

Candidate and Agents Briefing – 7 April



Gloucestershire County Council Elections & Stroud Central District Ward Election

Thursday 1 May 2025



Elections on Thursday 1 May 2025

- Gloucestershire County Council
 - 11 County Divisions
 - 61 Candidates
 - Single Member Divisions
- **Stroud District Council**
 - Stroud Central District Ward
 - 6 Candidates
 - Single Member Ward



Agenda

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 - Code of Conduct
 - Imprints
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- 04 Postal votes
- 05 Polling day and Tellers
- 06 Verification and the Count
- 07 Candidate Spending

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Hannah Emery	Deputy Returning Officer and Head of Corporate Policy & Governance
Jenna Malpass	Deputy Returning Officer and Democratic Services & Elections Manager

Key Dates



Postal Vote Issue	Thursday 10 April (16,500) Tuesday 15 April (500) Thursday 24 April (200) Daily until Thursday 1 May
Deadline to register to vote	Midnight Friday 11 April
Deadline to apply for a postal vote	5pm Monday 14 April
2nd Notice of Alteration	Tuesday 15 April
Postal Vote Opening	Thursday 17 April, 10am Tuesday 22 April, 10am Thursday 24 April, 10am Tuesday 29 April, 10am Thursday 1 May, 1pm Thursday 1 May, 8pm Thursday 1 May, 10pm
Deadline to apply for Voter Authority Certificate	5pm Wednesday 23 April
Deadline to apply for a proxy vote	5pm Wednesday 23 April
Final Notice of Alteration	Thursday 24 April
Deadline to appoint Poll and Counting Agents	Thursday 24 April
Day of Poll	Thursday 1 May, 7am – 10pm



Code of Conduct for Campaigners



Meaning of the term "campaigner"

All references to campaigners in the code of conduct include:

- Candidates standing at an election, their agents and their staff and supporters
- Political party officers, staff, members and supporters campaigning at an election
- Other people and organisations campaigning for or against a candidate, a group of candidates or a party at an election where they are employed or engaged by the candidate or political party

Campaign Code of Conduct

- The **Code of Conduct** provides a guide for campaigners, elections officers, and police forces to what is, and is not, acceptable behaviour at polling stations and in the community in the lead up to polling day.
- Refer to the Electoral Commission Guidance:
- <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance-candidates-and-agents-local-government-elections-england/campaigning>
- We will refer to the Code of Conduct rules throughout this presentation

Supplementary to the Code of Conduct:

- Comply with planning rules relating to advertising hoardings and large banners
- No posters are to be placed on any street furniture or highway land (roads, bridges, land adjacent to roads, pavements, road signs and lampposts). **Any posters on highway land will be removed.**
- Outdoor posters should be removed 2 weeks after the election



Imprints – Printed Material

Your printed candidate election material must have an imprint

The imprint must include the name and address of:

- The printer of the material (if it is physical material)
- The promoter (usually the agent)
- Who the material is being produced for (the candidate)

Physical imprints – Example

- Printed by [printer's name and address]
- Promoted by [agent's address], on behalf of [candidate's name] of [candidate's address].
- If you are your own agent, the material is promoted by you.

The Address can be:

- An office address
- A home address
- A PO Box or other mailbox service

Printed by Armadillo Printing
Lt, 22 School Rd, Stonehouse,
GL10 4RB

Promoted by John Smith, 110
Table Street, Dursley, GL11
4GT on behalf of Jane Smith of
112 Table Street, Dursley,
GL11 4GT



Imprints – Digital Material

- Digital imprint rules came into force in 2023
- Digital material is material in electronic form that consists of or includes text, moving images, still images, speech or music.
- It only applies to digital material that is published e.g. it would not apply to private messaging groups or an email sent by a party to its members.
- Election material you post for free, or paid for political material **must have a digital imprint.**

- Pop-up ads
- Paid adverts
- Websites
- Images
- Videos
- Social media posts
- Adverts that appears in any website, search engine result, app or social media platform

If it is not **reasonably practicable** to put the imprint in the material (in the post/image/video) then it must be one-click away.

- If the material is a tweet, the imprint should be included in your Twitter bio.
- The imprint cannot be behind a paywall



Duty to maintain secrecy

Candidates are entitled to attend key electoral events, including the opening of postal votes, the polling stations on polling day, and the verification and count.

Candidates may not:

- Attempt to keep tally of how postal ballot papers have been marked
- Disclose the name or electoral number of anyone who has or has not voted in a polling station, or ascertain who they have voted for
- Communicate any information obtained at the count about any voting intention on any specific ballot paper



Security & Police

Operation Ford

- Policing contribution to the safety and security of serving elected officials and those standing for election.
- Operation Ford can be used to report matters to Gloucestershire Police where any act is committed and it is believed that act is for the **purpose of intimidating or harassing an elected official or candidate**.
- To report a case through Operation Ford, call 101 or 999 (for urgent) and inform the call handler it is an 'Operation Ford' report. This will then inform the Gloucestershire Force Elected Official Advisor (FEOA).
- Returning Officers have a duty to share contact information of candidates to the Gloucestershire FEOA so that they can invite them to any security briefings.

Single Point of Contact (SPOC)

Deputy SPOC for election-related complaints – DS Simon Shaw

- Simon.Shaw@Gloucestershire.Police.uk, 01452 753131

SPOC for issues of candidate safety or polling station security - DS Chris Barnes

- Christopher.Barnes@gloucestershire.police.uk



Complaints and allegations of electoral fraud

- Any concerns that criminal offences referred to in the code have been breached should be raised with the SPOC
 - Be prepared to make a statement and substantiate allegations
- Any concerns that other parts of the code have been breached should be raised first with the candidate, political party or campaigner in question.
- Any further concerns should be raised with the Electoral Commission who will contact the relevant party or campaigner and agree actions to remedy or prevent reoccurrence
- If you are not sure if the code has been breached, raise the matter with your election agent and the Elections Office



Registration and Absent Voting



Access to registers and Absent Votes Lists

- Candidates and political parties are entitled to registers for their electoral areas.
- Election Agents are only entitled to the register on receipt of email confirmation from the political party that they are acting on behalf of the party.
- Notices of Alteration list the new registrations, absent votes and deletions made to the register since the 1 March.
- Publication of Notices of Alteration
 - Wednesday 2 April
 - Tuesday 15 April
 - Thursday 24 April
- All requests must be made **in writing** to:
elections@stroud.gov.uk

Only use data for permitted purposes:

- to help you campaign
- to check that donations/loans are permissible



Electoral Registration

As a candidate you can encourage people to register to vote.

The deadline to register is
Midnight Friday 11 April

Individuals can apply to register online at

www.gov.uk/register-to-vote

It only takes a few minutes and all they need is:

- Their national insurance number
- Date of birth and address

Other evidence can be provided if they don't have a National Insurance Number



Absent Voting

Electors can apply online:

Postal vote

www.gov.uk/apply-postal-vote

by 5pm Monday 14 April

Proxy vote

www.gov.uk/apply-proxy-vote

By 5pm Wednesday 23 April

It only takes a few minutes and all they need is:

- Their national insurance number
- Date of birth, address and photo of their signature

Other evidence can be provided if they don't have a National Insurance Number or cannot provide a consistent signature



Absent Voting

Emergency Proxy

Electors may apply for an emergency proxy if:

- They have a **medical condition**, illness or disability arising after the proxy deadline;
- They are a **mental health patient** detained under civil powers;
- Their **occupation, service or employment** means they cannot go to the polling station in person and they became aware after the proxy deadline; or
- They meet conditions relating to emergency proxies on the **grounds of voter ID** after the deadline to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate or Anonymous Elector's Document

Conditions for an elector to apply for an emergency proxy on the grounds of voter identification:

- Their photo ID, Voter Authority Certificate or an Anonymous Elector's Document is lost, stolen, destroyed or damaged after the deadline for VACs
- They have sent their accepted form of photo ID to another person to prove their identity and they consider it unlikely that it will be returned in time for polling day
- an elector or proxy applied for a form of accepted photo ID including a Voter Authority Certificate or Anonymous Elector's Document in the 3 months before the deadline
- an anonymous elector has not been issued with an Anonymous Elector's Document



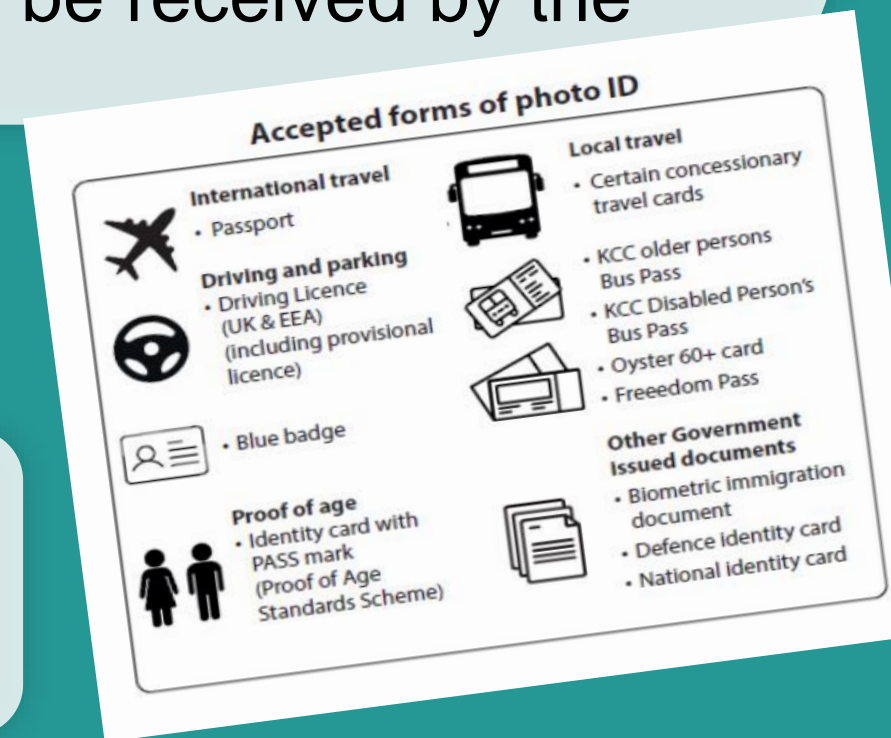
Voter Photographic ID

- Voters will need to provide a form of accepted photo ID to vote in person at a polling station.
- Voters will be able to present out of date photographic ID so long as the photograph is still a good likeness.
- If a voter fails to present a form of accepted photo ID they will **not** be issued with a ballot paper.
- This includes those who act as a proxy for another person.
- The original version, and not a photocopy or digital version must be shown unless it is a digital version of an eVisa

- If a voter does not have an accepted form of photo ID, they can apply for a Voter Authority Certificate online <https://www.gov.uk/apply-for-photo-id-voter-authority-certificate> or using a paper application form.
- Electors who are registered anonymously must have an Anonymous Elector's Document and their poll card to vote in person
- Any applications must be received by the Wednesday 23 April

Two new Photo IDs added to list: HM Veteran Card 100 and eVisa Immigration Document

A full list of approved photo ID can be found here: <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/voting-and-elections/voter-id>



Code of Conduct – Registration & Absent Vote forms

- Campaigners should be free to encourage voters to register to vote and apply to vote by post or appoint a proxy to vote on their behalf.
- Ensure that any electoral registration forms and postal or proxy voting application forms conform fully to the requirements of electoral law.
- Ensure the Electoral Registration Officer's address is clearly provided as the return address for registration or absent vote forms.
- Send any sealed completed registration or absent vote applications to the Electoral Registration Officer within two working days of receipt and before the deadline.
- Always explain the implications of applying to vote by post or appointing a proxy
- Never encourage electors to have their postal ballot pack redirected anywhere
- Encourage electors to explore other options for people to act as a proxy before (relatives, friends or neighbours) a campaigner agrees to be appointed as a proxy
- Campaigners are free to inform voters they need photo ID and how to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate
- Campaigners should not handle Voter Authority Certificate applications or assist with online applications



Postal Votes



Postal Votes

Postal Vote Issue

Postal vote packs will be issued on:

- **Thursday 10 April** (approx. 17,000): includes those who applied by Wednesday 2 April
- **Tuesday 15 April** (approx. 500): includes those who applied between Wednesday 2 April and Monday 14 April
- **Daily issues between Wednesday 16 April & Thursday 1 May** (approx. 100)

Candidates/Agents are not entitled to be present at the issue of postal votes

Postal Vote Opening

- All opening sessions are at Ebley Mill except the final openings at 8pm & 10pm at Active Lifestyles (Stratford Park Leisure Centre).
- Candidates and Election Agents are entitled to be present at postal vote openings
- Candidates may appoint ONE postal vote agent to be present
- Appointments must be made in writing to elections@stroud.gov.uk **before the beginning of each opening session**



Postal Vote Handling

- Campaigners cannot handle postal votes for other electors who are not close relatives or someone for whom they provide regular care
- Campaigners must never observe voters completing their ballot paper
- Campaigners may handle postal voting documents if that's a feature of a job they hold (e.g. a postal worker)
- Limits on the number of postal votes that can be handed in – a maximum of five plus their own for each poll

A campaigner is:

- a candidate at the election(s)
- a candidate's election agent, staff and supporters
- Political party officers, staff, members and supporters campaigning at an election
- other people and organisations campaigning for or against a candidate, group of candidates or a party where they are employed or engaged by the candidate or party



Completed postal votes returned by hand

- Postal votes can be handed into polling stations within the County Division, with the exception of Stroud Central District Ward which must be handed in within the Ward or to the Stroud District Council Offices
- Anyone returning postal votes by hand must complete a postal vote return form, otherwise the postal votes will be rejected
- An individual may hand in a maximum of **6 electors' postal votes** (their own and five others)
- A **campaigner** may only handle **their own postal vote** and those that belong to **close family members** or people for whom they provide care
- Polling station staff will not be able to provide advice about whether someone is a campaigner, but they may reject postal votes if they have reasonable cause to believe an individual is a campaigner
- If postal votes are handed in not in accordance with the rules, then they will be rejected



Postal vote opening process

Postal pack consists of: Envelope B (outer envelope), Postal Vote Statement (requires the elector's signature & DOB), Envelope A (ballot paper envelope), and the Ballot Paper(s)

1. Postal votes are sorted into County Division order
2. Ballot paper envelope and postal vote statements are removed from outer envelope
3. Postal vote statements are verified - the elector's DOB and signature is checked against the original application. If they do not match, the postal vote is rejected and ballot paper removed from the process
4. Once verified, ballot papers are removed from Envelope A, kept face down and counted as a record of what has been received that day
5. Ballot papers are sealed until the next opening
6. After the election we are required to write to all electors whose postal vote was rejected

Votes are not counted for candidates until the count



Code of Conduct – Postal Voting documents

- You must never handle anyone else's postal voting documents, except:
 - For your spouse, civil partner, relative, someone you live with or provide care for
 - If it is included in the duties of the job or role you hold i.e. postal worker
- Never observe voters completing their ballot paper
 - If you are with a voter when they complete their ballot paper, remember they must always complete in secret

Polling day and Tellers



Polling Day

- 102 polling stations
- One ballot box at each polling station
- All stations issuing one County Division Ballot Paper
- 3 Polling Stations issuing a Stroud Central District Ward Ballot Paper (St Laurence Church, Christian Community Centre and Paganhill Maypole)
- Polling hours from **7.00am** to **10.00pm**
- Elections Office will be open from **6.15am**
- Postal votes can be handed in at polling stations within the electoral area
- Only candidates, agents and officially appointed polling agents can enter the polling station (other than voters and Returning Officer staff)

Polling Agents

Candidates are permitted to appoint Polling Agents to attend polling stations within the electoral area or to a particular polling station.

- *Maximum of 4 Polling Agents **total** per polling station.*

Appointments must be made in writing to elections@stroud.gov.uk by **Thursday 24 April**



Code of Conduct - Polling Stations

Campaigners should:

- be allowed to put their messages to voters on polling day, including in public spaces outside polling places.
- be careful to ensure that your approach is proportionate and should recognise that groups of supporters may be perceived as intimidating by voters.
- Keep access to polling places clear to allow voters to enter (including the pavements around polling places)
- Ensure electors are able to cast their votes free from intimidation
- Not park vehicles long term on polling station grounds for campaign purposes
- No displaying of election material or using loud speakers immediately outside polling stations

Polling Station Staff should:

- Polling station staff and police should not seek to discourage or remove campaigners who are otherwise peacefully communicating with voters, *as long as they are not within or impeding access to the grounds of the polling place.*
- The Presiding Officer is responsible for maintaining order in the polling place, and you may be asked to move by polling station staff or police officers if you are impeding access by voters to a polling place.



Tellers

Tellers must

- Always remain outside the polling station
- Only enter to cast their own vote or vote as a proxy

Tellers may

- Approach voters for information as they enter or leave the polling station
- Display a coloured rosette or badge displaying the name of a candidate, party or emblem; it must not bear a slogan or be oversized
- In some instances be allowed inside the polling place

Tellers must not

- Be able to see or hear what is happening inside the polling station
- Impede, obstruct or intimidate voters on their way in or out of the polling station
- Demand any information relating to the elector
- Ask to see an elector's photographic ID
- Ask voters to re-enter the polling station to ascertain their elector number
- Have discussions with voters that may give rise to allegations or undue influence
- Display any material in support of or against any political party or candidate other than a rosette or badge.

**1 Teller per
candidate**



Verification and the Count



Verification & Count

Thursday 1 May

Active Lifestyles (Stratford Park Leisure Centre)

Postal Vote Opening: 8pm & 10pm

- Opening of postal votes from the polling stations.

Ballot Box Reception: 10pm

- All ballot boxes delivered to Active Lifestyles.

Friday 2 May

Active Lifestyles (Stratford Park Leisure Centre)

Verification: 9.15am

- Verify the number of ballot papers from polling stations.
- Verify the number of postal ballot papers from postal vote opening sessions.

County & District Count: approx. 12pm – 4.30pm

- Count and declare results for each County Division and Stroud Central District Ward.



Arrangements for the Count

**Active Lifestyles Stroud,
Stratford Rd, GL5 4AF
(formerly Stratford Park
Leisure Centre)**

Friday 1 May – 9.15am: Verification of **all** ballot papers followed by the County and District count.

- Upon arrival, provide your name at the main entrance.
- You will be issued with an ID badge which you must wear at all times.
- The café will be open for refreshments

Counting Agents

Candidates are permitted to appoint **TWO** Counting Agents to attend the verification and count.

Appointments must be made in writing to elections@stroud.gov.uk by **Thursday 24 April**

- provide name, address and email address of Counting Agents
- We are required to send appointment letters to Counting Agents, please try not to leave it to the last minute

Guests

Candidates are permitted to appoint **ONE** guest to attend the verification and count.

Appointments must be made in writing to elections@stroud.gov.uk by **Thursday 24 April**



Verification – Friday 2 May

Logistics

- Verification must be complete for all electoral areas before we can begin counting
- Each polling station will have 1 ballot box:
 - 102 ballot boxes across the district
 - ballot boxes containing postal ballot papers for County
 - ballot box containing postal ballot papers for Stroud Central District Ward
- 11 counting tables
- Verification must be complete for all divisions before the count can commence around 12pm

Process

- Each ballot box is opened and the number of ballot papers counted and verified against the Presiding Officer or Postal Vote Accounts
- Ballot papers will be face up
- Turnout for each electoral division will be calculated and declared
- Ballot papers are placed into 'mixing boxes' in the centre of the room. The mixing boxes contain all of the ballot papers from the polling stations in that electoral area and the postal ballot papers.



Count – Friday 2 May

- All elections taking place are single member divisions/wards
- Ballot papers are separated into piles of votes case for each candidate
- Counters will flag to the table leader any potential doubtful ballot papers
- Counted into 10's, recounted and paper clipped
- Counted into 100's and an elastic band placed around the bundle
- Bundles will be stacked in front of a sign with the Candidates name
- The Adjudication Officer will start adjudication at each table once all doubtful ballot papers have been removed.
- Provisional Results prepared and ballot papers for each candidate are totalled
- Overall total of ballot papers counted and ballot papers rejected must match the number of ballot papers verified
- If it does not balance, bundles are rechecked and papers recounted if necessary



Doubtful ballot papers

Reasons for rejecting a ballot paper

- Want of official mark
- Voting for more candidates than the voter is entitled to vote for
- Writing or mark by which voter could be identified
- Unmarked or void for uncertainty

Process

- Doubtful ballot papers will be extracted and set aside by the table leader
- An Adjudication Officer will inform Candidates and Agents when doubtful ballot papers are due to be adjudicated at each table
- Candidates and Agents will be able to see all ballot papers that will be rejected and the reason for the rejection
- Candidates, Election Agents and Counting Agents can object to the rejection. The ballot paper will be stamped 'rejection objected to' but will still be rejected



Candidate spending returns



Candidate spending

- Responsibility of the Election Agent
- Expenses must be returned even if NIL return
- You must get and keep receipts over £20
- Ensure you have a system in place to keep records of spending
- Returns are made public and a sample of returns may be reviewed by the Electoral Commission
- Failure to submit an expenses return is a criminal offence
- Spending will not be reimbursed



Candidate spending

What counts as candidate spending?

Spending to promote the candidate or criticise other candidates or items or activities during the regulated period including:

- ✓ Advertising
- ✓ Unsolicited material sent to voters
- ✓ Transport costs
- ✓ Public events
- ✓ Staff costs
- ✓ Accommodation
- ✓ Administrative cost

If you buy something before the regulated period begins and use it during the regulated period, this counts as candidate spending

What doesn't count as spending?

- X Costs attributed to a candidate's disability
- X Anything appearing in a newspaper (except adverts) or on a licensed broadcast channel
- X Volunteer time, including time spent by your staff that you do not pay for
- X Facilities candidates are entitled to such as public rooms for meetings
- X Someone's main residence and personal car (or other forms of transport)
- X General ICT equipment bought for personal use
- X Things you don't use during the regulated period
- X Reasonable security costs including data security costs
- X Reasonable travel and living costs of the candidate



Reporting

Records you must keep for spending

- What the spending was for – e.g leaflets
- The name and address of supplier
- The amount or value
- Details of when it was incurred and paid
- Details of any unpaid or disputed amounts
- Details or notional spending and its value
- Invoices or receipts for payment of £20 or over (£10 for parish)
- Details of any personal expenses

Action	Date
Receive all invoices	23 May
Pay all invoices	30 May
Submit spending return and agent declaration	6 June
Submit candidate declaration	6 June

- Expenses must be returned even if NIL return
- Returns are made public by the Returning Officer
- Sample of returns may be reviewed by the Electoral Commission
- Failure to submit a spending return is a criminal offence enforceable by the police
- No spending will be reimbursed by the council



Spending Limits

What are the spending limits?

Local Government formula: £960 + 8p per elector using 1 March register

Area	Electorate on 1 March	Limit	Area	Electorate on 1 March	Limit
Bisley & Painswick Division	8410	£1,632.80	Nailsworth Division	9170	£1,693.60
Cam Valley Division	9909	£1,752.72	Rodborough Division	9795	£1,743.60
Dursley Division	9366	£1,709.28	Stonehouse Division	8917	£1,673.36
Hardwicke & Severn Division	9076	£1,686.08	Stroud Central Division	10,542	£1,803.36
Haresfield & Upton St Leonards Division	6930	£1,514.80	Wotton-under-Edge Division	8861	£1,668.88
Minchinhampton Division	7879	£1,590.32	Stroud Central District Ward	1808	£1,104.64



Key Contacts

Elections office

- www.stroud.gov.uk/elections
- www.stroud.gov.uk/candidates
- 01453 766321 elections@stroud.gov.uk

Gloucestershire Highways department

- 08000 514514 highways@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Electoral Commission Contacts

- www.electoralcommission.org.uk
- 0333 103 1928 Email: pef@electoralcommission.org.uk

Police Single Point of Contact for election related complaints –DS Simon Shaw

- 01452 753131 Simon.Shaw@gloucestershire.police.uk

Police Single Point of Contact for candidate safety and polling station security – DS Chris Barnes

- 01452 753131 Christopher.Barnes@gloucestershire.police.uk

Operation Ford Contact:

- 101 / 999 OpFord@gloucestershire.police.uk





Any Questions?

Thank you for attending!

