



A day in the life

IT IS now some months since I passed the Essex High Sheriff's baton to my successor. During this time I have reflected on what a privileged and unique year I experienced. So many highlights and special events make it difficult to choose those to write about in any meaningful way. As I flick through my diary and programmes, speeches, invitations and letters, my attention is drawn to one day in what was a fairly typical week.

This morning finds me sitting on the bench in Chelmsford Crown Court dressed in full shrieval kit. It is the culmination of a particularly lurid case and I listen in admiration as the judge succinctly sums up its complexities for the benefit of the jury and defendant alike. It does not take long for the jury to deliver a guilty verdict and he will be sentenced the following week.

A quick change into 'civvies' and I head for the Essex Police Operational Support Group. I am present while an ongoing warrant is being executed in a rather splendid country house. It is a huge 'drugs bust' and I cannot believe the number of cannabis plants at every stage of growth in designated outhouses. The estimated street value is hundreds of thousands of pounds. Two arrests are made. I had already visited a drug and rehabilitation unit and also witnessed, as a magistrate, the devastating effect that drugs can have on mental health especially when mixed with synthetic man-made materials as is now so often the case. Feeling a little peculiar, thanks to breathing in copious amounts of toxic fumes, I heartily (although hopefully not too robustly) congratulate the officers involved. During the drive home I recollect some of the other impressive days I have spent with the many branches of Essex Police. I sat in a very special helicopter used for, among other things,



Above: Young volunteer recipients of a High Sheriff's Award give local children a holiday fun week which otherwise they could not have enjoyed

searching for missing persons. The software was the brainchild of the highly skilled pilots and drew interest from around the world. I patrolled some of the 360 miles of the county's coastal waters seeking smugglers of people and drugs; participated in successful traffic operations and observed lines of travellers as they approach customs at Stansted Airport, trying to spot the suspicious individual. The men and women of the police and other emergency services were unstintingly generous with their time. I listened to their concerns which vary from staffing to the future state of their pensions; in spite of all the frustrations and challenges they have to meet, including putting their lives on the line to keep us safe, their good humour and dedication is always apparent.

Back into uniform and I'm off to meet an enterprising youth council in Harwich. This group has been developing a project to raise awareness of domestic abuse among the young. They show me a short film they have produced with a clever and dramatic twist at the end which raises the hairs on the back of my neck. Enthusiastically I endorse their entry to the National Crimebeat Awards and I am thrilled to hear subsequently that they have received a prestigious Highly Commended Certificate. It has been heart-warming to meet similarly innovative and caring youngsters throughout my travels.

Home but not yet to bed as I must attempt to keep on top of the 'thank you' letters. Tomorrow there is a royal visit and a civic service in the evening – the year continues to rush past.

While High Sheriffs continue their strong support for all branches of the law, they are increasingly the champions of the voluntary sector. There are over 400,000 volunteers in Essex who are now responsible for servicing thousands of charities and social enterprises. Without these hardworking individuals most of our charities both large and small would fail. As I watched their care of others and listened to their remarkable stories I was humbled and uplifted in equal measure. It was such a privilege and a true highlight of my time as High Sheriff to meet these dedicated and hugely impressive people.

◆ Lorna Rolfe JP
High Sheriff of Essex 2016-17



Above: Lorna Rolfe with Cllr Steve Cole, Mayor of Castle Point and members of 217 Field Squadron, 33 Engineer Regiment on Armed Forces Day 2016