



Above: Mary Berry at our garden party, where she acted as a judge for our charity baking competition (pictured here with my wife Kate)

Left: Arriving at the annual garden party

Building effectiveness

WHY DO we say ‘yes’ when asked? I certainly did, without really working out what it meant!

Now, halfway through my year, I am thrilled I did. My wife Kate and I have discovered much in our county, met fascinating and wonderful people, scratched the surface on issues that harm many of us (reoffending, homelessness, addiction, mental health) and enjoyed whistle-stop tours of great institutions and great places.

One scheme that worked well was asking each borough and district council to give me a tour of their district to see the good and the bad. It was very good spending the day with the leaders of the councils and getting their views as well as seeing what was happening on their patch.

The most important relationship has been with the Hertfordshire Community Foundation. I approached them while

preparing for my year to ask what issues we face in the county. They were preparing a report focussed on the areas of need in collaboration with the University of Hertfordshire. This was immensely useful and guided my theme and diary. I urge anyone taking on this role to partner with their local Community Foundation.

Rather stupidly (given how large the subject was) I decided to celebrate and foster volunteering. Little did I realise that this covered potentially 30 per cent of the folk in the county if the statistics are to be believed. It has taken me to many charities and voluntary organisations, big and small. I do love the small ones – the local groups doing amazing things with very few resources and almost no costs.

In partnership with the Hertfordshire Community Foundation and the Cranfield Trust we have set up a 12-month ‘Building Effectiveness’ programme with self-

diagnosis, mentors and workshops for 10 Hertfordshire charities which applied to join. It seems to be heading for some success in helping those involved to identify areas of weakness and address these.

Despite being told that I did not need to fundraise, my wife Kate and I put on two charity concerts in St Albans Cathedral. They were a great success but the funds raised largely came from sponsorship not from tickets or donations. Be warned – fundraising is much harder work than one anticipates.

The relationship with the judiciary and law is central to our role but difficult for me since I was largely ignorant of what it is all about. I hope that I have contributed in some areas – themed lunches at the courts, visits to our local prison and governor, visits to the magistrates’ courts and entertaining the judges. Probably the most eye-opening and useful has been helping the Hertfordshire Constabulary on awards and prize-giving as well as meeting the teams on cybercrime, modern slavery and sexual abuse.

◆ Will Hobhouse

High Sheriff of Hertfordshire 2017-18