



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL
www.stroud.gov.uk

Becoming a Councillor: A guide to elections and the work of a Councillor



2002-2003
Crime Reduction in Rural Areas
2004-2005
Services for Older People
2007-2008
Emergency Planning

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Foreword

Every year (except in the fourth year of County Council elections) local people vote to choose their local Councillor in order to represent their interests and be the voice of their community.

If you are considering becoming a Councillor, this guide is aimed to help you, it highlights everything you need to know about the early stages of becoming elected.

Picking up a copy of this Guide could be your first step to launching your career in public office. Becoming a Councillor puts you at the heart of local democracy and can be both challenging and rewarding.

This Guide aims to help you understand how to stand as a candidate for Stroud District Council and explains a little of the work of a Councillor.

The Guide covers everything from Councillor eligibility and the Council's structure to the election process.

The Council wishes to represent a broad section of the community and wishes to encourage a range of candidates to stand for election. We welcome interest from everyone.

Please read through the guide, we hope that you find it a useful starting point.

Martin Wood,

Principal Democratic Services Officer

About the Stroud District

Stroud District is a largely rural area covering 175 square miles in the south of Gloucestershire. The eastern half of the district is part of the Cotswold Hills, which is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). To the west of the Cotswolds escarpment there is low lying landscape of the Severn Vale and the district is bordered by 42 kilometres of the Severn Estuary

Approximately 110,000 people live in the District, with three quarters of the district residents living in or around Stroud town, Cam, Dursley and Wotton-Under-Edge. The population of the District is aging and the profile is shifting from people under 45 to more people over 60. It is predicted that by 2026 the number of residents aged over 65 will increase by nearly half (40%) to 28150. Furthermore new ethnic communities are settling and growing due in part to the increasing migrant workforce.

The natural and built landscapes are of a high quality and important to the District's identity and local people's sense of belonging. The local communities have identified the need to effectively manage natural resources in order to protect the climate, minimise the risk and impact of flooding and reduce the amount of waste going to landfill.

The number of large employers in the District is declining, but micro and small businesses are thriving. There is also a growing demand for locally produced food and locally made products. This is reflected by the success of the Farmers Markets which operate throughout the district. Another aspect of the developing economy is tourism, though its potential has not yet been fully realised.

Selsley Common, south of Stroud:



Services provided by the Council

Stroud District Council is responsible for providing a wide range of local services including;

Environmental Services such as refuse collection, street care and cleaning and food safety.

Licensing - The District Council is responsible for issuing licenses, permits and registrations for a wide range of activities, including alcohol and entertainments licenses as well as taxi licenses.

Planning - The Planning Service covers planning, listed building conservation area and building regulation applications. It also develops planning policies at a local level, processes land charge searches and maintains the Council's address database through the naming and numbering of streets.

Housing – The Housing Management division provides a range of housing management services to Council tenants. These include repairs, rent, sheltered housing and tenant participation. The Housing Strategy division measures the housing needs of the people in Stroud District. This includes looking at the quality and suitability of social housing, and the affordability of adequate housing.

Regeneration – The Regeneration team's aim is to assist businesses across the district, by improving the economic climate to increase the wealth, diversity, and sustainability of our industries and services. They offer a range of services and initiatives to support growth and development from small to large multinationals.

Emergency Planning – The Council provides Assistance for emergency services in the event of a major civil emergency.

The Council's vision and priorities:

Vision

To make Stroud District a better place to live, work and visit for everyone.

Key Priorities

The key priorities are as follows:

Regeneration

To promote the economic vitality of towns and villages.

Environment

To create a better local environment

Affordable Housing

To provide affordable and decent housing

Community Safety

To create safer and stronger communities

Healthy Living

To promote health and well-being

In addition there is one internal priority:

Citizen First and Excellence

Be an excellent Council by being a strong community leader able to work in partnership, putting the Citizen First, investing in our people and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of our services, processes and technology.

How the Council Works

Stroud District Council has a Constitution which sets out how the Council operates and how decisions are made. Many day to day operational decisions are made by Officers in line with policies and budgets agreed by Councillors. Councillors are responsible for the major decisions taken by the Council including budget setting, approving key policies and ensuring that services are delivered in line with the priorities of the council in order to improve the quality of life in the district.

The Council's civic year runs from the date of the annual general meeting of the council. It is this meeting each year which appoints the Chair, Vice-Chair and Leader of Council, establishes and appoints members to committees and confirms the calendar for the forthcoming year. The Annual General Meeting is the first meeting held following the elections in May.

Stroud District Council operates under a Leader and Cabinet style of government. The full Council, comprising 51 elected Members, is the supreme body. The full Council meets approximately eight times per year. Amongst other duties, full Council sets the Budget (and Council Tax) and the policy framework within which all decisions must sit. It also chooses the Council Leader, who then selects his or her own Cabinet. The Council is elected by thirds.

Stroud's Cabinet is made up of up to 9 Councillors and is headed by the Leader of the Council. They are responsible for guiding the Council by developing strategies and policies with the help of Policy Panels. These Policy Panels supplement the work of Cabinet members, enabling all Councillors to be involved in improving the services that the Council provides for the District.

The work of the Cabinet is monitored by members of the Scrutiny Committees who can ask both Councillors and Officers to attend meetings and answer questions.

There is also a Youth Council which gives a democratic voice to the young people aged 11 to 18 in the Stroud District who have an opinion but no means by which to express it. Being a body that represents so many people who cannot vote, the Youth Council is extremely important to the operation of Stroud District Council. The Youth Council elects its own Youth Cabinet, whose members "shadow" members of the Stroud District Cabinet. Uniquely, these members have the right to attend Cabinet meetings and can take part in debate.

All Council meetings are usually open to the public although when some matters are discussed, which may be commercially sensitive or relate to individual private circumstances, the public will be excluded from a portion of the meeting.

Councillors and their work

Councillors can represent political parties or can be independent. Their common interest is to see their community improve and develop a better quality of life for local residents.

Councillors play a vital role in shaping and directing the effectiveness of local services for the benefit of local people. Councillors are elected by the community to represent the interests of local people.

People stand for election for many reasons:

- To shape the future of the local community.
- To contribute business or professional skills such as communication and negotiating skills.
- Representing residents of their ward and helping with local issues.
- To speak on behalf of the local community and help local people.
- To pursue a particular issue.
- To pursue their political beliefs.

Their work normally involves:

- Attending council and committee meetings to make or help shape decisions on local services.
- Representing the Council on other organisations.
- Decision making and formulating policy.
- Scrutinising the decisions of Cabinet.
- Helping the Council to achieve its corporate aims.

Being a Councillor requires you to care about your local community, be willing to give up some of your time and also be keen to learn.

Meetings and Decision Making

The **full Council** meeting is the most formal of meetings. There are 51 Councillors who make up the full Council, which meets approx 8 times per year. Their responsibilities are to discuss and agree major policies to determine how services are run, agree how much will be spent by the Council each year and agree how much you pay in Council tax.

The **Cabinet** is made up of the Leader of Council and up to 9 'Cabinet Members'. Each member of the Cabinet has a portfolio roughly corresponding to an area of the Council's priorities. Their role is to make significant decisions on how the council runs.

There are 2 **Overview and Scrutiny Committees**, their role is to review and monitor the Council's services, examine the decisions of the Cabinet to ensure they have been made in the correct manner and in a way that benefits the Stroud District. They are also required to comment on and develop Council policies.

There are number of regulatory Committees, these include Development Control Committee, Licensing and Regulation Committee and the Standards Committee.

The **Development Control Committee** determines planning applications and application to divert or extinguish footpaths.

The **Standards Committee** is responsible for ensuring the highest standards of behaviour are upheld. Membership includes independent members of the public, Parish Councillors and District Councillors.

The **Licensing and Regulation Committee** deals with a range of licensing issues around alcohol licences, taxis and street trading etc.

How to find out what is going on

You can find out what is being discussed (including the agendas, minutes and reports of committee meetings) by logging onto the 'Council and Democracy' area of the Councils website at www.stroud.gov.uk

You can also use our 'Webcasting' facility to watch live council meetings and playback recordings of meetings from our archive by using the link from our homepage at www.stroud.gov.uk

Members of the public can attend a number of meetings to listen to our Councillors discussing local issues. Members of the public may also ask questions at some meetings, further details of these can be found on the website.

How do I become a Stroud District Councillor?

District Council elections are based on one third of Members retiring each year for three years. In the fourth year, County Council elections take place. Sometimes an individual seat becomes vacant and details of the process are published as it occurs when this happens, the term of office lasts until the end of that term of office.

Criteria for candidates

You can be a candidate if on the day of nomination and on the day of election

- You are 18 years or over
- You are a British, Irish, Commonwealth or other European Union citizen

In addition, you must also satisfy at least one other qualification:

- Your name is on Stroud's electoral register
- You have lived in the Stroud District for the past twelve months
- You own land or have been a tenant in Stroud for at least twelve months
- Your main or only place of work during the last twelve months has been in Stroud.

You cannot become a candidate if

- You are bankrupt
- You have been sentenced to a prison term of three months or more (including a suspended sentence) within the last five years.
- You work for Stroud District Council or hold a politically restricted post with another authority.
- You have been disqualified from holding office as a result of an election offence relating to corrupt or illegal practices.

Nominations

To become a candidate you need to be nominated by ten people (whose names appear on Stroud's register of electors) and declare that you accept the nomination. The forms for this are attached and available from the Council offices a few weeks before Election Day.

Most candidates are nominated through a political party, but this doesn't need to be the case. Individuals may stand in their own right as independent candidates, as long as the principal qualifications are met.

If you want to be affiliated to a particular political party, you will need to get in touch with that party's local organisation. Details of all political parties are available from the Register of Political Parties at:

<http://www.electoralcommission.gov.uk/regulatory-issues/regpoliticalparties.cfm>

If you wish to stand under a name other than 'independent', you will need to register the name as a political party; advice is available from the following website:

<http://www.lga.gov.uk/independentgroup>

Candidates' agents

Every candidate must appoint an election agent, although you can choose to act as your own agent. Amongst other things, your agent sees that the election campaign is conducted in accordance with the law, deals with expenses and generally organises the campaign's activities.

Election Day

Every candidate is entitled to attend the 'count' and opening of postal votes on polling day. You can also appoint other people (polling agents), to attend the polling stations.

After the election

If you are elected as a Councillor you will be required to make a declaration in the presence of the Council's Returning Officer. This should take place as soon as possible after the election in order to allow you to take up your duties straight away.

All Councillors must comply with the Code of Conduct and make a declaration of financial and other interests. This is in order to show local residents that the people representing them are acting with integrity and do not participate in decisions where they gain personally.

Following the election, each candidate is required by law to complete a statement of expenses to show how much money has been spent towards their campaign. This must be completed and returned within 28 days of the declaration of the result.

You will be required to attend an Induction Programme; the details of this are attached with a Training Programme.

Frequently Asked Questions

Have I got time to be a Councillor?

It will depend on the extent of your involvement, your political activities and what role you take in the council. The time commitment can vary from a few hours a week to several hours a day.

You will be required to spend time talking to the people you represent, this could be in the form of post, emails or telephone calls.

Most meetings are held in the evening, allowing people with jobs or children to attend more easily.

Do Councillors get paid?

All Councillors are paid an annual basic allowance to recognise their time commitment and to cover incidental expenses. Some Councillors are also given an additional allowance to cover any special responsibility such as a portfolio holder or Chairman. There is also a travel allowance for attending meetings, and a carer's allowance for childcare or help for looking after an elderly relative.

Do I know enough to stand for election?

The main requirement is that you are enthusiastic about helping the local community and are willing to learn.

An induction programme and an ongoing training programme is available to all Councillors and dedicated Officer support through the Democratic Services team.

What support will I receive?

There will be training for new Councillors, including a number of briefing sessions. Seminars and courses can also be arranged throughout your time as a Councillor.

There will be a carefully prepared induction programme on the Council's services, priorities, aims and its challenges.

Stroud District Council officers are committed to assist you in fulfilling your duties, Democratic Services provide a first point of contact and support service to assist with any questions you may have.

Councillors are provided with a laptop in order for them to receive electronic correspondence and use the internet.

Key Contacts

Council main reception: Tel: 01453 766321

Elections office: Tel: 01453 754886

Democratic Services: Tel: 01453 754331

Useful Website Links

www.stroud.gov.uk – The Council's website including information on the Council's service, the Agendas, Minutes and reports of public Committee meetings.

<http://www.youth.stroud.gov.uk/default.asp?pid=1> – This site has been designed to give you essential information about Stroud District Youth Council

www.strouddc.ukcouncil.net/site/index.php - View the Council's meeting live or view archived meetings.

www.electoralcommission.org.uk – Information on the entire elections process.

www.aboutmyvote.co.uk – Details on how to register and vote.

www.standardsboard.co.uk – Information on the code of conduct and the ethical framework for Councillors.

By becoming a Councillor you can make a difference.

**The County and European
elections will be**

4 June 2009

(7 am – 10 pm)

**Notice of elections and
availability of nomination papers**

28 April 2009

Close of nominations:

7 May 2009

(4 pm)