

District Councillor report 3rd March 2022

Council tax update from April 2022

Council tax band D

West Suffolk	£187.11
Police and crime commissioner	£247.68
Suffolk County council	£1438.92

High lights

9 million investment to West Suffolk council zero carbon ambitions by 2030, this to include income generation, greener vehicles and buildings as well as extending its solar rent and roof schemes for business.

1.3 million investment will be made into parks and heritage assets such as Moyse's Hall and West Stow and maintaining areas like Brandon country park.

West Suffolk planning applications: 'Public Access' system

Message from the Systems Support team: please be advised that Public Access will be unavailable from Tuesday 29 March 2022 to Friday 1 April 2022 for an upgrade. This means you will be unable to view or comment on planning applications using the system during this time. We apologise for any inconvenience caused. If you have any queries, please contact prs.systems@westsuffolk.gov.uk

Support for Ukrainian refugees

You may be approached by residents or businesses in relation to support for Ukrainian refugees. We have been working with county colleagues on this matter and the County Council has updated its website to include a link for donations to the Red Cross scheme to support those impacted by the crisis in Ukraine. [Supporting Afghan and Ukrainian refugees | Suffolk County Council](#)

The government has also announced a Disasters Emergency Committee appeal: [Home | Disasters Emergency Committee \(dec.org.uk\)](#). There are some local community groups are collecting items and arranging distribution and some of you may have seen these on social media. We aren't as a council involved in these arrangements but people may wish to link with these groups directly.

We stand ready to help in Suffolk should the government ask local authorities to provide support. In Suffolk we have been participating in refugee resettlement for six years and so have partnerships and procedures already in place that will allow us to respond quickly if needed. Updates will be provided as the situation develops.

If you have any queries please do contact Davina Howes, Director (Families and Communities): davina.howes@westsuffolk.gov.uk

Council Tax rebate grant

You will be aware that the Government has announced a Council Tax rebate grant to help households with some of the impact of the rising energy costs.

The rebate of £150 is to be paid to households in bands A-D in England which are liable for Council Tax on 1 April 2022. It includes those whose bill is £0 owing to an existing award of Council Tax support, as well as to certain exempt dwellings.

Across West Suffolk Council Tax bills and a **Government leaflet** will be delivered to homes from today explaining how the scheme works. In line with the Government rules, the £150 rebate will not be shown on the annual Council Tax notices (that residents will be receiving shortly). Instead, we will contact residents as soon as we know how and when any payment will be made.

We are working through the Government guidance with Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP) and have identified that there are close to 64,000 households that will be eligible for this rebate grant in West Suffolk.

A little under 46,000 of these already pay by Direct Debit.

The rest – some 17,857 households, include those on exemptions or 100 per cent Council Tax support who are still entitled to the grant. We are exploring with ARP the quickest and easiest way of getting this money to them.

Why we aren't running a Direct Debit campaign just yet

Although money saving experts such as Martin Lewis are urging people to sign up to Direct Debit, and on the face of it this would seem a simple solution, we are not running a campaign to encourage this linked to the rebate grant just yet. We would of course prefer, in the long run, for people to pay by Direct Debit. However encouraging people to sign up right now does present an issue.

We have to effectively use the first Direct Debit of the billing year to verify an account so if people sign up in the days leading up to the 1 April date, we may not be able to collect their first payment before 1 May. This in effect could potentially delay their rebate grant until after then, which would undermine our assertion that it's the quickest way to access a grant. That said, we are still discussing this with ARP to see if there is a quick and easy solution.

Discretionary funding

You may have also seen that there is also discretionary funding to support vulnerable people and individuals on low incomes who pay Council Tax for properties in Bands E-H. This is subject to Government guidance and we are looking at this with ARP, after which we will model an application scheme.

In the meantime, if you are contacted by anyone wanting to find out more, please direct them to this webpage www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/counciltax

If you have any queries please do contact: Rachael Mann, Director (Resources and Property) rachael.mann@westsuffolk.gov.uk

Additional electric vehicle chargers in Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill

Last year we advised that we had secured external funding for additional electric vehicle chargers in Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill. This work is scheduled to start this week. (7 March).

West Suffolk is committed to tackling climate change. One of the many actions recommended and agreed from our West Suffolk Environment and Climate Change Taskforce, was to secure better electric vehicle infrastructure to help residents and businesses make the switch to Electric Vehicles (EVs).

Government figures show EV ownership in West Suffolk is above the national average and sales of EVs make up more than a quarter of new vehicle sales. We have seen a 75 per cent increase in the use of our "fast charger" in Ehringhausen Way, Haverhill, in the autumn compared to last summer months. Likewise, in Bury St Edmunds, our rapid charger in School Yard saw a 50 per cent increase.

We have already either directly invested in or secured investment in EV chargers at 16 locations across West Suffolk enabling 66 EVs to be charged at any one time. These include Rapid Chargers in Bury St Edmunds, Newmarket and Mildenhall, alongside fast chargers in Brandon, Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill, and Newmarket; and EV lamppost chargers to support residents (who often don't have driveways) to switch to EVs

We are now installing "fast chargers" at St Andrews Street car park in Bury St Edmunds and the Arts Centre car park in Haverhill. They will serve eight parking bays at each location and can be used not only by town centre visitors or workers, but also by local residents who again don't have a drive but may want to switch to EV use. Locations are highly dependent on electrical grid capacity and conditions of the grant funding.

The new chargers will cost £90,000 and the Office of Zero Emission Vehicles (OZEV) is funding three quarters of the capital costs of these with the remaining 25 per cent being met by the chargepoint operators BP Pulse. BP Pulse are also funding the first three years maintenance and connectivity costs, as well as offering a small profit share. Following the first three years, we anticipate that revenue will cover ongoing maintenance costs. Users of these EV chargers will still need to pay to park in the spaces As with our other car parks, the charging stations will be available on the BP Pulse network.

We will publicise the availability of these chargers once they have been installed and connected.

We will of course continue to work on delivery of charging infrastructure at other locations in our towns and villages and are working on a long-term delivery plan for public EV charging infrastructure.

All of this is part of our wider work around reducing air pollution and helping our environment for the benefit of all who live and work here. The work includes reducing vehicle idling, encouraging greater use of clean energy particularly solar energy as well as investing to significantly cut the carbon footprint of buildings we

manage across the district. This is outlined in more detail in the Final report of the West Suffolk Environment and Climate Change Taskforce <https://democracy.westsuffolk.gov.uk/documents/s37876/CAB.WS.20.045> (3.8 Work with partners to develop an EV charging Point strategy and roll out plan).

FURTHER INFORMATION:

About the fast chargers

The chargers being installed are 7kw “fast” chargers. These can be used by residents to charge a vehicle overnight. Town centre visitors who put their vehicle on charge for an hour could expect to get enough charge to power them for 20 to 30 miles while a charge of around 4-5 hours would supply enough power to drive 100 miles.

About Electric Vehicles

The Government plans to end the sale of petrol and diesel cars in the UK by 2030 with new hybrid vehicles allowed until 2035. While we continue to encourage people to walk, cycle, or use public transport, we recognise that given that West Suffolk is a rural area, for some people, some journeys aren't always possible by any other means than by car.

EVs also do not produce exhaust emissions. By switching to EVs people are helping reduce air pollution which cost this country at least £16 billion in health costs each year according to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

EVs are also cheaper than petrol or diesel vehicles –with a lower fuel cost per mile, cheaper servicing, and cheaper vehicle tax. Technology has dramatically improved meaning that EVs can make many long journeys on a single charge, and they are becoming a more realistic option not just for residents but for businesses including trades people and small-scale suppliers.

West Suffolk Council offers a Greener Business Grant which means it will match fund a business up to £1,000 towards the cost of an electric vehicle or company charge point. Suffolk County Council continue to work on their Plug-in-Suffolk scheme which is funding chargepoints at more rural community locations in West Suffolk.