



# Getting creative to help young people

I AM only halfway through my year, but what are my first impressions? I am amazed at how welcoming everyone is in the county across such a broad cross-section of people. It gives me a great chance to explore the county and see beautiful parts I did not know existed.

In many cases, this was my first real chance to grapple with the issues of local government, the emergency services and the voluntary sector. Austerity has sharpened people's minds to managing resources. Accommodation and the interrelated problem of homelessness are big issues in the South East.

The role has the great mixture of ceremonial and informal. Once in full shrieval regalia outside Chelmsford Cathedral, my wife and I were mistaken by a three-year-old for being 'Harry and Meghan', which caused much amusement. The contrast was being dressed down on the midnight patrol with the Street Pastors in Southend.

I have tended to focus on the preventative side of crime. It has been great fun seeing many of the voluntary organisations being creative with young people. One visit was to Lads Need Dads in Clacton, which provides male mentors for fatherless teenage boys. That evening focused on learning first aid, but much of the conversation was the normal interaction a father would have with a teenage son – football, music and school. There was a similar feel to a charity called Essex Youthbuild, which provides construction skills for youngsters who are more suited to vocational rather



Award-winners from Thurrock East on a Respect programme run by Essex Boys and Girls Clubs

than academic training. The benefit of an outward bound course was clear on a Respect programme run by Essex Boys and Girls Clubs. The three-month course ended with a week scaling peaks in the Lake District. The enjoyment and confidence which the team had gained was clear – and there was no mobile phone signal in the Lake District!

One of my most interesting visits was to the British Red Cross refugee and asylum seeker drop-in centre at Tilbury.

Below left: At the British Red Cross refugee and asylum seeker drop-in centre at Tilbury

Below: At the Essex County Council cadet reception with Chairman, Cllr John Aldridge, Army Cadet Olivia Whittle and Vice Chairman, Cllr John Jowers Photo credit: Paul Starr Photographer

The refugees receive no government money and rely on the Red Cross. A single man will receive £10 and a food parcel for a week.

In terms of initiatives we are using the panel that judges the High Sheriffs' Awards to help come up with nominations for the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. There is also a very successful fireman's training course called Firebreak which could be used further afield. Firebreak courses have been used for disadvantaged youngsters, people with mental health problems, and even in prison.

I was asked at a meeting with members of a district council, 'What is the purpose of the meeting?' Good question. The High Sheriff has a near unique role to network with some of the key people in a county. Some of the issues in one area are addressed differently in another. The ability to help open doors and build bridges is useful in a society where people have little time to think outside their own narrow area.

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