



# Our aim: diverse and inclusive

I AM sure I am not alone in saying that the question I was most often asked during my year in office was: 'How do you get to be High Sheriff?' I was proud to be able to tell people that, while you don't apply to be High Sheriff, in Buckinghamshire there is a selection process undertaken by a panel of people who consider various nominations.

We have had this panel in operation now in Buckinghamshire for a number of years, so when the revised guidance on the appointment of future High Sheriffs was produced by the Association in August 2018, we undertook an assessment of our current position against the new guidance. We were pleased that the existing practice met, and sometimes exceeded, the requirements. Given this position, we wanted to consider how we might do even better and go one stage further.

The guidance from the Association is broadly silent on the means by which potential candidates are brought forward to the panel, how they are assessed and how the names get on to the confidential list. Currently in Buckinghamshire candidates are proposed by the panel members themselves. Historically, we are not short of candidates to nominate as potential High Sheriffs, but we have been and remain short of a diverse pool of people from which candidates might be drawn. We decided that we would like to explore how practice might evolve to broaden the pool for consideration by the panel. We would prefer if names could be brought to the attention of the panel by a broader group of people.

Having asked at our regional meeting whether any county had an open process of seeking nominations for future High Sheriffs and learning that there was not any, the panel in Buckinghamshire had a workshop session to decide how we would set up a process. We have gone for a halfway house as a first stage: drawing up a list of organisations to approach with a letter describing what the High Sheriff does and inviting nominations together



**Top left:** With staff and students from the catering team at Milton Keynes College which provided the dinner at Bletchley Park. **Top right:** James Timpson, guest speaker. **Above left:** Dr Julie Mills, Principal and Chief Executive of Milton Keynes College. **Above right:** With Chief Executive Officer of Bletchley Park Iain Standen, who provided the venue

with Q&A sheet with more information, all of which uses inclusive language. There is also a form for them to use to return nominations.

All of this involves setting out what the expectations are of a person who becomes High Sheriff as well as the time and financial commitments. We are well aware that a constraint in trying to broaden the pool of candidates is the cost. The affordability paper recently produced by the Association is topical in this context. We have stressed in the information we have produced how important working in partnership is in keeping costs down. My own experience reflects this. Rather than host a summer reception or garden party, I have held events with partners which they find valuable and which also help to promote a particular aspect of the High Sheriff's

role – a win-win situation. Two examples are events on the transformative impact of education and of employers in prisons: one with the Open University involving various presentations followed by discussion and a reception, and the other a dinner at Bletchley Park co-hosted with Milton Keynes College and with James Timpson as guest speaker.

We don't yet know whether our new approach will be successful in providing a broader pool of candidates to be High Sheriff but we do think that it is worth a try. If there are other counties which are interested in what we're doing or would like to share their practice with us then do get in touch.

◆ Professor Ruth Farwell  
CBE DL  
*High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire 2018-19*