



The front line of policing

MY YEAR as High Sheriff did not start as one would have hoped, as in April 2021 we were still very much subject to restrictions imposed due to the pandemic. However, when a date and the number of people permitted to assemble was finally agreed that plan also changed at the last minute as sadly the date coincided with the funeral of HRH The Duke of Edinburgh.

I thought I knew this county pretty well, but how mistaken I was. I have been surprised and indeed humbled by the amazing resilience of the hundreds, if not thousands of people from all walks of life across Kent who have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic to help and support others – from charitable organisations to community groups or just individuals all doing their bit. That work is now of course ongoing... it really has been a heart-warming experience.

As my year progressed and restrictions were slowly eased, I have been privileged to spend time with and support various law enforcement agencies such as probation, young offenders' teams, Border Force, the courts and of course Kent Police. Together with all the other emergency services it has been fascinating to see first-hand the breadth of their work.



Kent Justices' Clerks Support Team (HMCTS) receiving a High Sheriff's Award with John Weir, the Lady Colgrain, Lord-Lieutenant, and His Honour Judge Julian Smith

I have also spent time in each of the seven prisons we have in Kent and again have been so impressed with the amount of work which takes place to offer rehabilitation to offenders... something which I am passionate about.

During the past 12 months I have spent time with various teams within Kent Police; for instance on Christmas morning I visited the force's control and incident room, which was, as always, a hive of activity.

Prior to being appointed High Sheriff I spent some 24 years as a magistrate in North Kent. In court we hear evidence, read statements, and listen to submissions from solicitors and counsel all in a very sterile environment. I have been able to see first-hand exactly what our police officers face on a daily basis and I have to say much of it is as far from sterile as one can imagine.

One of my lasting memories and perhaps the one which has impacted on me most, will be the time spent with the County Lines and Gangs Team, who in my view are on that front line of policing, combating gang activity and the ever-pervasive import of drugs into Kent, a practice that affects so many people, particularly the young and vulnerable who become involved often through fear or coercion. These officers are dealing with very dangerous individuals who would stop at nothing to achieve their ends.

However, right across Kent Police I have seen dedicated and committed officers and PCSOs who are determined to serve, protect and try to make a real difference in communities across our county.

To the Chief Constable, Alan Pughsley, his senior leadership team, his officers and support staff, may I say, on behalf of the people of Kent... Thank you!

As my year comes to an end, this Medway boy who went to a secondary school, who never once imagined that he would hold such high office, let alone be presented to four members of the Royal Family, feels immensely privileged and indeed humbled to have been appointed



Attending the Justice Service at Rochester Cathedral with the Rt Hon Lord Reed (centre), President of the Supreme Court



Officers from the County Lines and Gangs Team receiving a High Sheriff's Award with (centre) the Police and Crime Commissioner, Matthew Scott, John Weir, and the Chief Constable, Alan Pughsley QPM

to serve as High Sheriff. Even more so, I feel proud to have met and been able to support so many in our county.

May I also say thank you to Catherine Lloyd, Kent's Under Sheriff, for her advice and guidance before and during my year which has been invaluable.

His Honour Judge Griffith-Jones QC has presided at a number of Declaration ceremonies in Kent. As he now heads towards retirement, I thank him for his support and friendship on two counts: first, on behalf of the wider Kent shrieval family and second, my own personal thanks for that support. On both counts it has been very much appreciated indeed! We wish him and his wife Virginia a long and happy retirement, so well earned.

My year has been very much a partnership with my dear wife Beverly and I am indebted to her for all her support.

John Weir JP
High Sheriff of Kent 2021-22