower than UK average vacancy rates. The UK average for empty town centre commercial units is 12.8 per cent. In West Suffolk, the vacancy rate across the six market towns on 31 March 2026 was 7.33 per cent (compared with 7.8 per cent on 31 March 2025).

Alongside regular street markets, the council continued to support specialist and themed markets across West Suffolk, including Makers Markets and seasonal events. A £300,000 markets initiative saw increased stall occupancy, new traders and engagement. The Young Traders Competition regional final was again hosted in Bury St Edmunds helping encourage new business growth including our markets. The local heats for this competition in 2026 will be in Haverhill, Newmarket and Bury St Edmunds.

The council continued to support West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust in progressing plans for a new West Suffolk Hospital on the Hardwick Manor site in Bury St Edmunds. During 2025 to 2026, the project moved into the next stage of development, including public engagement launched in February 2026 on reserved matters and detailed design.

The Ipswich to Cambridge Community Rail Partnership (CRP) was formally established in January 2026 for the St Edmunds rail line running from Ipswich to Cambridge. The CRP will increase involvement of local communities with the railway, promote rail services, encourage better integration with other forms of transport and develop stations as gateways to local communities.

The council continues to work with transport infrastructure partners including Transport East, Suffolk County Council, Greater Anglia, Network Rail and National Highways to influence and lobby for transport improvements. In 2026 two additional weekday rail services were introduced by Greater Anglia:

1. departing Ipswich at 7.17am and arriving at 8.43am in Cambridge

2. departing Cambridge at 5.05pm and arriving at 6.27pm

In March 2026 National Highways included the A11 Fiveways junction as one of four schemes forming a pipeline of potential schemes for Road Investment Strategy 4 2031-2036.

Thriving communities

The Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme was continued for 2025 to 2026 and extended for 2026 to 2027, helping eligible low-income working-age residents with up to 100 per cent Council Tax support depending on circumstances.

'£275,000 Thriving Communities Funding was allocated to support 38 projects run by charities, communities and voluntary organisations across West Suffolk. The Thriving Communities Fund is part of a package of more than £650,000 of community support, agreed in this year, that will be delivered in 2026 to 2027 that includes £200,000 for Citizen's Advice West Suffolk (the second of a three-year funding agreement) to support the council's work with families and communities and £179,200 under the councillor Locality Budget scheme, also referenced in this report.

The former Stourview Medical Centre in Haverhill, acquired by the council in 2024, has been brought back into use in partnership with Haverhill Town Council, the Integrated Care Board, local community, faith, and social enterprises as the Stourview Wellbeing Centre which opened in May 2026. The centre run by local partners, provides coordinated support for residents physical and mental health and wider needs, while also contributing to town centre footfall.

165 Locality Budget applications were received for 2025 to 2026. The end of year transparency report (found on our Locality budgets page) gives a full overview of grants paid. Locality budgets are designed to enable councillors to respond directly to local needs by providing funding to community groups, activities, and small-scale initiatives that benefit residents in their area. Each councillor receives £2,800 a year as part of this scheme. With 64 councillors across West Suffolk, this equates to a total locality budget of approximately £179,200 annually.

Crucial Crew continued to deliver important personal safety messages to primary schools. In 2025 to 2026, 36 schools attended, with approximately 1,150 Year 6 pupils taking part, the highest attendance in five years. The children took part in seven scenarios looking at fire safety, water safety, healthy relationships, consent, anti-social behaviour, exploitation and hate crime.

Building Resilience and Nutrition (BRAN) funding created by a £90,000 grant from Suffolk public leaders and delivered by West Suffolk Council in partnership with Community Action Suffolk and Suffolk County Council has supported a range of projects across the district to help people out of food poverty, improve health and nutrition and reduce food waste.

Lakenheath was allocated up to £20 million over ten years through the Government's Pride in Place programme. Work has started to bring a community board together to look at options and ideas for this funding.

Proposals for redevelopment of the Olding Road site in Bury St Edmunds progressed significantly. Following Cabinet agreement in September 2025, enabling works began in autumn 2025 to support a new leisure destination including a trampoline park and indoor padel courts, with further options under consideration for the wider site.

Works to deliver the refurbishment Bury St Edmunds Leisure Centre progressed well through 2025 to 2026. The project remains on track for completion in 2026.

Lakenheath has secured Sport England place-based funding, which has supported a developmental stage of work including community engagement, leadership development, test-and-learn projects and preparation of a further bid for a two-year work programme

The council secured £667,297 to deliver new Football Foundation Play Zones in Haverhill, Mildenhall and Newmarket. During 2025 to 2026, planning permission was approved and construction was scheduled to begin at the end of March 2026, with completion anticipated by the start of the school holidays in July 2026.

The Holiday Activities and Food programme is Government funded and aims to help students who may not get a hot meal during school holidays. In West Suffolk the council worked with 20 providers to offer nearly 2,100 places over 155 sessions across 35 locations for Easter, booking around 2,000 places. We are continuing to expand offer with new providers offering a range of different activities.

Feel Good Suffolk, a partnership between the Suffolk councils, continued to support residents who want help getting more active, managing weight or stopping smoking. Additional funding was secured to drive local engagement in key locations around smoking cessation. Smoking cessation programmes have supported over 1,111 people to stop smoking with 289 of those people successfully quitting. Feel Good Suffolk has also helped 442 clients through weight management programmes, and 68.8 per cent of all clients increased their level of activity.

During 2025 to 2026, replacement play equipment was installed at Hepworth Avenue in Bury St Edmunds, Hopton Rise in Haverhill, Briscoe Way in Lakenheath and Manderston Road in Newmarket. These works were funded using some of the money allocated to the council from the Government under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

A new inclusive play area has been developed in Mildenhall after a £33,000 investment, transforming a previously limited space into a creative play environment for toddlers. The project followed engagement with a local councillor and was delivered as part of the council's Thriving Communities priority, funded through a combination of developer contributions and £16,500 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

During 2025 to 2026, the council developed a Culture and Heritage Strategy and Delivery Plan. This sets out ambitions to strengthen cultural participation, celebrate and connect heritage assets, support health and wellbeing, grow the visitor economy and improve collaboration across the district's cultural organisations.

The Apex in Bury St Edmunds sold tickets worth £2,683,198 between April 2025 and March 2026. The venue achieved an average of 66 per cent tickets sold in the main auditorium despite a planned closure for maintenance in August 2025, the Apex performed well.

184,933 total visitors visited West Suffolk council's heritage sites including West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village and Moyse's Hall Museum meaning that our heritage sites welcomed over 3,000 visitors each week. This included 16,627 school pupils.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF)

- During 2025 to 2026, funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) continued to support projects across West Suffolk Council's strategic priorities. Investment focused on the Government's themes of Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business, and People and Skills, funding a wide range of projects from community initiatives and business support to skills programmes and environmental improvements.

- Through the West Suffolk Investment Programme, the council allocated funding to projects totalling over £861,762.

- Investment will strengthen community infrastructure and wellbeing, supporting local organisations to increase participation in sport and community activity, improve community safety, and enhance parks and green spaces. Programmes such as Apprenticeships Suffolk, Thrive Youth and Talent Forge have helped people access training and employment.

- The programme has also supported economic growth and business resilience. Support delivered through partners such as MENTA has helped businesses start and grow, while wider investment in business support, innovation and workforce development has strengthened the local economy.

- Investment in culture and heritage has improved visitor experiences and supported the visitor economy, including work on a new cultural strategy and improvements at National Horseracing Museum and West Stow Country Park. This has helped protect local heritage while encouraging participation and tourism.

- Through REPF, the council has also supported regeneration, particularly in rural areas, through town centre improvements, public realm upgrades and initiatives such as the Brandon Commission action plan. Work is also progressing on rural transport to improve connectivity.

Getting the essentials right

Along with the other district councils in Suffolk, West Suffolk Council submitted its Local Government Reorganisation interim plan and later its Case for Change for new unitary councils in the county during 2025. On 25 March 2026, the Government announced that it was proceeding with the creation of three unitary councils in Suffolk from 1 April 2028. Work has since begun on the implementation of this decision.

A budget agreed for 2026 to 2027 proposed revenue expenditure of £81.8 million for the day-to-day delivery of services, and the council agreed an additional £4.5 million investment in strategic priorities from reserves.

There were 87,284 enquires to customer services in 2025 to 2026 – 57.87 per cent was online or by email, up from 54.95 per cent in 2024 to 2025.

The council's recycling rate for 2025 to 2026 was 38.2 percent, comparing to Suffolk's average of 39.5 percent. 99.8 percent of bins were collected on schedule throughout the year.

During 2025 to 2026, the council responded to 645 reports of fly tipping and 477 reports of abandoned vehicles (removing 37 which were actually abandoned).

129 sweeping requests, 91 dead animal removal requests, 28 broken glass clearance requests, 5 syringe removal requests and reports of almost 40 tonnes of fly-tipped waste, were responded to.

In 2025 to 2026, 32,210 households subscribed to 33,896 bins (compared with 34,671 households and 36,238 bins in 2024 to 2025) for the garden waste collection service. Quantities of garden waste are influenced by seasonal growing conditions, so vary from year to year. However, in both years, this service resulted in over 10,000 tonnes of garden waste being collected and composted locally.

The total tonnage collected from street sweepings and litter bins for last year was 1524 tonnes (compared with 2,172 tonnes in 2024 to 2025).

In 2025 to 2026 we had 57 volunteers sign up for their own litter picking equipment, supported 573 volunteers taking part in group litter picking events, completing 89 requests to collect bags of litter from these events.

West Suffolk car parks had 3,388,607 off-street and on-streetcar parking events in 2025 to 2026.

During 2025 to 2026, the council granted 1569 planning applications supporting the delivery of much-needed new housing, including affordable housing, and business growth across the district.

19 major, 224 minor and 670 other planning applications were granted during 2025 to 2026, compared to 48 major, 261 minor and 687 others in 2024 to 2025.

West Suffolk Council Better Recycling case study

West Suffolk Council, working together with Suffolk County Council and Suffolk's other local authorities as the Suffolk Waste Partnership, has been working to deliver significant changes to household recycling and waste services.

Led by Government's Simpler Recycling legislation, the new services will transform how residents recycle at home, expanding the range of recyclable materials, and introducing weekly food waste collections.

The national Simpler Recycling reforms required councils across England to redesign collection services to create greater consistency and increase recycling rates. For West Suffolk, this meant preparing a major operational transformation while continuing to deliver reliable frontline services for more than 80,000 households.

The new requirements included:

- weekly food waste collections
- expanded kerbside recycling collections
- increased recycling consistency across England
- additional operational capacity, staffing and vehicles
- significant resident engagement and behaviour change.

Better Recycling FOR WEST SUFFOLK

The scale of change has required new infrastructure, operational redesign, fleet investment and extensive cross-council team collaboration.

In 2024, the council approved plans to significantly improve recycling services and increase the range of materials collected from residents' homes. The council committed to maintaining fortnightly residual waste collections while introducing separate weekly food waste services and expanding dry recycling collections to include glass, cartons and plastic films and bags.

The council also strengthened operational readiness through:

- investment in additional collection vehicles and bins
- expansion planning for the Operational Hub
- recruitment planning for additional operational staff
- coordinated delivery planning with Suffolk-wide waste partners.

Alongside infrastructure planning, West Suffolk Council also demonstrated leadership in public engagement and recycling innovation.

In 2024, the council became the first in the country to support the rollout of Trovr reverse vending machines through partnerships with local organisations including business improvement districts, Abbeycroft Leisure and Eastern Education Group. The initiative encouraged residents and young people to recycle more through rewards-based technology and local incentives.

The programme reflected the council's wider ambition not only to improve collection systems, but also to help create long-term behavioural change and greater environmental awareness across communities.

As the June 2026 launch approaches, the council has rolled out the following to residents across West Suffolk:

- new green-lidded recycling bins
- indoor and outdoor food waste caddies
- updated recycling guidance and information materials.

The Better Recycling programme marks a significant change in West Suffolk's waste management and in turn will bring environmental benefits such as higher recycling rates.

Appendix 1: Housing, Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy – 2025 to 2026 progress report

Progress against the strategy action plan has been reported in the pages of the council's annual report and through updates and performance scorecards in this year presented to the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee. This appendix provides more detail through key statistics and case studies.

Priority 1

Preventing homelessness and rough sleeping and responding to diverse needs

24
additional units of temporary accommodation including emergency provision and two accessible units

Gradual increase of households having their prevention duty ended in this year, from

278
as of 31 December 2025 to

390
as of 31 March 2026

As of 31 March 2026, 193 people had been referred to the Housing Pathway Service

36 of those have accepted accommodation with 39 people waiting for accommodation

The national snapshot figures for rough sleepers decreased in West Suffolk from

10 to 7

£1,121,800
of Local Authority Housing Fund awarded to the council to purchase six units of accommodation including two units of temporary accommodation in partnership with local registered providers

The council is working with 94 private sector landlords through the West Suffolk Lettings Partnership with a total of

193 properties

Case study

The council's Rough Sleeper Team works with partner organisations to provide tailored and personalised support to individuals who are rough sleeping. The following case study provides one example of the support that can be provided.

A local person who had experienced ongoing substance misuse issues, mental health problems and had been homeless, living in unstable accommodation, for a number of years. After a period of time rough sleeping in Bury St Edmunds, they visited the Bury Drop-In to access support. The individual was then verified as a rough sleeper by the team and provided with suitable accommodation through the rough sleeper pathway. With a willingness to change their living situation, alongside support provided by the team alongside a number of agencies including Bury Drop-In, Citizens Advice, Turning Point and mental health services, the individual is now stable in their accommodation. The team is now looking to secure long-term accommodation so they can continue to thrive.

Priority 2 Better quality homes; safe and secure and matched to need

Across Suffolk

112

Warm Homes: Local Grant applications were approved and delivered, and a total capital spend of

£2.3 million

(inclusive of additional funding awarded).

15 of the 112 properties were in West Suffolk, spending an average

£20,674.37

38

proactive enquiries completed on potential HMOs with one previously unknown small HMO identified and brought up to standard

204

fast track Disabled Facilities Grant applications approved

235

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) (all types) in West Suffolk; 90 inspected

30

HMO licence applications processed

156

housing condition complaints were responded to with 85 Housing Health and Safety Rating System assessment completed, 17 category one hazards removed and 64 category two hazards reduced

16

mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant applications approved

31

Suffolk-wide zero per cent retrofit loans have been awarded to homeowners in West Suffolk at a total value of

£287,209

Through Safe Suffolk Renters, four proactive inspections of private rented sector properties and 24 responsive cases investigated, 14 households provided with advice and three referred to the Private Sector Housing team for further investigation, 12 households signposted to tenancy advice and two tenants provided with early intervention support to prevent homelessness. A further 181 properties have been proactively targeted to review domestic minimum energy efficiency standard (MEES) regulations and Electrical Installation Condition Reports.

Case study

Improving standards in the private rented sector

Safe Suffolk Renters has continued the collaboration between East and West Suffolk Councils that has seen engagement with landlords and tenants with this trusted brand and established a team of professional officers. This partnership provides a service that focuses on:

- homelessness prevention, that includes responding to enquiries from landlords and tenants providing early interventions to support tenancy sustainment, engaged with landlords through East and West Suffolk Council Lettings Partnership events and a range of other landlord events, proactive communication through a variety of channels.

- Renters' Rights Act 2025, in preparation, providing regular updates and advice to tenants and landlords, supporting Private Sector Housing teams with a framework, training, advice and workforce development to deliver the service that will be required to manage the new requirements.

- proactive investigations into poor compliance with housing standards that is targeted and led by intelligence, using Energy Performance Certificate ratings and Indices of Deprivation data to focus on households most at risk and supporting Private Sector Housing teams with wider investigations.

Moving forward, Safe Suffolk Renters will continue to provide a proactive service that targets the poorest quality homes that often house the most vulnerable residents, providing support and using enforcement to improve living conditions and outcomes for residents.

Priority 3 New homes; affordable, sustainable and accessible

4,963
new homes alongside
8,712
that already have planning permission, to be built between now and the year 2041 through the life of the current local plan

£300,000
of Council Housebuilding Support Fund revenue funding to support the council's priority to increase affordable housing and progress a future pipeline of sites

Work progressed to deliver

864 units of accommodation through the local plan process across **22 sites**

799 new homes were built on sites across the district by the end of 2025 to 2026 including 205 new affordable homes

Barley Homes and West Suffolk Council are working together to produce a pipeline of eight sites with the aspiration of all providing

up to 100% affordable housing

and these are being progressed to planning application stage that are expected to be considered by August 2026.

Case study

The council works proactively with developers, registered providers and local communities to deliver affordable and suitable housing to accommodate different needs. The following case studies set out some of the ways we carry out this work.

Proactively engage with rural parishes and communities
The council provided grant funding for three parish councils (Barningham, Cavendish and Chevington) to undertake an independent housing needs survey with support from Community Action Suffolk to determine the affordable housing needs in those parishes. A report for Cavendish has been completed, and this will allow the parish council to explore opportunities to bring forward a rural exception site (a small plot of land on the edge of rural settlements designated for affordable housing) in the parish. Creating a housing needs survey can be challenging for rural exception sites so this support can help parishes to overcome this barrier and more forward with providing affordable housing in our rural areas.

Increasing the delivery of affordable housing
The purchase of 13 additional affordable homes at Lark Grange in Bury St Edmunds was supported by £1,020,000 of section 106 commuted sum funding, provided by the council to Havebury Housing Partnership, who in total secured 17 affordable homes with additional support from Homes England funding.

Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document
The newly adopted Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning (SPD) document will support developers and registered providers in navigating key policies within the current West Suffolk Local Plan. The SPD provides further detail on commuted sum calculations, registered provider expectations, clarifies the M4(2)(3)b requirement (where adaptions have been made in a property to ensure immediate use by a wheelchair user) and encourages early engagement with the team for affordable housing development queries in order to enable delivery.

Appendix 2: Environmental summary indicators

Progress against the strategy action plan has been reported in the pages of the council's annual report and through updates and performance scorecards in this year presented to the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee. This appendix provides more detail through key statistics and case studies.

- Total emissions figures include West Suffolk Council and Abbeycroft Leisure.
- Total emissions down 37 per cent compared to 2010 baseline.
- Total emissions down 4.8 per cent compared to 2024 to 2025.
- The summary figures below are for West Suffolk Council only.
- Renewable energy generation up 286 per cent compared to 2012 baseline.
- Renewable energy generation up 26 per cent compared to 2024 to 2025.
- Gas consumption up 32 per cent compared to 2019 to 2020 baseline.
- Gas consumption down 14 per cent compared to 2024 to 2025.
- Grid electricity consumption up by 46 per cent compared to 2019 to 2020 baseline.
- Grid electricity consumption down 8 per cent compared to 2024 to 2025.
- Total owned vehicle emissions down 9 per cent compared to 2019 to 2020 baseline.
- Total owned vehicle emissions up 4 per cent compared to 2024 to 2025.
- Total miles driven by council's EV fleet saved £20,176 in diesel costs.
- Business travel down 60 per cent compared to 2010 baseline.
- Business travel down 0.5 per cent compared to 2024 to 2025.
- Total water consumption up 20 per cent compared to 2010 to 2011 baseline.
- Total water consumption up 5 per cent compared to 2024 to 2025.

- Total West Suffolk House waste down 72 per cent compared to 2012 baseline.
- The recycling rate was 64 per cent, down 2 per cent compared to 2024 to 2025.
- Total West Suffolk House waste down 15 per cent compared to 2024 to 2025.
- 6 Green Flags retained: Abbey Gardens, East Town Park, Brandon Country Park, Aspal Close, West Stow Country Park and Nowton Park.
- Public electric vehicle chargers installed by West Suffolk Council can support 124 EVs charging at the same time, up 59 per cent compared to 2024 to 2025.
- Energy delivered to drivers powered 423,773 miles, down 22 per cent compared to 2024 to 2025.
- 61 trees and 345 whips were planted during 2025 to 2026.
- Office printing down 62 per cent compared to 2019 baseline.
- Office printing up 12 per cent compared to 2024 to 2025.

West Suffolk
Council