



Hampshire 2013-14

Six months in, my main observation is just how varied the role of High Sheriff can be. In the last month, I have attended a garden party for a university vice-chancellor, conducted a citizenship ceremony, visited a major disability charity, spoken at a school about the role of High Sheriff, met one of Hampshire's largest businesses, sat with the director of the Prison Reform Trust to discuss reoffending rates, had tea at the Houses of Parliament with the MP for Winchester to discuss county issues, and been invited to RAF Odiham for a Battle of Britain Reception. For me this variety is one of the most special and rewarding things about being a High Sheriff. It is an incredible learning experience, and a huge privilege to be able to spend time with such a variety of interesting and expert people.

We are lucky in Hampshire to have regular visits from High Court Judges. The lodgings in Winchester are situated in the lovely setting of the Cathedral Close, and Winchester Crown Court is the location of many high-profile crime cases. I have found the High Court Judges to be excellent company, and extremely hospitable and welcoming when I have brought guests into court. We also have very busy courts in Southampton and Portsmouth and the Honorary Recorders of these three cities have been a source of great insight into the judicial system in the county, a system we take for granted, but perhaps should not.

I was asked to come and speak at a citizenship ceremony in Winchester in September. Sixteen people had successfully completed their course and were sworn in officially as British citizens. It was a very inspiring day all round – them so delighted to become British citizens, when, for some of them, the concept of free speech, tolerance, and protection under the law are alien concepts. I too felt that I renewed my own citizenship that day,



Rupert Younger, High Sheriff of Hampshire, with organisers and volunteers at Motiv8 in Gosport, a charity focused on reducing the risk of offending, anti-social behaviour and disengagement from learning or employment among young people.

and was deeply proud to do so.

I was very glad to have had time to research and think about my role in advance of my Declaration in April. The seminars at Burghley, and at Athelhampton House for the South West Region answered some of the big and not so big questions which concerned me. It was also a great chance to meet my fellow 'inmates' – High Sheriffs in nomination for neighbouring counties, with whom I have since had the opportunity to spend some time. As a group, in our court dress, we make quite a sight! I am not sure what the collective noun for a group of High Sheriffs is? A 'posse' fits the bill, or perhaps 'a velvet' or 'a ruff'. Ideas on a postcard?

I took on this role at a time when I am also in full-time employment and so had to be very focused in order to make achieving anything meaningful possible. I have set myself three priorities: helping to find ways to reduce reoffending rates; working to help the vulnerable and disadvantaged in the county; and identifying winners of the High Sheriff's Community Awards.

The first of these is really the main focus of my year in office. It has brought me into contact with a huge variety of national and local government agencies, and the police, prison, probation and mental health services, and the third sector. It is a daunting agenda but with a lot of potential for positive engagement. One substantive initiative that I am working on with the Police and Crime Commissioner is a conference in the new year bringing together national and international perspectives on preventative and restorative justice.

Improving the visibility and understanding of the role of High Sheriff has been a constant challenge. I have set up a richer website which now features pictures from various visits around the county, and have launched a Twitter account. This latter initiative has been particularly successful in helping to connect me to interesting people working in the area of reducing reoffending and I would strongly encourage other High Sheriffs who have yet to adopt Twitter to consider doing so. □

Rupert Younger

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