



Shrievalty as an ‘enabler’

THE WARMTH of the welcome that I have received across the county since my year began has demonstrated to me both the enduring importance and relevance of the Office of High Sheriff. In addition to its important ceremonial role, I have been eager to reflect the contribution that the Office can make across the public, voluntary and charitable sectors in the county.

One of the four Presiding Judges of the South Eastern Circuit, Mr Justice Singh who visited Kent during April, told me that virtually every 18-year-old with a custodial sentence has a similar CV, an individual beset by poor behaviour and lack of aspiration and academic attainment. There is increasing cross-party support to tackle these social problems at their root causes, known collectively as Early Intervention.

My shrieval theme has concentrated on preventative initiatives for those vulnerable young people who are most at risk of falling into the

Criminal Justice System. I have presented a High Sheriff Award to Nu Steps, a small charity providing vocational training for 14- and 15-year-olds at risk of permanent exclusion from school. With their self-esteem restored, several students have successfully re-engaged in their academic studies. In a different context, the Boys' Dance Club at Herne Bay High School instils a passion for contemporary dance among young men from tough backgrounds who have become disengaged from education. Few of these students will become professional dancers but the discipline and discovery of their self-confidence infuses the rest of their studies. This programme is now expanding to other schools in the area, exemplifying another ‘inclusion initiative’ worthy of an award.

Kent and Medway Progression Federation is an agency that seeks wider participation in higher education, working with 40 schools from the deprived areas of the county. It provides a number



of outreach programmes to enhance aspiration to higher education among students and it has proved an excellent framework to bring new initiatives of Early Intervention into the county. We hope to set up a county-wide scheme with Speakers Trust to support young people in reaching their potential through the medium of public speaking training to develop their self-confidence. The Government has recently launched a Youth Engagement Fund. Through the Federation, we hope that the latest roll-out of the programme will be in Kent, providing mentoring support to improve the attainment and employability skills those students who are the most disengaged. These two examples reflect where the Shrievalty can act as an ‘enabler’ to bring worthwhile initiatives to the county.

The last Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, rightly highlighted the ceaseless dedication of volunteers providing ‘the glue that binds our communities together’. As High Sheriff, it is humbling to see the level of volunteering within the criminal justice system, including the magistracy, prison visitors and victim support staff. I held a tea party for Victim Support and the Court Witness Service, including the enhanced service given to Child Witnesses, which was welcomed by the hundred or so volunteers who came.

In recognition of the efforts of volunteers in local communities, I am building upon the Community Award Scheme, now in its second year in co-operation with the Kent Association of Local Councils which supports Parish and Town Councils. With the encouragement of civic leaders, it is hoped to present over 50 awards across the county early in the New Year to champion the unceasing community work of the voluntary sector.

Often depicted as the ‘Frontline County’ during the nation’s history, Kent has been at the forefront of the commemorations to mark one

hundred years since the start of the First World War. Kate and I attended a most poignant and reflective vigil service at Rochester Cathedral as the candles were gradually extinguished in advance of 11.00 pm on 4 August, evoking the Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey’s famous quotation that ‘The lamps are going out all over Europe and we shall not see them lit in our lifetime’. Earlier in the day, those who had served in The Great War were remembered as HRH Prince Harry laid a wreath on the war memorial and unveiled the ‘Step Short’ Memorial Arch in Folkestone. A Service of Commemoration was held at Chatham Historic Dockyard for the first major loss of life at sea – three Royal Navy cruisers sunk off the Dutch Coast with the loss of 1,500 lives. It was a service of reconciliation with the presence of the German Naval Attaché, the First Sea Lord and other senior Royal Navy representatives.

The government has encouraged an enduring cultural and educational legacy in the light of the centenary so that young people and future generations will remember the sacrifices made. To this end, I commissioned the award-winning author Martyn Barr to write *The Lost Generation: The Young Person’s Guide to World War One*. The book has been recognised as a valuable resource for schools and two free copies have been sent to all schools in Kent.

In common with my recent predecessors, I have maintained the profile of the Office both online and through the local press with a small but dedicated band of followers on my Twitter account, @KentHighSheriff and I aim to hold their attention with my activities over the next six months as well!

◆ Hugo M Fenwick
High Sheriff of Kent 2014-15

Above left: Hugo Fenwick with (left) Brigadier Chris Claydon, Deputy Constable of Dover Castle, and (right) Nick Sandford, Chairman of Kent branch, Country Land and Business Association, cycled from Dartford to Dungeness to draw attention to the county’s attractions and the health benefits of cycling

Above: Hugo Fenwick, after unveiling the statue of a soldier of The Buffs (East Kent Regiment) at Folkestone Racecourse, commissioned Rex Cadman, organiser of the War and Peace Show to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the start of the First World War with trumpeters from the Duke of York’s Royal Military School and a Pearly Queen.

Below: Hugo Fenwick on patrol with the Canterbury Street Pastors.

