

West Suffolk District
Councillor
Report for
Hargrave Parish Council
March
2026



The following statement formed part of the agenda at the meeting of West Suffolk Council on Tuesday February 27th. The views expressed are of the Council Leader and do not necessarily reflect mine.

Leader's statement

This meeting will be discussing one of the most important duties we have as a council – setting a balanced budget. We all want to deliver on the strategic priorities we agreed and support the ambitions of our communities and businesses. We have to ensure we continue to deliver the high-quality services that our residents rely on. The budget we agree makes a difference to the everyday lives of all our residents. This is why it's so important. Welcome changes brought in by the government mean that this is the first budget for many years where we have the certainty and stability given by a multi-year settlement. I want to thank all who have been involved in putting this budget together. It is complex but the proposals build on our long history of strong financial management, make the West Suffolk pound stretch further all while meeting and seizing the challenges and opportunities faced by West Suffolk.

Supporting our communities One important element of the budget is the protection the proposals have given to the Thriving Communities Fund and Locality Budget grants. I am pleased to say grants totalling close to £275,000 from West Suffolk Council's Thriving Communities Fund were agreed by Cabinet. These support projects to benefit the health and wellbeing of all residents and also to help people who are struggling for whatever reason across West Suffolk. It includes money for youth projects and to support the victims of domestic abuse as well as people suffering from bereavement. The money will back the work of 38 projects run by charities, community and voluntary organisations. The Cabinet decision followed the recommendations of the council's Grant Working Party which met three times in order to go through the detail of applications. I want to thank Councillor Higgins as well as Councillor London and the Grant Working Party he chairs for their hard work on looking at all the applications. It is only the second year of grants under the Thriving Communities Fund and is part of a package of more than £650,000 of community support for 2026-2027 that also includes: £200,000 for Citizen's Advice West Suffolk (the second year of a three-year funding agreement) to support the council's agenda to work with families and communities; £179,200 under the councillor locality budget scheme. The next round (2026-2027) Locality Budgets will open again for applications in April. To give one example, a West Suffolk Council supported cost-of-living initiative, which helps people who are at their 'lowest point' and then aims to lift them back up, has worked to aid around 350 people in its first year. Unlike a food bank, people who come to the Newmarket Community Pantry Shop run out of The Racing Centre in Fred Archer Way, become members and then pay a nominal amount for their items - £3 for a shopping basket of food. The scheme is designed to help people retain their dignity rather than feel they are surviving on handouts. Members of the scheme are also given support to help them address the root causes of their hardship whether that is debt, managing income and finances, mental health, housing, or other challenges in their lives. The aim is to help people improve their situation, reducing their dependency on the shop. West Suffolk Council supported this project including with £22,969 from money allocated to the council from the government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Better Brandon

West Suffolk Cabinet backed a comprehensive set of initiatives designed to secure a better future for Brandon, following 52 recommendations from the independent commission. The commission was set up by the council and I would like to thank Mark Pragnell, a respected economist with over 30 years' experience, who chaired the commission and was supported by expert advisers and local stakeholders. The commission's work highlighted Brandon's strengths as a place to live, work and visit, while recognising the complex environmental and policy constraints that it faces. In response, the council created short, medium and long-term actions focused on partnership working, investment and targeted improvements. Immediate priorities include lobbying on key issues, enhancing local facilities such as the skate park and high street, and strengthening engagement through the Better Brandon panel. The council will also work with partners on skills, employment, housing opportunities and potential improvements to Brandon Station. Longer-term proposals aim to build strategic partnerships, unlock cross-boundary opportunities and raise aspirations for high-value jobs.

The proposed budget includes £100,000 in funding to support delivering projects and help attract further investment. Overall, the plan provides a strong foundation for coordinated action to deliver sustainable growth and improved wellbeing for Brandon's community.

Better Recycling

The council has been hard at work to ensure Better Recycling launches in June, in line with the government's new Simpler Recycling legislation. This is the first major change to household recycling since the introduction of blue bins. Residents will be able to recycle glass bottles and jars, cartons, and food waste in their household waste for the first time in West Suffolk. Pré-launch information packs are in the process of being delivered to residents. Due to the scale of the project this is being done in a phased approach, so don't worry if they've not been received yet! From the 23rd of February the first bins will start being delivered to residents in the south of the district, followed by the food waste caddies a few weeks later. The communication campaign is live across the district – you may have spotted it at bus stops or on social media. In-person engagement is also taking place in schools, meetings, and events to capture as many residents as possible. Helping tackle climate change and saving money welcome the news that our latest environmental performance report reveals continued progress toward reducing carbon emissions and enhancing sustainability efforts. The data for 2024 to 2025 shows that there has been a 34 per cent reduction in the council's own carbon emissions since 2010, even though the council's operations have grown. As well as emissions in buildings, this progress includes the benefits of replacing some smaller fleet vehicles with electric alternatives. Alongside this, there has been an increase in the council's generation of renewable energy of 8 per cent in just one year, due to the success of installing additional solar photovoltaic (PV) panels on council buildings and leisure centres during 2023 to 2024. More needs to be done, but the council's continued efforts to decarbonise its buildings has led to West Suffolk Council receiving a 92 per cent score in the buildings and heating category of the 2025 environmental scorecard issued independently by Climate Emergency UK. The national average for district councils was 48 per cent. Not included in this data is all the support we give to households and businesses to reduce their own energy bills, such as off-site renewable energy investments, grant schemes and recycling rates. These activities already prevent at least 7,000 tonnes of carbon a year from entering the atmosphere through third parties - which is more in total than the council itself still consumes. Our budget proposals look to continue this great work.

Culture

West Suffolk is a district recognised as a thriving centre for culture and heritage in East Anglia and I know several of our towns are looking to become UK Towns of Culture. These initial bids are Declarations of Interest, and the impetus comes from community organisations in the towns, with support from

West Suffolk Council.

I am pleased to say that Cabinet backed the council's first Cultural Strategy. Following engagement with the public, organisations and partners the strategy's mission is to strengthen and protect our cultural and heritage foundations, spark creativity and aspiration across all communities, and grow ambition and impact by connecting West Suffolk locally, nationally, and internationally. Through collaboration, innovation, and inclusivity, we will ensure culture and heritage improve the lives of all residents and visitors, celebrate our identity, and drive sustainable growth. Its

priorities are: Strengthen and Protect the Foundations; Spark Creativity and Aspiration; Grow Ambition; and Accelerate Impact.

Take a bow all those who worked on this important piece of work led by Councillor Shipp. I look forward to the curtain opening on many more projects backed by this strategy across West Suffolk. As I write this, two successful exhibitions are about to finish on 22 February

that were on display at Moyses Hall. The Art of Cinema features props from movies including Batman, Star Wars, The Mandalorian Star Trek and Harry Potter – to name but a few. It is part of the wider Sci-Fi and Action exhibition at Moyses which opened in October and included celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of Steven Spielberg's Jaws and the 70th anniversary of J.R.R. Tolkien completing The Lord of the Rings trilogy.

Councillor Cliff Waterman

Leader of West Suffolk Council

Mike Chester



West Suffolk
Council

District Councillor for the Chedburgh and Chevington Ward