



**RTPI**

Royal Town Planning Institute

# Your Career in Planning Enforcement



# Why is planning enforcement the right career path for you?



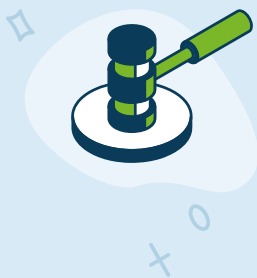
## Community-minded

If you are motivated to make a genuine difference in your community, planning enforcement is a deeply rewarding career path. Enforcement officers get to witness the positive impact of their work first-hand, as enforcement actions lead to tangible improvements in local areas and often bring much-needed respite to community members who have dealt with prolonged nuisance issues.



## Peacemaker

While most enforcement interactions are congenial, planning enforcement regularly involves sensitive decisions involving people's homes. A major aspect of the job is mediating disputes and resolving conflicts. Enforcement will be a great fit if you enjoy practicing negotiation skills and have a calm temperament that allows you to respond to emotional situations with professional equanimity. Excellent listening skills, managing expectations sensitively, and dealing with people under difficult circumstances are essential.



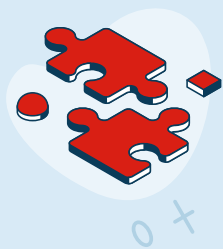
## Sense of civic duty

As the law enforcer for planning, you uphold the integrity of the system and protect both people and the environment. You serve as the main point of contact between the council and the public. Planning enforcement officers take pride in this respected professional role that comes with a major legal component. You may have opportunities to appear in court as an expert witness.



## Adventurous

If you are an active individual who enjoys varied workdays and dislikes being stuck behind a desk, enforcement provides plenty of opportunities to get out in the field. Officers spend much of their time out on site visits, investigating cases and meeting people face-to-face.



## Problem-solver

If you enjoy tackling investigations and untangling complex problems using facts and data, enforcement is an ideal career path. Officers unravel intricate cases by delving into site histories, analysing events on the ground, and carefully assessing regulations. This intellectually stimulating work is both challenging and deeply rewarding. Being pragmatic, fair-minded, and equipped with a can-do attitude are vital.



## Outgoing

Outgoing individuals who enjoy actively communicating with a wide variety of people from different backgrounds will appreciate the diverse interactions enforcement offers. You'll get to meet professionals across sectors as well as community members. You may also get to speak publicly, arguing cases clearly and fairly in court.



## Heart of the planning system

Planning enforcement sits at the heart of the planning system – without it, planning is pointless. Enforcement provides an invaluable understanding of planning legislation and experience across the full development process from core principles to appeals. No other planning role offers such well-rounded expertise spanning the system.



## Mobile

If you want a career that allows mobility across the country rather than confining you to one location, enforcement officers have the flexibility to find work at councils across the UK.

# Routes into Enforcement

Planning enforcement officers come from a wide variety of backgrounds in addition to university studies or apprenticeships in town planning.

Young graduates or school leavers often start out working as administrative support officers, and the council sponsors them through their qualifications to become enforcement officers.

Many enforcement officers come from other careers including law enforcement or regulatory services, where they have skills which can be easily transferred.



## Routes to Qualification

### University:

You can choose planning as an undergraduate degree; each higher education institution will have its own entry criteria but relevant A Level or equivalent subjects include geography, economics, law, or sociology.

Alternatively, you can choose an undergraduate degree in a different subject, such as geography or economics, and then complete a master's in planning.

The RTPI accredits a number of planning schools from across the country. To find out more, please click [here](#).

### Chartered Town Planner Apprenticeship:

There are also apprenticeship routes which you can take to become an enforcement officer, including the Chartered Town Planner Apprenticeship which has two possible entry points and typically takes three to six years, depending on prior qualifications.

This is a real job in planning which enables you to work and study at the same time. Successful completion of the apprenticeship will give you professional recognition and status as a qualified planner. To find out more, please click [here](#).

### Town Planning Assistant Apprenticeship:

It is also possible to become a planning enforcement officer via an apprenticeship route later in your career. The Town Planning Assistant Apprenticeship is designed for those who would either like to embark on a career in town planning, or those currently working in support roles in the profession who would like to 'upskill' and open up new career paths. To find out more, please click [here](#).





## Starting a career in planning enforcement

The National Association of Planning Enforcement (NAPE), one of the Royal Town Planning Institute's member networks, promotes the role of enforcement within planning. Members of NAPE's management committee have taken different routes into the profession, from studying planning at university to going directly into work.

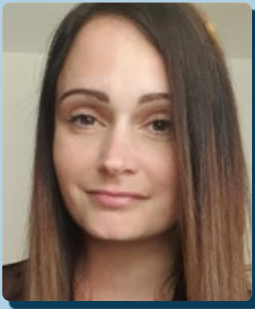


### Craig Allison Senior Planning Enforcement Officer North Yorkshire Council

When I was deciding my A Levels for my final year of school my teacher advised me to drop one subject and focus on the subjects that I found most interesting and at the time this was geography. However, I was unsure in terms of what to do with geography as a career. One of my teachers at the time was previously a local councillor for York asked if I had looked into planning.

I then did some research and looked on the RTPI's website, finding it quite interesting. I subsequently went to university to do a specialised degree in Urban Studies and Planning. After graduating from university I found it extremely difficult to get a job as it was at the height of the recession and roles in planning were scarce. Whilst pursuing my career in planning I started working two days a week at my local council for free within the planning policy department just to continue to gain some more experience.

I then came across enforcement and applied for a job with no idea what this entailed. The council which I was volunteering at made sure I shadowed the enforcement officer for a day, and I absolutely loved it. I successfully obtained the job as an enforcement officer and 10 years later I'm still thoroughly enjoying it.



## **Olivia Stapleford** **Planning Enforcement Manager** **Buckinghamshire Council**

I have worked in a local authority since leaving school at 16. I worked initially at my nearest council, picking up the phone to deal with people's missed rubbish collections! I then became interested in waste and recycling, so I worked in that field for a number of councils, working my way up to officer level in this area. I then worked in licensing – having got into a role through a mis-interpreted job advert. The role really interested me; I loved the legislative side of things and enforcement. Additionally, I found the variety of work involved in licensing really stimulating.

My move into planning enforcement was also an accidental mis-interpreted job advert. I thought it was for an environmental enforcement job (waste/recycling) but, after being off work for two years having my children, I applied for the role, hoping I could join my new local council, having moved home.

Before the interview, I was told I had to do a presentation on planning enforcement and expediency/streamlining services. I was terrified! What is planning enforcement anyway? A lot of research later, I realised what it was, it was something we all know exists, but never really know who is 'behind the scenes' sorting it all out for us.

I got the job and learnt very fast. My passion for legislation and enforcement helped me immensely, but overall, the variety and sense of achievement with the role is what kept me going.

I have worked my way up to Team Leader of a new Unitary Authority in my 10 years in planning enforcement, and I have never looked back!



## **Karen Bolton** **Planning Enforcement and Monitoring Officer** **Carmarthenshire County Council**

My experience of getting into planning enforcement was as a second career. I had been working as an IT operations analyst and call service manager since leaving school and decided to do a law degree as I thought it might lead to better prospects than an English degree.

To part fund my way through college I became a civil detention officer in a police station. When a job came up for a planning enforcement officer at a local borough council I applied and was accepted.

There were loads of jobs in available in planning then as now and I quickly moved onto county planning. While I found this valuable and interesting it had less of a public focus, so I moved back to a district council. I have worked in several interesting parts of the country so I would say do planning and see the United Kingdom if not the world!

# Case study: A career as a planning enforcement officer

**David Allan**  
**Planning Officer**  
**City of Edinburgh Council**

## **What have you accomplished in your career that you are most proud of?**

As a local authority planner working within the context of planning enforcement, you often face the challenge of dealing with development which has not been subject to the necessary scrutiny and statutory assessment before being carried out.

This unauthorised development can be of significant concern to members of the public, who sometimes feel it is the role of the planning authority to punish or penalise those who have carried out the works, rather than to resolve any issues relating to the development.

However, I am fortunate to work for a planning authority where the enforcement emphasis is on delivering positive outcomes, and while formal enforcement action is sometimes unavoidable, it's recognised that it can be more effective to negotiate a resolution which meets statutory planning provisions or mitigates any harm, and that in many cases the most appropriate course of action may be to take no action at all. In any case, this planning decision has to be justified and defensible.

The ability to deliver positive planning outcomes through enforcement relies on a good investigative mind coupled with strong decision making and it is the development of these skills that I am most proud of over any individual outcome.





## How has your work in enforcement enabled you to make an impact on your community?

Most enforcement cases investigated by the planning authority arise as a result of concerns submitted by local residents, and the main reasons for submitting enquiries are often impacts to residential amenity or impacts to heritage designations such as listed buildings and conservation areas.

Although individual breaches of planning control may have relatively minor, localised impacts, when taken cumulatively they can begin to have more noticeable effects on the wider character or appearance of an area and patterns of inappropriate development can emerge over time.

Within the context of my work, the rise in popularity of short-term letting has been a growing concern for local residents and communities as residential properties, often in shared buildings, are being subject to unauthorised changes of use. Planning enforcement has had a key role in tackling this trend and has been successful in returning properties back to residential use.

In cases where enforcement action has been required, as action is only taken when there are reasonable grounds for doing so, usually because there is a degree of harm being caused, then every positive outcome achieved through the enforcement process to remove or mitigate that harm should in turn have a positive impact on the community. Where enforcement action is successful, this can also go some way to deterring other similar breaches and give communities greater confidence in the planning system.





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