

Message from the Chairman of Kent County Council



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Chairman: DAVID BRAZIER

Fifty Thousand Canapes...

There is a generic description of the role of the Chairman being to “uphold the democratic values of the Council as a whole and represent the Council at civic and ceremonial functions.” Coupled with this is the perception that the Chairman’s main aim is to consume fifty thousand canapes during his year. I have never been one to believe the hype, so I set about finding out more about the role and what it entailed when I became Vice-Chairman of the Council in May 2016.

One of the first things I did was to google “Chairman of Kent County Council” and the search returned a handful of results that seemed mostly limited to the annual announcement of the new post holder. Disappointed, I sought advice from the Civic Office, which supports the Chairman and Vice-Chairman in their duties, and was told that the role is very much what you make it. Not to be deterred, I spoke with former Chairmen and colleagues across the council, only to be told again that there are no hard and fast rules for being Chairman but that it would help to have a theme. Assuming Tina Turner’s “Simply the Best” was not the sort of theme being referred to, I thought long and hard about what my focus for the year might be.

By way of background, I should explain that I was unexpectedly elected to the Council in 1997, and have held many positions within the council during that time, even reaching the grand heights of Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport. I have worked on many large projects supported by KCC, including Turner Contemporary and Cyclopark, and decided that I would choose Tourism as my focus.

There is also a tradition that the Chairman supports a charity during his year and I had no hesitation in selecting Kent Community Foundation. This is an organisation that does excellent work with major donors in supporting and highlighting the activities of smaller charitable organisations across the county to ensure they can continue to operate at a local level, access funding opportunities and receive the positive recognition they deserve.

I have to say, having been in post for a few weeks now, the generic description of the role of the Chairman given earlier does not accurately reflect the very unique position the Chairman of the Council finds himself (or indeed herself) in. As Chairman, I have the ability to step outside of the political agendas and highlight the Council's work, educate people about what the Council does and use the civic function to bring people together to work on key issues affecting our county.

I have begun organising a range of initiatives designed to improve the outcomes from the civic activities of the Chairman. I have set in place new ways to engage with a variety of people across the county, starting with this update to highlight the activities and achievements of the Chairman, the Council and the people of Kent. We have already had the newly formatted East Kent Area Reception at Turner Contemporary (on 11 July and there will be more to follow about this), which I'm pleased to say was a great success and I have been contacted by a number of guests to say how useful they found the event. There are two more Area Receptions planned for later in the year and I am hoping they will be just as successful.

I have started a programme of visits to local businesses, voluntary organisations and community groups across the county to highlight and promote the excellent work they are undertaking, and will be working with Visit Kent to promote and highlight tourism within the county in the coming months.

My ambition for the year is to make the most of the civic role of the Chairman, bringing people together and humanising KCC. I look forward to doing things differently and to being an approachable and productive representative for all those whose work makes KCC the vital and effective organisation that it is.