



The totality of the experience

BORN AND bred in Essex, I have always been proud to call myself 'pure Essex' and there can be no doubt that Essex is a fascinating county of which to be High Sheriff. It is large at 1,420 square miles; has the longest coastline in the country at 363 miles; is populous with 1.75m inhabitants; diverse with 14 district and borough councils, 18 MPs, two cathedral towns and five other significant towns; has one of the largest economies outside London; is blessed with exceptionally beautiful countryside and outstanding churches; has a long cultural tradition; and is characterised by its vitality.

We have four Magistrates' Courts, two Crown Courts, one County Court, one Coroner's Court and one Military Court; and two prisons, one civil and one military, all of which I have had the privilege to visit. We have an active and highly regarded police force seen to be at the cutting edge of modern policing and leading many initiatives such as implementation of the Athena computer system now being introduced across the country. Essex Police have taken me on 27 separate visits to different units to give me a full picture of the complexities of

modern policing. So there is plenty for the High Sheriff to do in respect of the prime responsibility of law and order.

Our main employer is London and the City of London but in addition we have: three major ports, Tilbury, DP World and Harwich; two airports, Stansted and Southend; and two crack army formations, 16 Air Assault Brigade based at Colchester and 33 and 101 Engineer Regiments (bomb disposal) at Carver Barracks, all of which are leaders in their fields. And we have a thriving commercial sector with a few large companies but a host of entrepreneurial smaller companies selling quality products round the world.

We also have a very active voluntary sector with some 400,000 engaged in voluntary activities of some form. So there is no shortage of calls on the High Sheriff over and above the work on law and order.

I chose for my theme The Common Good because I was interested to see the interaction of these various streams of activity, particularly in a year dominated by change resulting from the economic cuts and compounded by structural and technology changes. Essex is no exception

in this regard but wherever I have gone I have been greatly impressed by the positive approach taken in the face of these difficulties. Essex's greatest strength is its determination and ability to find a way through.

It has been a great privilege to see the county from top to toe, warts and all, and for me the highlight has been the totality of this experience with my strongest memory being of the wonderful people working for the common good often in the most trying circumstances. The Justice Service encompassed all that is best in this endeavour.

◆ Vincent Thompson
High Sheriff of Essex 2015-16

Above: Declaration Ceremony in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Chelmsford: His Honour Judge Owen-Jones, His Honour Judge Lodge, Rt Revd Thomas McMahon, Bishop Emeritus of Brentwood, Chaplain to the High Sheriff 2015-16, Vincent Thompson, High Sheriff 2015-16, Cadet Sgt A Koutas, cadet to the Lord-Lieutenant, Lord Petre, Lord-Lieutenant, Mrs Lorna Rolfe, High Sheriff 2016-17, Revd J Risby, Chaplain to the High Sheriff 2016-17, His Honour Judge Gratwicke, Her Honour Judge Lynch