



## Berkshire 2012-13

Being High Sheriff is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see what goes on, often below the radar, in one's county; and it is an opportunity that should be grabbed with both hands.

I wanted a focus to my year and so decided to learn why there are so many people in prison (the number has doubled in the last twenty years), and why so many (two-thirds) are re-convicted within two years of being released. It has proved to be a fascinating journey of discovery and, because the problem overlaps with so many other social issues, it has taken me into all corners of Berkshire. Also, because everyone involved recognises that it is a problem, I and my wife, Patricia, have been welcomed everywhere.

I have sat in court with judges and magistrates; I have visited four prisons, some more than once, and have been left alone to talk to groups of prisoners; I have been out with the probation service and seen offenders carry out unpaid work in the community; I have been out on patrol with police officers and witnessed an arrest; I have visited pupil referral units (where pupils go after being excluded from mainstream school); I have talked to the local authority officers charged with reducing crime through initiatives like youth offending teams, family intervention projects and troubled families programmes; I have sat in on integrated offender management sessions where all the agencies meet to agree how they will work together to help individuals who are at risk; and I have spent time with lots of charities and other organisations working with ex-offenders and other vulnerable people.

The main thing I have learnt is that, sadly, there is no magic wand. The 84,000 people in prison in England and Wales are all individuals with different stories and needs; and they all need



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individual attention and support to help them to sort out their lives. This is, of course, very demanding on resources, and the results can often be disappointing when ex-offenders revert to crime. Nevertheless, there are things which can be, and are being, done and I have been hugely impressed by the many people in Berkshire who work in this field. Their professional skills, real compassion and personal commitment are awe-inspiring: I was privileged as High Sheriff to witness their work and to express, on behalf of the county, gratitude.

My year also, of course, had its fair share of royal visits. HM The Queen attended a garden party and river pageant at Henley to mark the Diamond Jubilee: unlike the London event, the sun shone and we had a lovely day. I also attended Her Majesty at Windsor for the State Visit of the Amir of Kuwait which was a splendid ceremony. I wore two metaphorical hats when HRH The Duke of Gloucester came to Greenham Common Trust to present the Trust, of which I am a director, with the Queen's Award for Enterprise.



# News from and about Members

During my last week, I held a reception to thank the many people who have helped me during my year to understand the criminal justice system and who, more importantly, do such good work with ex-offenders in Berkshire. We were privileged to be joined by the Home Secretary, Theresa May, who is a Berkshire MP, and who encouraged us in our work.

Like all High Sheriffs, I suspect, I started my year with some trepidation, but it has flashed by with lots of fascinating, rewarding and hugely enjoyable experiences. Patricia and I have loved every minute of it. □

**Charles Brims**

*High Sheriff of the Royal County of Berkshire 2012-13*



Sir John Madejski, Professor Suzanna Rose (High Sheriff in nomination), Home Secretary Theresa May and the High Sheriff.