

# Shropshire Council Elections 2021

## Information for Candidates

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# Introduction

Do you want to help get things done in your neighbourhood? Are you already active in your community? As a councillor, you can make a difference. This pack is intended to introduce you to Shropshire Council and explain in more detail what is involved if you want to stand for public office and what is involved in being a councillor.

Being a councillor is a rewarding form of public service that puts you in a unique position where you can make decisions about local issues and improve the quality of life for people within Shropshire. It gives you the opportunity to help your local community and be part of a dedicated team providing key services for your area.

The councillor's role takes in:

- Representing the division
- Decision making
- Policy and strategy review and development
- Overview and scrutiny
- Regulatory duties
- Community leadership and engagement

Being an effective councillor requires hard work. The primary role of a councillor is to represent their division and the people who live within it. Community Leadership is at the heart of modern local government and councils are taking on new responsibilities for working in partnership with other organisations, including the voluntary and community sector, to improve services and the quality of life for citizens. Being a councillor is also a great way to gain political experience and useful skills in public speaking, debating and problem solving.

Councillors are expected to take steps to keep in touch with their communities. It is assumed that they will, at least on an annual basis, attend parish/town council meetings and meetings of local community groups. Councillors are also chosen to represent Shropshire Council on outside bodies (both local and national) which include a wide range of trusts, associations and committees.

## Shropshire

Although Shropshire is a predominantly rural and sparsely populated county with a traditional reliance on farming and associated industries, it is also a place with vibrant attractive towns, a small business enterprise culture and growing niche sectors in food and drink, environmental technologies and creative industries. It is located in the West Midlands, covers an area of

319,730 hectares and has a population of over 313,400, which is the equivalent of just 0.98 people per hectare. The county is noted for its beautiful scenery, diverse landscape and rich natural and historic environment; not only does this contribute to the high quality of life enjoyed by Shropshire residents; it also helps to make the county a successful tourism destination.

39% of the Shropshire population live in villages, hamlets and the countryside. Over 74,000 people live in the county town of Shrewsbury. Shropshire also benefits from a network of market towns which act as important employment and service centres to their resident populations and hinterlands as well as representing an important part of the tourism offer. The five largest market towns in the county are Oswestry, Market Drayton, Whitchurch, Ludlow and Bridgnorth.

As the largest inland county in England, Shropshire shares its border with Wales as well as with five English counties/unitary authorities (Telford and Wrekin, Staffordshire, Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Cheshire). It is within easy reach of Manchester and Liverpool to the north and Birmingham and the West Midlands conurbation to the east.

Shropshire Council became a unitary authority in 2009 and replaced the former two-tier system which consisted of the County Council and five District and Borough Councils. There was no change to the parish and town councils in the county and the unitary council continues to work closely with them to provide services to the residents of Shropshire. Shropshire Council is responsible for all the services that the County, District and Borough Councils used to deliver. That includes planning, licensing, bin collections, schools, libraries and roads.

The Council has an essential role in creating the conditions for Shropshire to be a place where people can flourish and where they want to live, work and play.

## Introduction to Council Services

Shropshire Council provides a wide range of services which are grouped under the following headings, with a few examples of what they do in brackets:

- **Economy & Place** (Planning, Economic Growth, Business Relationships, Regeneration, Broadband)
- **Infrastructure** (Highways, Public Transport, Environmental Maintenance, Street Lighting, Highway Drainage, Waste & Recycling)
- **Housing & Communities** (Housing Need & Development, Sport, Leisure, Culture, Visitor Economy, Library Services, Outdoor Partnerships)

- **Commercial Services** (Property Services, Assets, Shire Services, Climate Change & Carbon Reduction, Commercial investment)
- **Social Care and Operations** (social care, housing services, children’s centres and public health)
- **Education, Improvement and Efficiency** (early years, school admissions, school funding, special educational needs, Education Access, post 16 education and training, apprenticeships, Safeguarding, School Improvement)
- **Children’s Social Care and Safeguarding** (social work teams, safeguarding, looked after children and children with disabilities)
- **Early Help, Partnership’s and Commissioning** (Early Help practitioners, Strengthening Families, Children’s Centres and partnership forums and commissioning, Youth provision)
- **Public Health** (Regulatory Services, Trading Standards and Licencing, Registrars, Coroners and Bereavement Services, Health Improvement, Health Protection Wider Determinants of Health/Place Based Health Care, Healthcare Public Health Partnerships)

These in turn are supported by:

- **Finance**
- **Legal and Democratic Services**
- **Workforce Transformation and Development**
- **ICT**

## The Election Process

Councillors (also known as Members) are elected to represent local residents in an area called a division or ward. The council consists of 74 elected councillors who represent 63 electoral divisions.

If you are interested in standing for election to Shropshire Council, you will need to complete a nomination paper and submit it in person before the statutory deadline for that particular election. Ten signatories must verify each nomination paper: a proposer, a seconder and eight others (known as assentors) included on the electoral register for the division you wish to represent.

In the run up to the election, candidates may apply for a free copy of the electoral register for the division in which they are standing. It lists residents in that division who can vote at the election.

Unlike Parliamentary elections, candidates do not have to pay a deposit before they can stand in Shropshire Council elections. However, there is a maximum amount that any candidate can spend on their election, which is determined by the number of electors listed on that Register. It should be noted that while these amounts are referred to in law as 'expenses', they are not recoverable from the Council, win or lose.

If you wish to appoint another person to manage your expenditure and act as your election agent, that person must sign a declaration of acceptance. If no such application is received, you will be deemed to be acting as your own agent.

## Who can become a Councillor?

You can become a Shropshire Councillor if on the day of submitting your nomination and day of election, if you are a qualifying Commonwealth citizen, a citizen of the Republic of Ireland or a citizen of another Member State of the EU, who has attained the age of 18 and:

- You are registered as a local government elector for the administrative area of the county; or
- You have, during the whole of the twelve months preceding that day, occupied as owner or tenant of land or other premises in the county; or
- Your principal or only place of work during those twelve months has been in that county; or
- You have during the whole of those twelve months, resided in that county area.

You could be disqualified as a candidate if:

- You are subject to bankruptcy, or debt relief restrictions order, interim or otherwise;
- You have a criminal conviction which carried a prison sentence of 3 months or more in the previous 5 years;
- You work for Shropshire Council, or hold a politically restricted post with another authority.

Being a councillor is a demanding role, so it helps if you are passionate about your area and working in the best interests of local people. While candidates do not need any previous experience, a general understanding of how a council works can be useful. Most council meetings are open to the press and public and you may find it useful to go along as a member of the public prior to the election to familiarise yourself with how they operate.

There are no specific or educational achievement requirements, but research suggests that effective councillors are able to:

- Keep up to date with issues of local concern, drawing information and resources from a range of people and organisations
- Engage proactively with their community, canvass opinion and seek new ways of representing others
- Evaluate arguments according to evidence and make independent and impartial judgements
- Look for new methods and topics for critical challenge and scrutiny
- Seek feedback on their own and performance and develop their own skills.

## After the Election

Should you be elected then the real challenge begins...

No one can act as a councillor before they have first signed their Declaration of Acceptance of Office. You will be invited to Shirehall in Shrewsbury to deal with this and some other administrative formalities.

As part of your introduction to the Council there will be induction sessions for you to attend, starting with the Welcome Meeting, subject to any Covid restrictions in place at the time. This will be a chance for you to meet other Members and senior staff (known as officers) in a relaxed and informal atmosphere.

You will be introduced to a Senior Officer who will act as your point of contact, and who will be able to help you find your way around council services and processes. You will also have the chance to meet the Members' secretarial staff and be told about the services they provide.

The first Council meeting after the election will be held during your first month as a councillor. This is when the Council will appoint its Chairman, Speaker and Leader, Scrutiny Committees, Regulatory Committees and other bodies. In making these appointments the Council normally accords with the wishes of the respective political group. You should therefore speak to the leader of your political group about your preferences.

## Induction and Training

During your first year in office you will be invited take part in the Induction Programme which will begin immediately after the election. This programme is offered to all Members and it is strongly recommended that you attend the planned sessions.

All Members should attend the 'essential training' sessions. These will provide you with the essential information that you need to have in order to perform your duties fully. The

following sessions are essential training and will be held within the first 3 months of the new municipal year:

- Ethical Conduct
- Corporate Parenting
- Safeguarding
- Equalities and Diversity
- Freedom of Information and Data Protection
- IT training on Microsoft Teams live and accessing the e-learning platform.
- Planning (for all Members and Substitutes of the Planning Committees)
- Licensing (for all Members and Substitutes of the Licensing Committees)

During your first 12 months in Office, you will also be invited to other sessions, such as:

- Media Training
- Finance and Commerce
- Planning for all Members
- Introduction to the decision making process
- Ongoing IT training

You will also be invited to attend sessions giving you information about how each of the Services work as well as specific Member briefings on things such as changes in Council protocols and procedures, new legislation or government initiatives.

All Members will be offered a Personal Development Plan (PDP) interview that will give you the opportunity to recognise the skills you have and identify any additional training that you may benefit from.

## Attendance at Council Meetings

All councillors are involved with decision making, which takes the form of various committees, groups and meetings with other councillors to debate and approve council business.

Councillors are appointed to serve on a wide range of task and finish groups, policy commissions and regulatory committees as well as representing the Council on outside bodies such as local partnerships and charities.

You will be expected to attend all formal meetings of the Council and the committees of which you are a member. There are written rules that govern behaviour and procedures at these meetings and enable councillors to take part effectively. Most meetings are open to the press

and public. There will also be workshops, occasional training seminars and briefings with officers and other councillors, which you will be invited to attend.

## Time Commitment

The amount of time you will need to devote to Council work will depend on the extent of your council activities and responsibilities. There will be a mix of daytime and evening meetings. The full Council, for instance, meets every six weeks, presently during the day.

There is no fixed time that councillors are expected to spend on council duties. However evidence presented (and confirmed by national survey findings) shows that councillors can spend the equivalent of 25 hours per week dealing with elector's problems, generating community interest and action and representation on local bodies, non council committees, charities, attending parish/town councils and residents' meetings. The minimum is likely to be 8 hours per week.

Outside the council chamber, your representative role will involve you making yourself available to your electorate. You may choose to hold surgeries or something similar to best manage this process. However, the people of your division will expect you to promote and advocate projects to both enhance and defend the area. You will also be expected to have regular contact with the parish and town councils operating within your division.

Clearly some councillors have more time to give than others, but if you are elected to the office of Council Leader or Chairman of the Council the role can very demanding. Similarly, if you are appointed as a portfolio holder on the Cabinet or chair of one of the scrutiny or regulatory committees there would be significant calls on your time.

While the law requires your employer to allow you to take a reasonable amount of time off, either paid or unpaid, to perform your duties as a councillor, it is recommended that you discuss this with them before making a commitment.

## Council Decision Making Structures

**Council** meets every six weeks and the 74 members are expected to attend each meeting. Here councillors decide the Council's overall policies and set the budget each year. The Council will elect its Leader for the life of the Council at its first meeting. The Leader will appoint members to the Cabinet. The Council will appoint scrutiny committees, which scrutinise decisions taken by the Cabinet. Council also appoints regulatory committees.

**Cabinet** meets every month and is the part of the Council which is responsible for its key decisions. The Cabinet is made up of the Leader and up to nine councillors. When key decisions are to be discussed or made, these are published in the Forward Plan, in so far as they can be anticipated. If these key decisions are to be discussed with council officers at a meeting of Cabinet, this will generally, be open to the public to attend except where personal or confidential matters are being discussed. The decisions Cabinet makes must be in line with the Council's overall policies and budget. If it wishes to make a decision that is outside the budget or policy framework, this must be referred to the Council as a whole to decide.

Each Cabinet Member has a specific portfolio of work for which he or she is responsible. Cabinet Members and there are currently seven substitute Members.

**Overview and Scrutiny Committees** meet every 6 weeks. They support the work of the Cabinet and the Council as a whole. They allow Shropshire people a greater say in council matters by holding public hearings into matters of local concern. These lead to reports and recommendations which advise the Cabinet and the Council on its policies, budget and service delivery. Scrutiny committees also monitor the decisions of the Cabinet. They can 'call-in' a decision which has been made by the Cabinet but not yet implemented. This enables them to consider whether the decision is appropriate. They may recommend that the Cabinet reconsider a decision. They may also be consulted by the Cabinet or the Council on forthcoming decisions and the development of policy.

**Regulatory Committees** meet regularly in order to assist Shropshire residents to have a say in the development of their local areas. The committees consist of:

- Planning Committees which determine Planning Applications, Rights of Way, Commons Applications and Traffic Regulation Orders.
- The Strategic Licensing Committee and the Licensing and Safety Sub-Committee, determine Licensing issues.

**Central Committees** meet quarterly for various purposes and include the Audit Committee and the Pensions Committee.

**Standards Committee** is responsible for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by all elected and co-opted members of the Council. The Council has a Code of Conduct for Members which everyone elected to Council must undertake to uphold.

The proportion of seats each political group gets on each committee is proportional to the number of group members they have. Your Group Leader may ask which committee you might be interested in. They will decide who is nominated for places on the committee.

# Representatives on Outside Bodies

'Outside bodies' are organisations and charities to which the Council appoints representatives. As a councillor you may be asked by the Leader of the Council to be a representative on one of the outside bodies.

As you are representing the Council on an outside body it is important that you are able to give the commitment it needs to be able to attend the meetings, thereby making it an effective experience. As always, when you are representing the Council, you need to follow the Code of Conduct for councillors.

## The Councillor's Role

All councillors have the same 'role description' which explains your roles and responsibilities. Other 'roles' also have 'profiles' eg Speaker, Committee Chairman, Group Leader etc. The profile below outlines your role as a councillor:

The Member is accountable to the Division and its communities and to Full Council.

### Community Leadership

- Representing the community, serving them all fairly and equally, promoting tolerance and cohesion.
- Engaging with and championing the interests of the local community.
- Encouraging the community to participate in the governance of the area.
- Developing an in-depth understanding of local concerns, by consulting the community especially the most vulnerable.
- Creating and developing partnerships with and between all sections of the community to encourage them to do more for themselves and ensure resources are used effectively to meet the needs of the area.
- Regularly communicating with the community using e.g. newsletters, emails, phone or local media, to keep local communities informed and to manage expectations.

### Making Decisions and Overseeing Council Performance

- Contributing to the debate at all Council meetings attended, reaching and making informed and balanced decisions, overseeing and improving the outcomes for both your Division and for Shropshire as a whole.
- Contributing to the formation and scrutiny of the council's policies, budgets, strategies and service delivery.

### **Representing communities and the Council**

- Accurately representing the community to the Council and the Council to the community.
- When appointed, to represent the Council on local outside bodies, as an appointee of the Council, promoting common interest and co-operation for mutual gain.
- When appointed, to represent and be an advocate for the Council on national bodies and at national events.
- Attending meetings of each Parish Council in a Member's division annually.
- To attend and pro-actively contribute to Local Joint Committee meetings.

### **Internal Governance, Ethical Standards and Relationships**

- Promoting and supporting open and transparent government.
- Adhering to the highest standards of behaviour in public office and promoting respectful and effective relationships.

### **Values and Behaviours** - To be committed to the values of the Council which are:

- Focusing on meeting our customers' needs.
- Working and learning together.
- Valuing our differences.
- Building trust together.
- Making resources count.

## **Skills Required by the Effective Member**

To fulfil their role as laid out in the role description, an effective Member requires the following:

### **Community Leadership**

- Analytical thinking, including asking good questions and listening to enable people to feel heard.
- Facilitation and negotiation skills to enable different voices to be heard and to help groups work effectively together.
  - Creating conditions needed to build trust
  - Relationship building
- Self awareness, eg, being aware of own impact on situations and being able to manage own feelings and responses.
- Able to achieve results in different situations through influencing and using feedback effectively.
- Working with diverse groups to identify problems and find solutions effectively.

### **Making Decisions and Overseeing the Council's Work**

- Knowledge and understanding of the Council's rules and procedures in relation to meetings.
- An understanding of strategic priorities and key policies.
- An understanding of the service contexts behind decisions.
- A basic understanding of local government finance and audit procedures.
- The ability to challenge ideas and contribute positively to policy development.

### **Representing the Community and the Council**

- Good public speaking skills.
- Good presentation skills.
- The ability to persuade others and act with integrity.
- The ability to work with the media and to identify when additional support from public relations is required.
- Identifying when additional support is required.

### **Internal Governance, Ethical Standards and Relationships**

- An understanding of the structure of the Council, roles of officers, members and different agencies and partners.
- Respect for, and desire to work with, different groups and individuals.
- Have knowledge and understanding of the Member/Officer Protocol.
- Have knowledge and understanding of Legal responsibilities e.g. Corporate Parenting, Safeguarding, Equality and Diversity and Regulatory Committees.
- A knowledge and commitment to the values of the Council.

## **What do Officers Do?**

The Council's service headquarters operates from Shirehall in Shrewsbury, but services are also delivered from local offices around the county.

Officers (the paid employees of the Council) are responsible for ensuring that services run smoothly, efficiently and effectively. Officers are fully committed to help councillors fulfil their duties by offering advice and guidance on any issue. In most cases it will be the senior officers who are the first port of call.

Certain officers have specific duty to ensure that the Council acts within the law and uses its resources wisely. The Director of Legal and Democratic Services, who is also the Council's Monitoring Officer, has a close relationship with councillors in advising them on issues of probity and legality.

Officers are available to help and advise irrespective of whether you are part of a political group, chair of one of the scrutiny or regulatory committees, or simply acting in your capacity as a Shropshire Councillor.

## Members' Support

To help you carry out your duties you will be able to use the secretarial and administrative support staff in the Members' Secretariat. This includes:

- Typing / composing correspondence and photocopying
- Acting as contact point for councillors / officers / outside agencies / personal queries
- Supplying stationery (headed paper and business cards)
- Organising Council surgeries/preparing publicity flyers when required
- Booking accommodation and arranging rail tickets

Please note that support and facilities are provided on a non-political basis and staff cannot assist you with your party political work.

## IT Provision

After the election you will be provided with a laptop, mobile phone and computer screen to enable you to fulfill your duties, roles and responsibilities. The Council has declared a climate emergency and as such is dedicated to reducing its carbon footprint, as part of this the Council does not print papers for Members or provide printers and ink cartridges and is digital by default. You will be expected to use your laptop and screen to view Committee papers and other documents that you may need to access to enable you to perform your role. All Committee Papers are published before meetings on the internet or circulated to Committee members, as appropriate.

Since the start of the Covid-19 crisis, legislation has allowed meetings to be held remotely, although it is unclear at this time whether this will be allowed to continue after May 2021. Should remote meetings continue, this will be done using MS Teams Live, and you will be given full training on using this system shortly after the election.

# Members' Allowances

Councillors do not get a salary for the work they do. However, they are paid allowances which are designed to reimburse them for the costs they incur while engaged on Council business.

Every councillor is entitled to a basic allowance. This is paid directly into a bank account in monthly instalments. The amount is intended to recognise the time commitment of all councillors attending meetings with officers, electors and their political groups. It is also intended to cover incidental costs, such as the use of the home or personal telephones for council business.

Some councillors are also entitled to claim an allowance to cover special responsibilities undertaken on behalf of the Council, such as portfolio holder or chair of a committee.

Travel allowance is payable for attendance at approved council meetings both at and away from Shirehall, but this does not apply to other work within the division.

If you as a councillor are away from home for a certain number of hours on council business, other than for division work, councillors are entitled to claim a subsistence allowance. There is also a child care and dependent carer's allowance, up to an agreed maximum cost per hour.

## Vision, Priorities and Values

### OUR VISION

#### Innovate to thrive

### OUR PRIORITIES

- More people with a suitable home
- Care for those in need at any age
- A good place to do business
- A healthy environment Sustainable places and communities
- Embrace our rurality

## OUR VALUES

Our values drive our behaviour and demonstrate to our communities, our staff and our partners what we see as being important.

- **Environment**

Leading the way in protecting, enhancing and valuing our natural resources, and respecting our historic environment.

- **Equality and inclusion**

Treating everyone as equal regardless of their circumstances and backgrounds and identifying and helping people who may need support.

- **Excellence**

Striving for excellence in every aspect of what we do and using our resources wisely and responsibly in partnership with others to maximise their impact.

- **Fairness**

Being fair, open and honest, acting with integrity, and expecting the same in others.

- **Innovation**

Striving to improve, to learn from others, to encourage entrepreneurship and to explore new approaches with enthusiasm.

- **Listening**

Demonstrating that we are listening and responding to communities, partners and staff, and treating views with respect.

- **Partnership**

Working collaboratively with communities and partners to benefit the people of Shropshire.

- **Self-reliance**

Encouraging people to be as independent and in control of their lives as possible, for as long as possible.