Catherine Stihler has been Chief Executive Officer of the Open Knowledge Foundation since February 2019. Open Knowledge is a global not for profit with a worldwide network which led the open data revolution and is a global leader campaigning for a fair, free and open future. Most recently Catherine has led calls for a moratorium on micro-advertising in the UK General Election.

Prior to this, she represented Scotland as a Member of the European Parliament from 1999. As Vice-Chair of the European Parliament’s Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee, she worked on digital policy, prioritising the digital single market, digital skills, better accessibility of digital products for the disabled, as well as citizen online data protection and privacy. As leader and founder of the All-Party Library Group she promoted and advocated for the importance of libraries and how libraries can remain relevant in the new digital age. Catherine was instrumental in securing graphic health warnings on cigarette packets in 28 countries and delivered braille on pharma packaging across the EU. She played a pivotal role in ensuring the World Health Organisation (WHO) recognised sudden infant death syndrome and led the first campaign in the European institutions on Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) - one of the world’s biggest killers. Her pro-European and anti-Brexit stance led her to be one of the six Scottish politicians whose Court case to revoke Article 50 resulted in a ground-breaking judgement by the European Court of Justice.

Born in Bellshill in 1973, Catherine was educated at Coltness High School, Wishaw and the University of St Andrews where she was awarded a MA (Hons) Geography and International Relations (1996), and a MLitt in International Security Studies (1998). Before becoming a MEP, Catherine served as President of St Andrews University Students' Association (1994-1995) and worked in the House of Commons for Dame Anne Begg MP (1997-1999). She has a Master of Business Administration from the Open University, and in 2018 was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of St Andrews. Catherine was elected to serve as the 52nd Rector of the University of St Andrews between 2014 and 2017, and was awarded an OBE in 2019 for services to politics. Her key achievements as Rector include the Inspi rer Lecture series, the Rector’s Fund and saving the ancient role of Rector across Scotland when threatened by the proposed Higher Education Governance Act.

Catherine's unique experience on Court as both a student and as a working Rector, provides her with an unparalleled skill set to deliver in this special role, enabling the university to flourish.
Personal statement

Studying at St Andrews was life changing and made me the person I am today. I want everyone to benefit from this special place.

I have never really been able to leave St Andrews; I keep wanting to come back. After studying for an MA (Hons) in Geography and International Relations, I continued studying for an MLitt in International Security Studies. I met my husband here, we married here, and we continue to live in Fife. Then, between 2014 and 2017, it was an immense privilege to serve as the 52nd Rector of this university.

Now I am standing for the role of Senior Lay member. This job is critical to the good governance of the university, and I believe my 20 years of political experience have provided me with the necessary diplomatic skills for this position.

I am running on a platform of #ABC:

- A is for access. I want to widen access so that students with the greatest potential regardless of background can benefit from the St Andrews experience.
- B is for budget. Financial stability is critical for the current and future success of the university. With Brexit uncertainty and so many unknowns, I will help to ensure our university’s future success.
- C is for community. I will do all that I can to support our communities and ensure that St Andrews continues to flourish. That’s both the local community where town/gown relations are critical; and the national environment of Scotland and the UK and the international environment which makes St Andrews today one of the most global universities on the planet.

The role of Senior Lay member is not to be confused with the ancient role of Rector or Principal. This role rests with the ruling body of the university, the Court, enabling its effectiveness whilst being a critical friend to the senior management team. Some describe it as akin to the CEO/Chair relationship on boards, with the Principal as CEO, and the Senior Lay member as Chair. As someone who has been a trustee of Court working with two past Senior Lay members, I am all too aware of the need to listen, to question and to find consensus.

This is not a permanent position; I would be performing the role on top of my day job as CEO of the Open Knowledge Foundation - a global not for profit which led the open data revolution and is a global leader campaigning for a fair, free and open future. However, unlike the Rector whose role is to Preside over Court and be an advocate for the student body, the Senior Lay member must remain neutral - placing our university’s interest at the heart of all that he/she does.

I believe I have the skills to deliver in this special role, enabling our university to flourish.

Please Vote Stihler #ABC