



## A bird's-eye view

I AM without doubt a different person from the one who stepped into the role of High Sheriff a year ago. I hope I'm an improved version, more aware – that I am, to use a popular new term, 'woke'.

In many respects, as a High Sheriff, you can hardly avoid becoming more aware of your community and the issues it faces, and through my year the Island has reinforced its position – in my mind at least – as the UK in microcosm. All the issues that face communities around the country are here; in smaller numbers certainly but they're here. One of the benefits of the unique position afforded by the role of High Sheriff is that it enables a panoramic view.

I made it a priority to meet as many people working in emergency and support services as possible. Achieving this goal helped me understand what motivated those individuals and also what they considered the barriers and difficulties they faced. It also allowed me to hear their stories from different perspectives but they all had a common aim: to support the community, make it stronger, and simply help people live their lives.

As the one with the bird's-eye view, I saw my opportunity as High Sheriff to

facilitate the different services working together: the police, the probation service, and the courts, or community and volunteer groups supporting different age groups and sectors.

With its links to law and order the office of High Sheriff also enabled me to visit HM Prison Isle of Wight. I could see first-hand the incredible work that prison staff do under increasing budget pressures. It's all too easy to dismiss the role of prison staff as just gaolers or crowd control but the knowledge and care that go into the day-to-day work of the governor and all the prison staff deserve greater recognition. I was very pleased to have been joined on one visit by the High Sheriffs of Devon and Cornwall. They found it interesting to reflect on prison work from a wider perspective, having visited facilities in their own region.

I also aimed to take the office of High Sheriff of the Isle of Wight on a social media journey, using these channels as a way to make it more accessible. Since the role has young people at its heart, it made sense to communicate in a manner appropriate to them. I may not be a Kardashian just yet but progress has been made!



Photo credit: Heleen Lindsay-Fynn

High Sheriff of Cornwall Mrs Sarah Coryton, Ben Rouse, High Sheriff of Devon Mrs Heleen Lindsay-Fynn

This takes me neatly to the High Sheriff's Children and Young People's Awards, which were held at the end of March. I'm happy to report that we had the highest number of nominations in recent years. While it is sad to think that there are so many young people on the Island who have faced, or are facing, tough times in their lives, what is worth acknowledging and celebrating is that these young people are inspirational heroes to those who care for them and love them – and that extends to the wider Island community. Despite their own issues they all looked at the positive ways they could turn their adversity into help for others. It was a wonderful evening and I was honoured, and humbled, to meet them all and help celebrate their achievements.

It is very overwhelming when your year as High Sheriff starts but as it whips along it seems to be too short to do all the things you'd like to do. It has been a privilege to have served the Island over the last year and I wish every success to my successor, Gioia Minghella-Giddens.

♣ Ben Rouse  
*High Sheriff of the Isle of Wight 2017-18*



Ben Rouse at the High Sheriff Awards 26 March 2018

Photo credit: Robin Crossley, Isle of Wight County Press