

A new volunteers guide to the West Suffolk Liberal Democrats

The local West Suffolk party (<https://www.wslibdems.org.uk/>) is responsible for engaging its members and managing any election a Liberal Democrat is standing at within the area, whether:

- Parish Council (Parish council links can be found on the [West Suffolk site](#))
- Town Council (Town council links can be found on the [West Suffolk site](#))
- West Suffolk District Council (<https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/> click on Council tab at top)
- Suffolk County Council (the divisions within West Suffolk) (<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/>)
- Parliament (Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket, and West Suffolk)

Local Liberal Democrats parties across the country rely on their members, supporters and other volunteers. We are a federal party with every member having a say and an equal vote unlike the other main parties. You do not though need to be a party member or registered supporter to volunteer. In West Suffolk we have a growing number of new and experienced volunteers, with some more localised groups emerging. We encourage and will support the growth of any localised groups our members and supporters want to establish across West Suffolk. Where local groups are established, WhatsApp has become the media of choice to stay in closer contact.

What responsibilities do the different councils have?

Many find it confusing to understand what different councils have responsibility for. Locally, we have a two-tier system with District and Country Councils. Other areas have moved to a unitary authority where the roles of the councils are combined in an aim to provide a more efficient and joined up service to the community.

Below are the high-level responsibilities of each council in our area.

Parish & Town Councils

Town and Parish Councils are an essential part of the structure of local democracy and have a vital role in acting on behalf of the communities they represent. They: Give views, on behalf of the community, on planning applications and other proposals that affect the parish including managing local recreation areas, halls, cemeteries etc.

West Suffolk District Council

The district council provides a range of services to its residents, including waste and recycling collection, car parking, community development, licensing and environmental health, planning and building control, markets, leisure facilities, parks and open spaces and housing advice.

Suffolk County Council

Suffolk County Council is broadly responsible for: adult and community services. children and young people's services (including schools) economy, skills and environment (including highways).

Local Party Executive:

West Suffolk Liberal Democrats are overseen by the Executive committee, consisting of:

- **Chair:** Elected member, responsible for leading the local party, chairing executive meetings, forward planning and representing the local party at external engagements (the current Chair is Helen Korfanty)
- **Deputy Chair:** Elected member, responsible for assisting and filling in for the Chair

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- **Secretary:** Elected member, responsible for minuting all meetings and preparing minutes for approval at the next meeting (currently vacant)
- **Finance Officer:** Elected member, responsible for local party budgeting and any banking requirements
- **Membership Development Officers:** Elected member, responsible for engaging with and activating new members and supporters.
- **Committee members:** Members of the party elected to the executive.

Others may have temporary or permanent places on the committee such as Campaign Manager, election agents, councillors and parliamentary candidates.

We have an AGM once a year to appoint the committee and hear their reports as well as hearing from guest speakers.

Campaign Management

We currently have a funded Campaign Manager, Jack Wheelan, without whom and without the funding donation from our current Chair, we would unlikely have seen the current growth in the local party. Amongst other things, the key responsibilities of a Campaign Manager are:

- Leadership and team motivation
- Performance monitoring
- Leading on all campaign strategy, communication with the media
- Candidate selection and personal/professional development
- Using campaign technology/systems
- Representing the local party at external engagements
- Managing campaign logistics such as printing, data protection and election law

Volunteering roles

There are a wide range of roles that may appeal to and suit different volunteers. The more people who are involved, the better. Just because someone works in a certain industry in their daily life, or has certain skills, we do not assume this is what they would want to volunteer. Offering what you want to volunteer for is up to each individual.

Ongoing volunteering roles

Volunteering does not just centre around elections. It is important the local party become a diverse and close community in itself. We also need to stay connected to our local communities to regularly listen to and communicate with them.

Voter contact

- **Case work:** If you have a little more time on your hands and like exploring more about specific local issues, case work is really important to give us the information to support and respond to concerns from our communities.
- **Clerical support:** This is a catch all for all office style work that can be done sitting down. Typically, this means counting out leaflets, addressing or stuffing envelopes etc. when you have the time to do so.
- **Doorstep canvassing:** Essentially this is just having discussions and finding out what people are currently thinking about. Talking to voters when running up to an election is key to getting LibDem votes. Canvassing can appear daunting at first to new volunteers, training

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from and shadowing a more experience canvasser will always be the first step. When volunteers feel ready to take over, they will be supported until they feel confident alone. We always canvass in groups.

- **Leafleting:** Working alone or alongside others to deliver leaflets in specific areas. This can be specifically for an election campaign, surveys or Focus leaflets to keep our communities up to date.
- **Wholesaling:** The task of taking delivery rounds to deliverers or acting as a base for deliverers to collect rounds.

Other membership engagement activities

In order to develop the West Suffolk Liberal Democrat community, you may feel you have other skills or

- **Event organising:** Social and or campaigning events
- **Sharing your skills:** You may have particular skills in marketing, photography, social media or organisational management etc. that you feel you can offer the local party
- **Skills development:** You may have skills the local party is currently lacking that you are willing to run training in, or be happy sharing the skills you have picked up to train and support other new volunteers

Money

The Liberal Democrats mainly operate from small donations from individuals, unlike the Conservatives and Labour who mainly run off bigger donors.

- **Standing order campaigns** – a regular financial donation to the local party that can be monthly or yearly.
- **Big donors** – a one-off large donation to the local party, many local members now write a large donation to the Liberal Democrats in their wills.

If you are interested in donating please go to wslibdems.org.uk/donate or email Jack Wheelan at hello@wslibdems.co.uk. Also contact Jack if you feel you have the skills to get more people donating to the party.

Election time

When a bigger election campaign kicks off, we have a short period of time to deliver the best outcome for the party. Many of the usual volunteering roles will become busier and therefore we have a need for specific roles to support this:

- **Candidate:** Member of the party who has been selected by the Executive to stand for an election
- **Agent:** Trained member of the party, responsible for making sure all procedural and legal requirements are met throughout an election campaign
- **Campaign Manager:** Works closely with candidates and their agent, delivering the vision and overall management of that election campaign
- **Volunteer Coordinator:** Works with the Campaign Manager to ensure volunteers are activated to support the campaign. Larger campaigns can have multiple coordinators, particularly if we need to engage the electorate by phone or other media sources as well as on the ground.

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- **Stock manager:** Holds, maintains and manages distribution of stakeboards (garden posters) and banners (larger adverts) when an election is called and makes sure they are collected post-election for storage.
- **Hammer teams:** Deliver and install stakeboards and banners to identified locations, engaging with property owners to make sure they are happy and taking stakeboards down post-election, returning them to stock.
- **Drivers:** Offer a taxi service for voters with mobility issues (elderly/disabled) on an election day, taking them to and from their polling station.
- **Tellers:** Tellers are volunteers who stand outside polling stations on behalf of the campaigners, election agents or candidates. Their job is to ask for and note down the electoral numbers of voters so that they can be removed from the list of people who are yet to vote. This then reduces the numbers of doors that our canvassers must knock on later in the day.
- **Counting agents:** a limited number of agents are allowed to attend the count. Counts are generally overnight following an election, or the following day. Counting agents observe the count and monitor the number of votes cast for different candidates to give confidence in the accuracy of counting, but also in the relative performance of our candidates.

Our electoral position in West Suffolk

We do not kid ourselves; we have a lot of work to do to make sure voters are clear on the real value having a Liberal Democrat run council can have on an area. We are at the beginning of our journey to join our neighbours in Cambridgeshire who already deliver this benefit to their communities.

We currently only have one District Councillor representing us in West Suffolk, Jon London from Exning and have a recent history of near misses and increased votes. By the 2027 District elections we hope to stand a full complement of candidates and ensure higher numbers to have more influence on the district council. Before then we have County Council elections in May 2025, for which we will put up a full slate of candidates and hope to gain at least 4 seats for West Suffolk to add to the 7 LibDem County Councillors currently on the council and many others likely to join them from across the county.

If anyone is interested in finding out more about being a candidate, please speak directly to one of the local champions in our team (<https://www.wslibdems.org.uk/our-team>). Jon London will be able to share his first-hand experience of being a district councillor.

Alternatively, email hello@wslibdems.org.uk with your contact details and we will get back to you as quickly as possible.