



So you want to be
a District Councillor?



1. Why become a councillor?

There are many reasons why people stand for election as a councillor. Often it is because they want:

- To speak on behalf of their local community and to help local people and represent their needs and concerns
- To pursue their political beliefs and aspirations
- To offer their personal or professional skills to assist the work of the council

You may have already decided to stand for election as a Stratford-on-Avon district councillor or you may be giving it some thought and are wondering what it might involve. Either way this leaflet gives you some information to help you decide whether you would like to stand for election.

2. What does the district council do?

The district council is responsible for the provision of:

- Strategic housing services/homelessness;
- Environmental health/licensing;
- Leisure, sports and museum services;
- Parks and allotments;
- Local planning and building control;
- Refuse collection and street cleaning;
- Public toilets;
- Council tax and housing benefits;
- Council tax collection;
- Business rate collection.

Stratford-on-Avon has 53 district councillors each of whom represents a particular area or ward in the district; some wards have more than one district councillor.

Councillors come from all walks of life: this is very important as it means that a diverse range of people reflecting different points of view are helping to shape and develop the quality and effectiveness of services which the council provides for the benefit of all residents.

The council has a formal constitution which is a comprehensive document explaining how the council operates, how decisions are made and what procedures are followed to ensure the council is efficient, transparent and accountable to local people. You can see the full constitution on the councils website

<http://www.stratford.gov.uk/council/council-401.cfm>

The council is organised with a number of committees covering, for instance:

- Environmental issues;
- Community services;
- Policy and resources;
- Strategic development;
- Planning;
- Personnel;
- Licensing;
- Overview and scrutiny;
- Standards.

The officer management structure includes a chief executive, two strategic directors and eight heads of service (Customer services, Revenues & Housing, Change and Performance, Member Services, Environment, Planning, Community Services and Resources).

3. What do councillors do?

There are many challenging roles to being a councillor from representing your community and constituents and undertaking work on their behalf, to representing the council on other bodies, being a member of council and being fully involved in decision making.

All councillors are expected to represent and champion the interests of the community, businesses and constituents in each area. To achieve this as a councillor you will need to:

- Keep yourself informed about the needs of your area;
- Represent your community to the district council and other bodies;
- Be accessible to the people in your area and be able to be contacted by telephone;
- Play a leading role in your area and keep in contact with local groups and societies and, where they exist, parish councils;
- Keep people in your area informed about your work.

As a councillor for a particular ward, you will be asked by the electorate to help with problems and you will be responsible for promoting and representing your ward.

As well as the representational roles, councillors participate in the political management of the council. All 53 members make up the full council, which normally meets five or six times a year. Council is responsible for setting the budget, council tax and deciding the councils overall policies. It also appoints committees to undertake functions on behalf of the council. The executive committee is made up of the leader of the council and up to nine other councillors (appointed by the leader). Each member of the executive has a portfolio responsibility for one of the main service areas of the council.

Additionally you may also be asked to serve as a member of a panel, a committee or at some point the executive.

Most meetings are open to the public and you are welcome to attend if you would like to see how the council's political structures operate. A timetable of meetings is available on the councils website at <http://www.stratford.gov.uk/council/meetings.cfm>

Councillors may also represent the council on a wide range of local and regional outside organisations such as school governing bodies, community organisations and charities and trusts.

Personal conduct

The way councillors act in office, particularly over matters where they have a financial or personal interest, is governed both by law and by a code of conduct.

If elected, you will be required to sign a declaration stating that you undertake to observe the council's code of conduct for councillors. You will also be required to declare certain financial and other interests which you may have.

4. *Am I able to stand for election?*

Almost anyone can stand to be a councillor.

You must be at least 18 on the day of nomination, and be a British subject, a commonwealth or EU citizen. You must be an elector within the district or have lived, worked or occupied any land or premises in Stratford-on-Avon for at least 12 months immediately preceding nomination and election.

You cannot stand for election if you already work for the council, are subject to a bankruptcy restrictions order or interim order, have a criminal conviction involving a prison sentence of not less than three months in the previous five years or you are otherwise specifically disqualified.

You do not need any previous experience but an understanding of how a council works would be helpful.

If you are elected you would be offered training to help you carry out your duties and support from the council and your political group (if appropriate).

We welcome people from all backgrounds. The greater mix of people, the more effectively the council can reflect the views of its community.

5. *How can I stand?*

The next council elections take place in May 2007. The closing date by which you must submit your nomination will be 4 April 2007.

You may want some advice about nominations, election expenses or any other aspect of the election. Information can be obtained from your political party office, from existing councillors or from the councils principal democratic officer on 01789 260208.

6. *What about politics?*

You certainly do not have to join a political group but in practice many councillors choose to do so.

Within the council the political groups provide a structure and means to enable matters and emerging issues to be discussed informally and this helps the council when it subsequently takes decisions about important policy issues.

If you wish you may stand as a representative of a political party, in which case you will need to contact your preferred political party's local office.

You can also stand as an independent.

Most councils form political groups (which is not necessarily the same as political parties) and each councillor can choose whether to join a political group, or remain an independent or non-aligned member on the council.

7. *What is the time commitment?*

Time commitment will depend on several factors such as: how involved you want to be; your political activities; if you choose to be involved in particular issues. Depending on your role, the time commitment can vary from a few hours each week to several hours every day.

It is likely that you will need to commit from a day to about 20 hours per week to carry out the basic role as a councillor effectively. This could rise to 25-30 hours per week if you take on additional responsibilities. Leading councillors such as political group leaders and committee chairmen and group spokespersons would spend considerably more time than this.

If you are elected as a member of a council body, you will be expected to attend its meetings, which are usually held at the district council offices in Stratford-upon-Avon. There may also be workshops and smaller working group meetings to attend with officers or other councillors. For most of the meetings you attend there will be associated papers which you will need to read beforehand

If you are in employment, you may need to discuss the time commitment with your employer.

Other calls on your time may involve evidence gathering in respect of scrutiny exercises, attendance at seminars and briefings. You will also need to devote some time in respect of induction and any identified training and development opportunities.

Advances in information technology now assist Councillors in carrying out their duties and modern councillors will need to take full advantage of the facilities on offer, you will be provided with IT equipment and support for these.

Your representative role will involve making yourself available to the people of your ward and you may choose to hold ward surgeries. Your constituents will look to you for help in dealing with their problems, whether or not these fall strictly within the councils remit.

You are likely to receive a lot of post and a great many telephone calls and emails. You must bear in mind not every caller will telephone you at what you may consider to be a reasonable hour.

If you are not also a town or parish councillor, it is likely that you will be in regular contact with or invited to attend your local parish council meetings.

It is for you to decide the level of commitment that you are able to give to being a councillor. Some may have more time to give than others, but if you are elected a chairman or member of the Executive committee, remember the role can be very demanding.

8. Will I get paid?

There is no salary for being a councillor as it is regarded as a public service. However, councillors are paid allowances (basic allowance is in the region of £4,000 per annum) which is intended to recognise the time devoted by you to your work, including such inevitable calls on your time as meetings (whether council meetings or meetings with constituents or political group meetings) and also cover incidental costs such as the use of your home and telephone for which the other provision is not made.

In addition you are able to claim travel, and in some cases, subsistence, for your attendance at certain 'approved events'.

Some councillors also receive a special responsibility allowance in recognition of particular duties they undertake.

Councillors are taxed and pay National Insurance on their allowances, e.g. basic and special responsibility allowances, just like normal employees. Travelling and other expenses incurred as part of a councillor's duties, including mileage expenses and subsistence allowances incurred as part of a councillor's legitimate expenses, are paid to levels agreed by the council and so are not taxable.

9. Will I get training?

On election councillors are encouraged to participate in a comprehensive programme of induction. This covers a wide range of things from information about the council's services, challenges and priorities to training aimed at developing and supporting councillors' personal skills to enable them to undertake their role most effectively.

As well as this initial training, the council will provide all councillors with the tools to do the job effectively. The council will therefore work with individual councillors to develop a personal development plan to meet specific training and development needs and help you to develop the competencies you will need to be an effective councillor.

Member seminars are arranged regularly to keep you up to date on specific initiatives. Additionally, councillors also attend specific conferences and seminars which are relevant to their area of work.

A structured member training programme is also provided to enable members to benefit from further training.

10. How about support?

As a councillor you will be given the opportunity to have information technology facilities provided and supported by the council, installed at your home e.g laptop and printer with connection to the internet and email. As part of your induction you will be offered training in using your information technology facilities.

As far as possible, communication with members will be emailed and each member will be given an email address.

There is a members room at the main offices in Stratford upon Avon where current publications and council documents can be referred to. The members room also has information technology facilities plus a photocopier and fax machine.

Official correspondence can be typed for you at the councils offices and you will be provided with personalised official Council stationery.

The councils democratic services staff are available to offer you help and advice on request.

11. Still interested?

The district council welcomes the public to attend its meetings. Why not come along to a meeting soon? See our website <http://www.stratford.gov.uk/council/meetings.cfm> for details of when meetings are due to take place.

You can also contact one of the existing district councillors for an informal discussion. They are also listed on the councils website.

If you are still thinking of standing as a candidate for a particular political party you should first get in touch with that party's local organisation (Many parties will also have a national website through which you can get information).

OR

If you would prefer to speak with an officer then don't hesitate to contact the elections office on 01789 260208 or email elections@stratford-dc.gov.uk

Approximately five weeks before the election, public notices are issued and these will give you information about what you need to do to get your name on the ballot paper.



Member Services
Stratford-on-Avon District Council
Elizabeth House
Church Street
Stratford-upon-Avon
Telephone 01789 260208
email elections@stratford-dc.gov.uk
www.stratford.gov.uk