



# To convene and connect

**ACROSS THE country the role of High Sheriff thrived, adapting to rise above challenges and continuing to be more relevant than ever. As the 800th High Sheriff of Surrey and the 10th woman to hold the role, I took office with some trepidation as the Covid-19 pandemic raged on, but on reflection it seems to have been a particularly impactful shrieval year for that very reason.**

I prioritised visits to the most deprived wards and to those who had valiantly maintained Surrey's criminal justice system, as well as Surrey Police Force, Fire and Rescue Service, prisons and charities. I found wonderful people, determined to carry on but exhausted; the role of High Sheriff in giving support and appreciation was warmly welcomed and felt extremely pertinent.

The silver lining of the post-pandemic recovery was the emergence of a genuine desire to reconnect with people and a collective will to achieve ambitious goals. To 'convene and connect' was a delight, and produced many positive results, particularly surrounding my theme: 'Every Child Included'. My goal was to reduce the number of permanent school exclusions in Surrey, continuing the work of two outstanding previous High Sheriffs (2017-2019) on this difficult but important issue: 41 per cent of prisoners are permanently excluded from school (Justice Committee, 2019).

As an NHS doctor and Vice-Chair of the Community Foundation for Surrey,

I know that two things bring about real change: new data and a crisis. I was only expecting the former as, pre-Covid, I initiated an independent research project with Royal Holloway, University of London on school exclusion in Surrey.

My year was bookended by two summits centred on the research, which convened Surrey's educational and voluntary sectors with the local authority and police. In July 2021, 70 delegates happily came together for their first face-to-face gathering in 18 months. Having heard the new data, they developed a list of evidence-based recommendations for change. By the second summit in March 2022, after much hard work, material changes were in place and the number of permanent exclusions in Surrey had reduced by 40 per cent. A new Surrey Alternative Learning Programme and the Community Foundation's £2 million mental health fund for young people sparked national interest, and Anne Longfield, the Children's Commissioner for England (2021), was a guest speaker at the March summit.

There have been countless other wonderful experiences including joint visits with neighbouring High Sheriffs. Speaking on BBC Radio Surrey became very familiar; I gave out all kinds of awards, learnt tricks with a school dog, enjoyed 3 am patrols with the Woking Street Angels, appeared in *Hello* magazine making chocolate robins with the Countess of Wessex, appeared on Pakistani



Inspecting new Surrey Police officers with the Lord-Lieutenant of Surrey, Michael More-Molyneux



Christmas festivities at Disability Initiative, Camberley with HRH the Countess of Wessex, two previous High Sheriffs, Shahid Azeem DL and Bill Biddell DL, and Chief Executive Lucy Brown

television, featured in a list of Inspirational Surrey Women and, of course, supported numerous wonderful charities, many of which received grants from the Surrey High Sheriff's Youth Awards.

I launched a new website with a local IT consultant and was delighted to develop a considerable social media following. My event invitations were sent from the digital database 'Greenvelope', which is a great innovation for efficiency and continuity between shrieval years, and my team subsequently helped several other counties start their own databases.

After a final joint visit with my successor, I handed over the reins in front of a packed cathedral congregation, happy in the knowledge that the role of High Sheriff prevails, enhanced by collaboration among High Sheriffs and fortified by the experiences of the pandemic – and what a joy it was to sing the National Anthem in full voice!

**◆ Dr Julie Llewelyn**  
*High Sheriff of Surrey 2021-22*

**Below:** With the acting American Ambassador to the UK, Ambassador Philip Reeker, at the Remembrance Day Service, Brookwood American Cemetery

