



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 and sports services;
- Parks, open spaces 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;
- Electoral Registration, Elections and referenda

Stratford-on-Avon has 36 District Councillors each of whom represents a particular area or ward in the district. A ward is represented by 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 Council's website

<https://www.stratford.gov.uk/council-democracy/the-councils-constitution.cfm>

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

- Strategic development and finance;
- Planning;
- Personnel;
- Licensing;
- Overview and scrutiny;
- Audit and Standards.

The officer management structure includes two Executive Directors and five heads of service (Governance & Democracy, Planning & Housing, Technical & Community Services, ICT & Revenues and Infrastructure & Transformation)

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 e-mail and 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 36 Councillors make up the full Council, which normally meets five or six times a year. The Council is responsible for setting the budget, council tax and deciding the Council's overall policies. It also appoints the Cabinet and various committees to undertake functions on behalf of the Council. The Cabinet 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 committee, sub-committee, working group or at some point the Cabinet.

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 Council's website at

<https://democracy.stratford.gov.uk/ieDocHome.aspx?bcr=1&Page=all>

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. You can access the Council's Code of Conduct at

<https://www.stratford.gov.uk/council-democracy/code-of-conduct.cfm>

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 (currently). 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 or suspended 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 on 2 May 2019.

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 David Dalby, the Council's Democratic Services Manager on 01789 260210.

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 have 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 per week 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 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 or attendance at training 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 in 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 Council's remit.

You are likely to receive a lot of post and 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/town 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 as a chairman or member of the Cabinet, you must remember the role can be very demanding.

On the positive side, being a Councillor can be very rewarding. You will play an important part in local decision making and be able to influence policies that affect your neighbourhood. You will also be ideally placed to help your local constituents and be their voice on the District Council.

8. Will I get paid?

There is no salary for being a Councillor as they are not employees of the Council. However, Councillors are paid allowances (the basic allowance is currently £5,254 per annum, paid monthly) 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 provision is not made.

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

Some Councillors also receive a special responsibility allowance in recognition of particular duties they undertake e.g. if they are Leader of the Council or a Committee Chairman.

Councillors are taxed and pay National Insurance on their 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?

Stratford-on-Avon District Council is a multi-million pound organisation and you will be making decisions with Council Tax payer's money. It is important therefore that you received the correct training.

On election, you will receive an Induction Pack and will be encouraged to participate in a comprehensive programme of training and induction. This will cover a wide range of things from information about the Council's services, challenges and priorities, to training aimed at developing personal skills to enable you to undertake your role more effectively.

As a new Councillor, you are expected to attend the Induction Programme of events – the majority of which will be in the early evening. **You should therefore aim not be on holiday in May and June 2019.**

As well as this initial training, the Council will provide you with the tools to do the job effectively. It will work with you to develop a personal development plan to meet your specific training and development needs and help you to develop the competencies you will need to be an effective Councillor.

Member training sessions are arranged regularly as part of a structured Member Training Programme to keep you up to date on specific initiatives. Additionally, you can also attend specific conferences and seminars if they are relevant to your area of Council work.

10. How about support?

As a Councillor you will be given the opportunity to have information technology facilities provided and supported by the Council. This may be a laptop, desktop PC or smartphone. As part of your induction you will be offered training in using your information technology facilities if you require it.

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

There is a Members' Room at the Council Offices in Stratford-on-Avon where current publications and Council documents can be referred to. The Members' Room also has information technology facilities plus a photocopier.

You will be provided with personalised official Council stationery such as business cards.

The Council's Democratic Services staff are available to offer you help and advice on request.

Political parties are being asked to provide mentors for new Councillors to help them settle in quicker and offer advice.

11. Still interested?

There is a Prospective Councillor Event being held at 5pm on Thursday 15 November 2018 in the Council Chamber at Elizabeth House, Stratford-upon-Avon. You are very welcome to attend.

Also, the District Council welcomes members of the public to attend its meetings. Why not come along to a meeting soon? See our website <https://democracy.stratford.gov.uk/ieDocHome.aspx?bcr=1&Page=all> 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 Council's 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 260210 or email elections@stratford-dc.gov.uk

Approximately six 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.



Stratford-on-Avon District Council

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Telephone 01789 260210
Email elections@stratford-dc.gov.uk

www.stratford.gov.uk