



Spreading hope

WITH MY fellow High Sheriffs of the Thames Valley, Jane Cranston of Oxfordshire, and Peter Kara of Buckinghamshire, I visited all the prisons in our region, as well as a Secure Training Centre for young offenders and Broadmoor Hospital. As we neared the end of our shrieval years, the three of us felt that some of the most impressive people whom we had met were those who work in these institutions.

We were particularly struck by the dedication, professionalism, warmth and empathy of the nurses, chaplains, kitchen staff, search teams, librarians, and of course the prison officers too. And, at the same time, we felt that these people were in some ways forgotten members of society, while nevertheless doing vital and valuable work in increasingly challenging environments.

We observed how they dealt with the problems that arise from budget constraints such as understaffing and overcrowding. They also had to face the challenges of drugs, the threat of assault, self-harm and suicide among those they watch over. Indeed in one prison, we experienced at first hand an alarming incident, which, but for the quick and brave actions of the prison officers and the governor, could rapidly have become highly dangerous for all of us.

For these reasons, we decided to instigate and organise a Prison Awards scheme across the Thames Valley, in order to recognise the work of individuals

or teams nominated from within their institutions by their colleagues. We presented these awards to 52 individuals who work in six prisons, as well as at Broadmoor Hospital, in ceremonies at the various establishments. Short speeches from the High Sheriff and Governors or Chief Executive topped and tailed the ceremony, during which each recipient had a citation read out, before being presented with a framed certificate.

The reaction of some of those to whom we gave awards was very humbling, with tears being shed and pride instilled at their being recognised, appreciated and properly thanked. Governors and staff members commented on how the awards had raised

morale which, in many of the places we visited, was sorely in need of a boost.

David Redhouse, Governor of HMP Huntercombe, said to us at the ceremony there:

'Your presence... and your idea of holding an award ceremony here in the prison demonstrate powerfully that you believe in what we are doing, and it is an encouragement for us all. But the awards themselves are then very particular encouragements to the individuals receiving them. And that's vital because one of the most powerful ways of spreading hope is to help hopeful people develop and implement their own ideas for making their environments better.'

'So I trust the award winners will be spurred on to do even more than they have done already. And then, because hope can be passed on from one person to another, I trust that the rest of us will be inspired by the examples of hope which our colleagues whom we see recognised today have shown, to develop hope for ourselves so that we too may go on to do more and better in our own work, also becoming the people we ought to be and making Huntercombe the prison it ought to be.'

It was a huge privilege to have been afforded the welcome and indulgence that we inevitably received within these institutions. It is also wonderfully reassuring to know that such exemplary work is going on every day behind the scenes, on behalf of the wider public.

Top: Peter Kara (Buckinghamshire), Sarah Scrope (Berkshire), Sheila Hale, award winner of Broadmoor Hospital, and Jane Cranston (Oxfordshire), at Awards Ceremony at Broadmoor Hospital

◆ Sarah Scrope DL
High Sheriff of The Royal County of Berkshire, 2017-18



Sarah Scrope, Jane Cranston, Peter Kara, Ian Blakeman, Governor of HMP Bullingdon, and High Sheriff's Award recipients from HMP Bullingdon Photo credit: Marion Mason Images