



Looking after our own

IT HAS been an immense privilege being High Sheriff of Hertfordshire in 2017-18. When I accepted the role it was with little understanding of what it involved and even less of where it might be possible to make a difference. Now that it is over, I am often asked: 'What next?' Good question... (It would have been good to have given this more thought!)

We all fulfil the High Sheriff's role a little bit differently and in that there are great opportunities for us to focus where we choose and to serve our communities in diverse ways.

The highlights are many: events and relationships with the Abbey in St Albans, Building Effectiveness programme at Hertfordshire Community Foundation, the relationship with the Hertfordshire Constabulary, charity bake-offs at the garden party, meeting so many great volunteers doing great things in the county, the sheriff knitted 'dolls' and the High Sheriff's Awards, the enthusiasm and passion which so many organisations apply to issues they really care about, the friends we have made across the county and in so many different communities, discovering so much more within Hertfordshire.

The most sobering activity was two days spent with Meals on Wheels in Stevenage and Rickmansworth (run by Hertfordshire Independent Living Services). On both days we saw over 20



High Sheriff dolls knitted by a group of ladies from St Michael and All Angels Knit and Natter group – all the more impressive as a number of the ladies are visually impaired



Tackling the Peace Plunge Abseil organised by Peace Hospice Care in Watford

Photo credit: Don Bennett

clients and each one had less than five minutes of interaction as we delivered and sometimes served the meal. For many of the clients this was the only human contact made that day. Of the 20 on each trip, about a third were single widows or widowers (mostly widows) who were living life as best they could in clean surroundings they could be proud of; a third 'managing', and then the rest with lives that seemed simply miserable: abandoned by families, lonely, often chain smoking, often cold, often eating and drinking badly.

The elderly in many parts of the county have local charities and groups which offer respite, company and the occasional meal or get together which helps enormously. For many others old age really does not appear to be life worth living. This issue is only going to become

more serious – there are lots of local districts in Hertfordshire where those over 50 will make up more than 50 per cent of residents in the near future.

If there has been one particular learning point, it is this: the state simply cannot take care of all the issues that arise in society. The welfare state was spelt out in the Beveridge Report of 1942 offering nothing less than a state that looked after us citizens 'from cradle to grave'. It is increasingly obvious that this cannot be fulfilled.

Instead, it is up to us as individuals, families and communities to 'look after our own' and spend whatever time and money we can looking after each other, volunteering and being prepared to get involved and be there to help each other.

♦♦ Will Hobhouse
High Sheriff of Hertfordshire 2017-18