

Since starting in my role in late September 2025, I have learned (and am learning) a lot.

- I've been learning how Ashford Borough Council works – and sometimes doesn't work
- I've been learning how the Rolvenden & Newenden Parish Councils work, and Tenterden Town Council
- I've been learning about this Ward and the people in it and I am pleased to say that, even though I don't live here, the villages of the weald share so many common traits that it is all very familiar.
- And I've been trying to learn everybody's names – and often failing!

I am pleased to say that, so far, I have really enjoyed my time as a councillor. It isn't always straight forward and it is occasionally frustrating when I can't make something work, but it is ultimately fulfilling. The role has become much bigger than I expected, but it is all better for that. When I started, I promised myself (and warned my wife!) that I would throw myself into everything and be as active as I could be. There is no point in doing this job if you are not going to get stuck in.

I'd like to tell you a little bit about my experience so far, because I suspect that most people don't really know what a borough councillor does. I know I didn't.

Ashford Borough Council is controlled by a coalition of Ashford Independent and Green councillors. We took power from the Conservatives in 2023. All our decisions are run through the words: People, Planet, Place.

We are, in effect, the third tier of government, with the national government at the top, then Kent County Council and then us at Borough level. We look after bin collections, parks and leisure centres and green spaces. We do local planning (although we are working to strict national guidelines), we look after social housing, we run commercial licensing, building control, business rates, food safety, car parks...all the good stuff!

We don't have any control over roads, education, NHS, social care or any of those big contentious issues.

However, after Local Government Reorganisation, which will probably take place in Spring 2028, all the responsibilities of KCC and ABC will be rolled into a new Unitary Authority. Which will cover an area smaller than KCC, but larger than ABC...TBC

In November, I was very pleased to be invited onto the cabinet to take on Kate's old portfolio – Parks and Recreation. There are eight of us on the cabinet and my portfolio suits me perfectly as it combines my twin passions for the natural world and sports and healthy living. The portfolio takes in all the ABC run sports facilities, from football pitches to indoor bowls to skate parks, as well as the two leisure centres and the Julie Rose Stadium.

It also includes all the parks and green spaces in the borough, from the grass around Sparkwood to the new country park planned for Conningbrook Lakes in Ashford. As well

as this, as portfolio holder, I am currently involved in working groups to improve and expand the cycle paths and footpaths around the borough and another group to improve the fishing facilities in Ashford town.

It is a very varied brief and I wouldn't have it any other way.

However, my main role as Borough Councillor is here in the ward and my priority will always be for the benefit of Rolvenden and Tenterden West. I spend a lot of time talking to people in person or by email about their personal circumstances as well as being involved in the Neighbourhood Plan, the final development of Newenden Village Hall and the future of Monypenny.

One of my favourite parts of the role is distributing the £3000 in grant funding that I am able to hand out to charities and organisations in the area. In the last financial year my grant went to the Neighbourhood Plan, The Mildred Trust – who do fantastic work in the Tenterden area and who ran a kids club here in the hall yesterday. They will also be setting up The Sprout Squad which will introduce primary school kids to the joys of growing their own food. Lastly, I have funded a screening of Tenterden Wildlife's 'Wilder Tenterden' film which promotes and celebrates the beautiful countryside around here and the good work that people are doing in it. My funds for 2026/7 are not yet allocated, so if you know a good cause that needs some money, please get in touch and I'd be very happy to consider it.

People often ask how much time this role takes and what I really do, so I'll try to break it down.

- Every day I expect to spend about an hour reading and replying to emails – sometimes it is more, sometimes less. These emails can be about all sorts of things, but are often from ward residents who are asking for help with a range of subjects. I will always do my best for residents and these emails are the ones I deal with first.
- If we have a monthly cabinet meeting, I will have a lot of reading to do. Reports can be long, dry and repetitive, but it is by reading these reports and asking (lots of) questions that I begin to understand how local government works.
- Full council meetings are every six weeks and require more reading. If I've understood the cabinet meetings properly, the full council meetings are easier, but they can also throw in some unexpected subjects.
- Once a month, I attend the Planning Committee and this is another folder of reading. Last month we only had one application to consider, the month before we had six. The committee only considers applications that are 'called in' by the ward councillor. They tend to be contentious or marginal decisions or really big applications. They can take a lot of time and can be emotionally draining. I take this role seriously and it can be hard to balance the needs and wants of everyone involved. There can be winners and losers in these decisions and that can be hard to be a part of, but it can also transform people's lives in a positive way.
- I am very pleased to be a part of the Joint Advisory Committee for the High Weald National Landscape, of which almost all of this ward is a part. That involves more reading and three half day meetings a year – so not too onerous. I really enjoy this

role and I have recently put myself forward for the management committee. I guess I am a glutton for punishment.

- My Portfolio responsibilities require two formal meetings per month and several smaller ones with various stake holders. But in reality, it is council's officers who really do all of the work. I have been really impressed with the attitude, ambition and commitment of ABC's officers. They really do the best that they can for the borough in conditions that are sometimes difficult and are often under-funded. It is easy to criticise the authorities that run our lives, but my experience so far has only been a positive one.