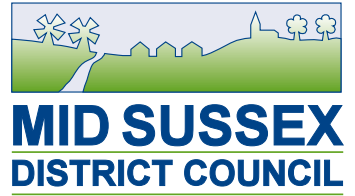


Being a Councillor

A guide for Mid Sussex
District Council



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What do councillors do?

Councillors are ordinary people doing an extraordinary job. They are people who are elected to the local council to represent people in their local community. They must either live or work in the area.

Becoming a councillor is both a rewarding and privileged form of public service. You will be in a position to make a difference to the quality of other people's daily lives and prospects. However, being an effective councillor requires both commitment and hard work.

Every day, councillors have to balance the needs and interests of residents, their political party (if any) and the Council. These will all make legitimate demands on a councillor's time - on top of the demands and needs of a councillor's personal and professional life. Your role as a councillor often depends on your experience and commitment.

Before you consider becoming a councillor you may want to discuss it with your family and friends to ensure that they are aware that you will need their support and understanding. You may be spending a lot of your spare time on council business.



What does being a councillor involve?

Councillors have a wide-ranging role and it is up to each individual councillor to choose how they work. This can include many different things:

- Representing the ward they are elected to serve
- Decision-making
- Developing and reviewing council policy on a range of issues
- Scrutinising the decisions taken by the executive Cabinet
- Regulatory duties
- Community leadership and engagement.

The Local Government Association asked Councillors 'what does being a councillor involve?' A helpful video can be found here: <https://youtu.be/TJNkpOvVHQ>



Jill windmill Used in Publicity'

My story

Cllr Anne Eves

I was inspired to stand for office because I believe even very local initiatives, like converting old phone boxes into libraries, can improve people's lives.

Since being elected I have set up a repair café - a good way to bring people together and avoid things going to landfill. I've been involved in planting trees around town to provide shade, and sowing wildflower verges to help the pollinators. I've set up a bicycle donation scheme for Ukrainian refugees.

It is satisfying helping residents with casework & guiding them through the maze of three-tier local government. My role is often to connect people who will be better off for knowing each other; introducing a newly retired man to The Shed, for example, or a champion BMX rider to the officer responsible for the BMX track.

Councillors don't just sit in meetings; they also spend time at local events, milling about and staying in touch with the community. It's our job to represent people to their council.

Finally, some of the best advice I was given is to plan your time off, because it can be very busy!



Who will I be representing?

The Mid Sussex district is divided into areas, known as wards, and each ward elects a councillor or a number of councillors, depending on the size of the ward.

Mid Sussex district has 3 town councils and 21 parish councils.

For many councillors, representing residents is the most important part of their role. This can involve lots of different things, but usually means district councillors will spend time:

- listening to the views of local people so that they know what problems and issues exist in their area
- ensuring that the needs of their residents are taken into account when the Council is making decisions about how it is run, what services it should provide and how it should spend its money
- working with the council officers to bring about improvements to their area
- holding surgeries where local people can drop in with questions
- getting involved in local campaigns
- offering support to local schools, community groups, businesses and other organisations.

Whilst councillors have a special duty to their electors, including those who did not vote for them, the main duty is to the whole community of Mid Sussex.



Will I be able to make decisions?

All district councillors are involved in making decisions about how the Council is run, what services the Council should provide, and how it should spend its money.



Mid Sussex District Council

Full Council is made up of all 48 councillors and is responsible for agreeing the Council's overall policy and financial framework. This includes making decisions about major council strategies, agreeing the Council's annual budget and agreeing the level of Council Tax each year.

Most other decisions are proposed by either the Cabinet, which consists of seven councillors who are each responsible for a particular area of the Council's work, or by individual Cabinet Members. Some decisions are delegated to council officers.

The Council's Constitution sets out how Mid Sussex District Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people.

Am I able to get involved in investigating the Council's work?



Some councillors who are not in the Cabinet are members of a Scrutiny Committee. A Scrutiny Committee allows residents to have a greater say in council matters by holding in depth reviews of decisions made or actions taken. These lead to reports and recommendations which advise the Cabinet and Council as a whole on its policies, budget and service delivery. This committee has the right to investigate any aspect of Council business and make recommendations about how it should be changed. They can also 'call in' decisions made by the Cabinet or by individual Cabinet Members and ask that the procedures by which these decisions were reached be reviewed. Scrutiny is the crucial process of looking at the work and decisions of the executive. As well as the close examination of Council work, it can also look at the work of partners and involve the community and interested parties.

Committee meeting

Will I be expected to go to political meetings?

If you are a member of a political party you will be expected to attend political group meetings, as well as party training and events.

Will I be involved in community leadership or engagement?

District, Town and Parish councils are not the only organisations that affect the quality of the local area. Many other organisations and agencies play an important role too, from public services such as the NHS and the Police to businesses, charities, and voluntary and community groups.

Community leadership should encourage these organisations and agencies to work together with the councils to make Mid Sussex a better place for everyone who lives and works here.

Since councillors do not control these organisations and agencies their role as a community leader involves :

- fostering a shared understanding across all these different organisations about key local issues
- co-ordinating the actions of these organisations to make sure that everyone is working together in the most effective way
- acting as a public face of the District Council.

Councils deliver a significant amount of work through partnerships with other services and agencies. Therefore, you may have opportunities to sit on partnership boards or committees for health, regeneration and community partners to name just a few. Remember though that this will often involve additional meetings and background preparation.





Mid Sussex Applauds Awards Ceremony

Will there be other duties?

Some councillors may sit on quasi-judicial committees, for example a planning or licensing committee, which take non-political decisions on planning and licensing applications, respectively.

Policy Working Groups may also be arranged to help the Council develop policies and strategies aimed at making a better Mid Sussex.



Fibre Dig-Site

What skills do I need to be a councillor?

Diverse groups tend to make better informed decisions, so it is important that the Council not only represents the communities it serves, but also has a wide range of skills and experience. That's where you come in.

The knowledge and experience you have picked up through your personal and professional life is important. While you don't need any special or formal qualifications to be a councillor, having or being able to develop the following skills, knowledge and attributes will help you in your role:

- **communication skills** - these include listening and interpersonal skills, public speaking skills, the ability to accept alternative points of view as well as the ability to negotiate, mediate and resolve conflict.
- **problem solving and analytical skills** - this includes being able to get to the bottom of an issue and to think of different ways to resolve it, including advantages and disadvantages of each. Understanding and acting on issues of local concern and representing all sections of the community. Evaluating arguments and making decisions that balance public needs and local policy. Analysing information quickly and presenting arguments in a clear, meaningful and accessible way.
- **team working** - including being able to work with others in meetings and on committees and being able to complete any tasks on time that you agree to do. Scrutinising and challenging decision makers, acting as a critical friend who provides constructive feedback. Building positive relationships with colleagues, council staff and the wider community by working together.
- **organisational skills** - these include being able to plan and manage your time, keep appointments and meet deadlines.
- **ability to engage with your local community** - you may have to make yourself available through meetings, the media, the internet, public forums, debates, on the phone and face to face at regular sessions, called surgeries. You should be able to act consistently with integrity when representing the views of your political group and communicating their values in decisions and actions.
- **technological skills** – you will be expected to have a degree of confidence in using technology in your work at the Council. Residents and officers will have an expectation to contact you via email. The Council provides agendas and committee papers to you. Some meetings and briefings will be held virtually, and all committee meetings will be livestreamed. Your engagement with the Council may include the use of e-forms.

You might have specific skills and knowledge gained from professional experience or from working with other groups. These might be:

- housing, regeneration or environmental issues
- the needs of specific groups, such as children and young people, disabled people, older people or those with health problems
- an understanding of financial management and reporting processes
- legal and regulatory systems or procedures.

But don't worry if you think you don't yet have some of the skills or confidence to be a councillor. Mid Sussex District Council has a variety of support, training and information available to new and experienced councillors.

More guidance and advice is also available from:

- [Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities](#)
- [Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government](#)
- [Local Government Association](#)
- [The Electoral Commission](#)

What is a district councillor's workload like?

- Councillors should attend the six Full Council Meetings each year. They will also be asked to serve on one or more of the committees. There is some variation in how often these committees meet, but it is usually monthly or bi-monthly. Councillors must not let their attendance slip for more than six months otherwise they will be disqualified
- In addition to attendance, councillors need to spend time reading reports and becoming familiar with the issues they deal with so that they can make informed decisions
- They will also need to attend relevant training sessions
- Some councillors take on extra responsibilities, such as becoming a Cabinet Member, chairing a committee, or acting as a party group leader. These activities increase a councillor's workload
- Councillors who are members of political groups are also required to attend group meetings and agree action prior to meetings
- Many councillors represent the Council on outside bodies (including charities) such as Mid Sussex Voluntary Action, neighbourhood associations and youth, business, community interest and environmental groups.
- Most councillors also attend meetings in their wards and residents contact them frequently about matters of concern.

Do councillors get paid?

District councillors are not paid a salary. However, they do get allowances to cover some of the costs of being a councillor. These fall into three categories:

- **Basic Allowance** - all councillors receive a basic allowance which is paid monthly. This allowance recognises the time councillors spend working in their wards and attending meetings, and seeks to reimburse out-of-pocket expenses incurred by councillors (for example stationery, telephone costs and IT equipment)
- **Special Responsibility Allowances** - councillors who hold particular positions of responsibility, either within the council or within their political group, are paid this allowance
- **Travelling and Subsistence Allowances** - councillors may claim travel and subsistence allowances for certain approved duties, such as attending committee meetings. A carer's allowance is also paid if a councillor needs to cover the cost of caring for a dependent relative while they attend Council business.

Full Council annually determines the level of these allowances, in the light of recommendations received from an Independent Panel.



Marking the Opening of the A2300

My story

Cllr Rodney Jackson

I have been interested in community issues for many years and became a member of Hurstpierpoint and Sayers Common Parish Council in 1991. I have served continuously on the Parish Council for over 30 years. At the turn of the century, I joined a local pressure group "Hurst 2000" with the objective of getting the Parish Council to provide more for the villages - with much success. I have been interested in rural policy issues and have been a member of the Association of Local Councils at District, County and National levels.

I have been concerned over the years with rural disadvantage e.g. relatively high property values, limited or non-existent public transport, poor mobile phone and broadband connectivity, etc. Interest over a wider area meant I stood a number of times as a Liberal Democrat candidate for the District Council. I was elected to the District Council in 2019.

The District Council provided a number of training sessions on planning, finance, licensing and the use of virtual technology as well as many briefing workshops on upcoming issues. The officers of the council although very busy were always helpful in providing advice, especially helpful in dealing with casework from residents.

Overall a worthwhile experience and I intend to stand again at the next election.



What training will I be offered?

After election to the District Council, councillors receive an induction pack and follow a programme of training that introduces them to the Council's structure and processes. There will be a high number of training sessions during 2023. It is important that a prospective councillor understands that there will be heavy demands on their time in the first couple of months after the election.

Councillors will then receive ongoing learning opportunities and support through in-person training sessions and an e-learning platform to help them fulfil their role. It is necessary to attend these in order to keep up to date with legislation and also to continually develop skills in order to best serve electors.

Some training, such as planning, licensing and scrutiny skills, is mandatory for councillors sitting on those committees. Officers can also provide administrative and technical support to councillors. Support for councillors with special needs can also be provided.

Can I stand for election?

You can stand to become a district councillor if you:

- **Are a British, Commonwealth, Irish or European Union Citizen**
- **Are 18 or over on the day of the nomination**
- **Live or work in Mid Sussex.**

However, you cannot stand for District Council election if you:

- **Are a Mid Sussex District Council employee or are employed by a company under the control of the local Council**
- **Are employed by another council in a job that has been designated as politically restricted, for example, where the law says that you have to be politically neutral**
- **Have, in the last five years, had a prison sentence (whether suspended or not) of three months or more**
- **Have been declared bankrupt**
- **Are disqualified from standing for election for some other reason, such as having been convicted of an election offence.**

You should also know that if you have arrears of either Council Tax or Council housing rent then, if elected to be a councillor, you would not be able to vote on finance related matters.



Election count

What are the first steps?

If you are a member of a political party, or thinking of joining one, and you want to stand as their candidate then you need to contact that party. You can only stand as a representative of a registered political party if you are their authorised candidate. If you are not a member of a political party, then you can stand as an independent candidate. The Independent Group at the Local Government Association can provide advice to people standing as independent councillors (www.lga.gov.uk).

Do I need to have an agent?

No, you don't need to have an agent to stand for election. An agent can help the candidate to run their campaign, but you can also perform these tasks yourself. It is crucial to keep track of the money spent conducting the campaign, as these figures must be included in the official candidate spending returns that must be made after the election.

What happens when?

Elections have to be run to a legal timetable. In Mid Sussex, Council elections are held every four years. All the deadlines are absolute, so it is important to know what you must do and when. The dates are worked out on the basis of how many days before or after the election they are (excluding weekends and Bank Holidays). The key dates and the candidate nomination pack will be published at our [upcoming elections webpage](#) in the Autumn of 2022.

- Publication of the Notice of Election happens at least 25 working days before Election Day
- Nomination period starts the next working day, and closes at 4pm, 19 working days before the election
- Publication of the Statement as to Persons Nominated must be published at least 18 days before Election Day
- Appointment of election agents can be done at any time during the nomination period, and not later than 19 days before Election Day
- Changes to existing postal or proxy vote applications and new postal vote applications have to be made by 5pm, 11 working days before the election
- Closing date for new proxy vote applications is 5pm, 6 working days before the election
- Election Day - polling stations are open from 7am to 10pm and ballot boxes are then securely transferred to the count venue
- Last day for the return of submissions and declarations of candidate spending returns is 35 calendar days after the declaration of the result (including weekends and Bank Holidays).



What is the Code of Conduct?

All councillors must maintain the highest standards of conduct and ethics. Currently, they must sign a document agreeing to abide by the code. The Code of Conduct is a standard set nationally that lays out a level of conduct that councillors are expected to follow. A body known as the Standards Board enforces the code.

The Council has an officer, known as the Monitoring Officer, to help councillors make sure that they follow the Code of Conduct. All councillors are provided with training about the Code of Conduct.

A copy of the Council's Code of Conduct can be found at www.midsussex.gov.uk/memberscodeofconduct

Basic facts and figures about the District Council

Mid Sussex District Council covers an area of 128 square miles extending from north of the South Downs to the Surrey border and serves a population of approximately 143,000. The Council employs around 300 people. For elections from May 2023, the district will be divided into 27 wards from which 48 councillors are elected. Councillors are elected for a four-year period.



What does the Council do?

Mid Sussex District Council's main purpose is to be an effective Council delivering value for money services and helping to create a strong economy, environment and community.

The Council has four key priorities:

- **Effective and responsive services** - strengthening the performance of all of the Council's services, with a particular focus on improving customer experience.
- **Sustainable economic growth** - supporting existing businesses, encouraging new ones and attracting inward investment to the District.
- **Strong and resilient communities** - working with partner organisations to build sustainable communities that will deliver a better quality of life for all.
- **Financial independence** - responding to reduced Government support by robust management of budgets and maximising income to be as financially self-sufficient as possible.



The Budget and Corporate Plan is prepared annually and a number of Flagship Activities under each priority are identified that the Council commits to achieving in the year ahead.

Organisation of the Council

Council Officers are employed within the following directorates:

- **Chief Executive** - Head of Paid Service, implementation of leadership team, Legal and Democratic Services
- **Deputy Chief Executive** – Development Management, Planning Policy, Housing Enabling, Economic Development, Sustainability, Environmental Health, Community Services and Emergency Planning.
- **Director of People & Commercial Services** – Revenues & Benefits, Housing Options, Customer Services, Digital & Technology, Waste, Leisure, Landscapes, Contracts, Estates, Facilities, Building Control.
- **Director of Resources and Organisational Development** – Finance, Audit and Treasury, Insurance, Planning and Building Control Support, Local Land Charges, Policy & Performance, Programme, Service Redesign, HR, Payroll, Organisational Development, Communications & Marketing, Public Relations, Community Engagement & Development.

Working in Partnerships

The Mid Sussex Partnership

The Mid Sussex Partnership is a group of organisations from across Mid Sussex who work together to solve issues that affect the district.

Working together for a better future

A sustainable community is one which works to ensure a better quality of life for everyone now and for generations to come. To do this we must:

- Work together to tackle crime and antisocial behaviour (statutory duty)
- Enhance and protect resident's health and wellbeing
- Offer services and infrastructure which are of a high quality, safe and accessible
- Improve quality of life and community involvement

In the Mid Sussex Partnership, the Council works alongside the following organisations:

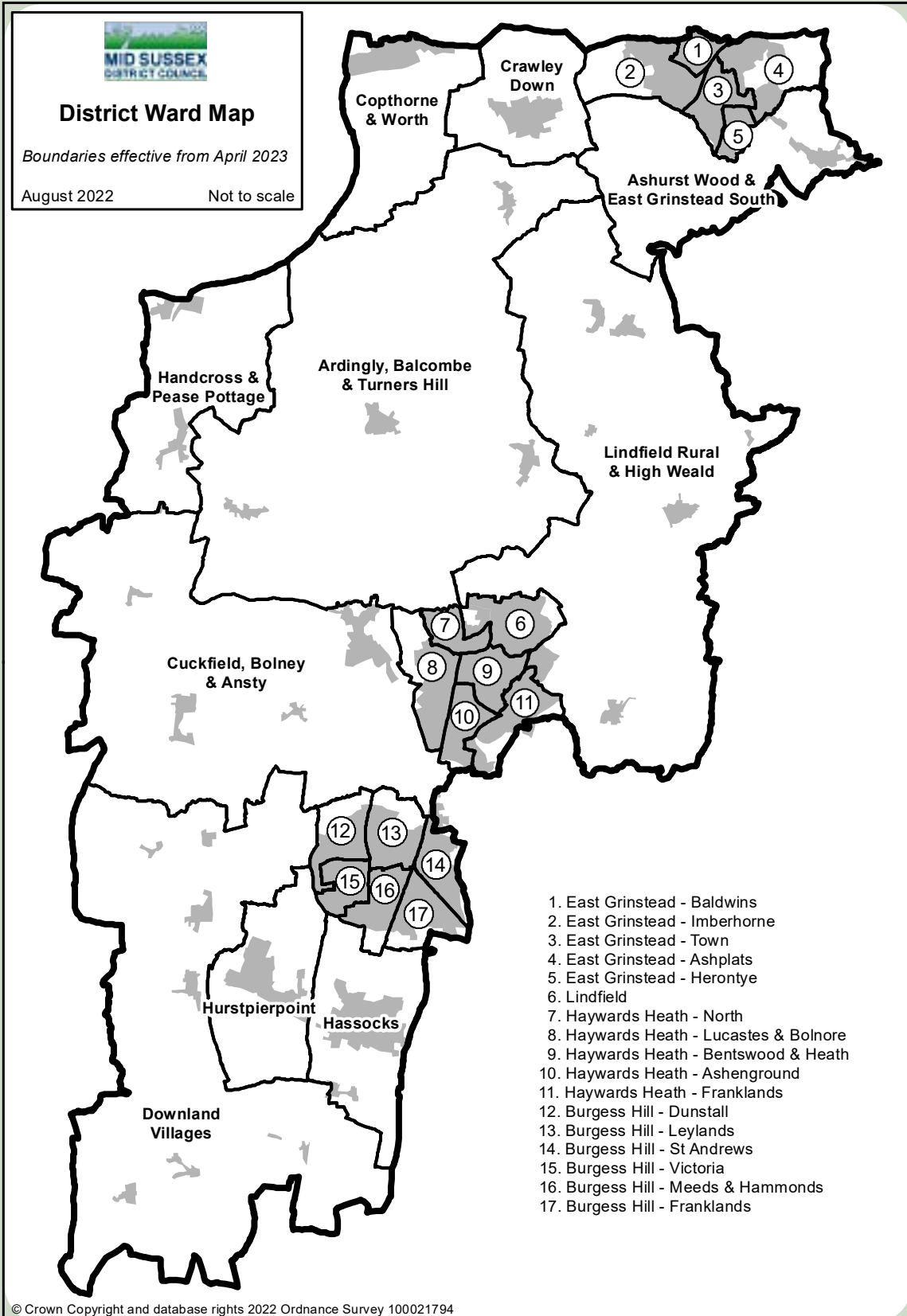
- West Sussex County Council
- Mid Sussex Association of Local Councils
- Sussex Police
- West Sussex County Council Public Health
- Horsham and Mid Sussex Clinical Commissioning Group
- West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service
- Clarion Future Communities
- Representatives from Local Voluntary Organisations
- Representatives from the Local Business Sector



Love Parks

Contact details for further information

elections@midsussex.gov.uk
 www.midsussex.gov.uk/elections
 Electoral Services - 01444 477003



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