



Supporting a safe and secure society

MY DECLARATION as High Sheriff took place at Newcastle's Discovery Museum's Shipping Gallery. This captures the continuing and pivotal part played by those two great rivers of our county, the Tyne and the Wear, in bringing prosperity to this part of the United Kingdom. These rivers have drawn people from all over the world to settle on their banks, building a reputation for a warm welcome, a strong sense of fun and family, and a sense of community as enduring as the rivers themselves.

As High Sheriff I wanted to raise awareness of the particular plight of children and young people affected by domestic violence and abuse. At the same time, I thought it important to recognise the valuable work of those who work in child safeguarding, which is difficult and complex, requiring resilience, sensitivity and finely balanced judgment. Domestic violence and abuse knows no class, no colour, no creed – it exists in each and every community. It represents seven per cent of the workload of Northumbria Police, with a child being referred as at possible risk in 40 per cent of those cases. Research shows that help from police is sought only on average after 35 previous incidents; worryingly, this means children and young people will have seen or heard much unpleasantness before obtaining help. These vulnerable young people, even if they do not directly witness

violent or abusive acts, are more likely to suffer problematic behaviour, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and educational problems, which can affect them in later life.

With the support of the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Chief Constable and Northumbria University, we hosted a conference called *Hearing the voice of the child; creating safe spaces for children and young people affected by domestic abuse*. This was attended by the judiciary, magistrates, police and probation services, health (including GPs) and social services, housing providers, local authority members, charities and community groups. The conference, focussing on children in the north-east region, shared expertise of how best to support these vulnerable children and young people. It attracted excellent academic and professional speakers, with keynote speeches by the Police and Crime Commissioner, Vera Baird QC, and the Children's Commissioner, Dr Maggie Atkinson.

We can all help by creating a safe space for children, physically and mentally. This is a cornerstone of the Tyne and Wear High Sheriff's Awards Fund, established in 1995 and serviced by successive High Sheriffs. The fund recognises and rewards local organisations which support children and young people in a safe and secure



Northumbria University conference (left to right) Dr Maggie Atkinson (Children's Commissioner for England), the High Sheriff, Lesley Storey (Domestic and Sexual Violence Co-ordinator, Newcastle City Council), Prof Peter Francis (Pro Vice Chancellor, Northumbria University), Vera Baird QC (Police and Crime Commissioner) and Dr Pamela Davies (Programme Director, Criminology, Northumbria University)

environment, developing confidence, building skills, finding fun and friendship, learning to be part of a community and in turn learning how to play a part in the community. For my husband and me, it has been heartwarming to see these organisations in action, run by dedicated, dependable and caring people, many of them volunteers, and to meet some fabulous and inspiring children and young people.

It has been enjoyable to make the opening speech before a 3,000-strong audience for Newcastle Pride; to participate in civic events across Tyne and Wear's five local authorities; to award the Queen's Medal to a 100-year-old fireman (now retired!); to watch the launch of the Great North Run and the quest for the millionth runner (a world first for this type of race); and last but not least, to participate in the pageantry of the legal processions and to dine with impressive High Court Judges in our home. In the centenary year of the outbreak of the Great War, it has been humbling to take part in ceremonies paying homage to those who lost their lives and to those who returned. It has been a privilege to become more acquainted with the armed forces and to participate in Freedom of the City ceremonies for the Royal Artillery and Royal Marines in Sunderland and Newcastle. I have also seen at first hand the work of the police, probation, fire and prison services, all of which make our society safe and secure.

It has been a special six months so far.

◆◆ Ruth Thompson OBE
High Sheriff of Tyne and Wear 2014-2015



Commandant General Royal Marines, Major General Martin Smith MBE, the Lord Mayor of the City of Newcastle councillor George Pattison, and the High Sheriff during the exercising the Freedom of the City by Her Majesty's Royal Marines. 43 Commando Fleet Protection Group Royal Marines provided the guard accompanied by the Band of Her Majesty's Royal Marines Scotland