

# the ashford freedom flyer!

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Happy  
New  
Year



January is  
here!





# PEOPLE!



## A big thank you to our team!

Tenterden Leisure Centre's refurbishment has been progressing really well, and we want to say a huge thank you to our fantastic staff. The team have been mucking in poolside, working hard to get everything refreshed and ready for reopening with the new features. Their extra effort, teamwork, and willingness to help wherever needed has made a real difference, and we are incredibly grateful for their continued support and dedication.

## Festive fun with Colin!

One of our most iconic members, Colin has been part of the Stour Centre family for over a decade and always brings a smile with him. In December, he went fully festive, proudly wearing his Freedom Leisure Christmas hat as he headed along to his much loved aqua classes. We love seeing familiar faces like Colin enjoying their time in the pool and being such an important part of our community.



## Connecting at the Area Managers' Day!

The Area Managers' Day at Maidstone United was a great opportunity for Freedom Leisure colleagues to connect, share experiences, and strengthen working relationships. Gez led engaging team-building activities on the tennis courts at Freedom Leisure Maidstone, encouraging teamwork and collaboration across the group.

## Proud sponsors of Bearsted FC U13s!

We're proud to be sponsoring the Bearsted FC U13 boys team for the next two seasons. The team have been in outstanding form, heading into Christmas top of the league after winning every match so far and sitting six points clear of second place. Their success doesn't stop there, the boys also claimed victory at the Aylesford Tournament this year and are continuing an impressive run in the U13 Challenger Cup. Huge congratulations to the players and coaches on a fantastic season to date.



## Emily recognised at Kent Wellbeing Awards!

Huge congratulations to Emily, our Healthy Communities Manager, on being Highly Commended at this year's Kent Wellbeing Awards. This recognition is so well deserved and reflects Emily's dedication, passion, and the positive impact she has across our communities. We're incredibly proud of her and the team at the Stour Centre for the difference they continue to make every day.





# COMMUNITY!



## Spreading festive cheer at Ebbsfleet Christmas Fair!

Our Ashford team spent the weekend at Ebbsfleet Christmas Fair, where we spoke to the local community about our brand new Kent site, Weldon Wellbeing Pavilion opening in Ebbsfleet in February 2026. We signed up our first members, met some key figures in the community and spread festive cheer along the way.

## Charge your car, enjoy a coffee!

Our newly installed electric vehicle chargers at Julie Rose Stadium make it easy to power up your car while enjoying a Costa coffee on site. Whether you are here for a workout, a class, or to watch some athletics, you can plug in, take a seat, and enjoy a relaxing break while your vehicle charges. It's a convenient way to keep your car ready to go while taking some time for yourself.



## A festive run for a great cause!

The Santa Dash at Julie Rose took place on the 14th December and was a huge success, with just over 80 runners, there was a sea of red suits and Santa hats. Raising money for the pilgrims hospice, the day was full of festive spirit, with each participant receiving a medal, Santa hat and mince pie on completion. Huge thank you to Santa Sam for coming along and supporting the day, we couldn't have done it without you.



## Freedom Leisure wins National Award!

Freedom Leisure has been named the National Pioneering Pool Operator Award winner at the Swim England National Awards, recognising the impact of our Learn to Swim and Strength In Mind projects. With support from Zoggs UK, we have provided free swimming kit to vulnerable children and offered free lessons at the Stour Centre. A big thank you to the Ashford team, Zoggs UK, and Ashford Borough Council for helping us make a real difference in the community.



## New water features make a splash!

Our pool refurbishment at Tenterden Leisure Centre has been a fantastic success, and the new water features look amazing! The pool is fully refilled and up to temperature, and our lifeguard team gave everything a thorough test to make sure it is safe and ready for everyone to enjoy. Visitors have been loving the upgraded features, including the flume, waves, and all the new additions.



# FREEDOM LIFE STORIES!



## Meet Marshall!

Marshall is a marathon and long-distance runner with Ashford Athletics Club, who train at Julie Rose Stadium. Training under coach Stella Bandu since 2013, he excels on track, road, and cross country. Highlights include winning the 2025 Edinburgh Marathon, a 2:16:59 course record at the 2024 Chester Marathon, and sub-31:00 for 10,000m. Marshall also inspires others, showing how sport builds resilience, wellbeing, and community.

### How did your journey into running begin?

My running journey began when I joined Ashford Athletics Club. What started as a way to keep active quickly became something much bigger. Being part of the club gave me structure, encouragement, and a real sense of belonging, and it's where I learned to push myself further than I ever thought possible.

### Who is your biggest inspiration?

My biggest inspiration is Alex Yee. His mindset, work ethic, and humility really resonate with me. He shows that success comes from consistency, resilience, and believing in the process, not just natural talent.

### What has been the toughest challenge you've faced as a runner?

The toughest challenge has been the mental side, staying motivated through tough training blocks, setbacks, a full time job and exams and days when progress feels slow. Learning to trust myself and keep going even when it's hard has been just as demanding as the physical training.

### Why do you think sport is important for local communities?

Sport brings people together. It creates connection, confidence, and a shared sense of purpose. Local clubs and facilities give people of all ages the chance to improve their physical and mental wellbeing while feeling part of something bigger than themselves.

### What achievement are you most proud of, and why?

Winning my first marathon is the achievement I'm most proud of. It represents months of dedication, early mornings, setbacks, and perseverance. It's proof that with commitment and support, you can achieve things you once thought were out of reach.

### What does crossing the finish line really feel like?

Crossing the finish line is an overwhelming mix of relief, pride, and emotion. In that moment, every tough training session and every doubt feels worth it, it's not just about the distance, but everything it took to get there.

### What would you say to someone who thinks they "aren't a runner"?

I'd say running isn't about speed or distance, it's about starting. Everyone begins somewhere, and every runner was once a beginner. If you're willing to take that first step, you already are a runner.







# DISCOVER!



## Memberships Made for the New Year!

Start the year with a membership that works for you. From 26th December to 31st January, enjoy 12 months for the price of 9 when you pay annually, or join on a monthly membership with no joining fee. It is a great way to build healthy habits and stay active all year.



## Swim Stronger by Summer!

Give your child the confidence to enjoy a summer full of swimming. Starting lessons now helps children build essential water skills, improve technique and feel comfortable in the pool. Our structured swimming lessons support steady progress, helping children grow in confidence as they learn to swim safely and happily.

## Member Testimonials



"Great gym, assisted weight machines are in good condition and everything works. Good free weights area, and a mass of cardio machines."

- K W, Stour Centre



"Wow! Well done, and thank you to all involved. Our two younger ones are very excited to see the new features. Great to see all the investment in our community leisure centre, we are all very lucky to have one in the town. Thank you."

- Graeme, Tenterden Leisure Centre



"We're grateful to be nominated as 'Fundraiser of the Year' and look forward to Jan 9th! Congratulations to everyone in all the categories....all heroes!"

- Abbie's Army, Stour Centre



**BE A PART OF THE ASHFORD FREEDOM FLYER!**

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