



Giving half a chance

IN THE run up to my year in office I was often asked what charities I would be supporting or whether I had a 'theme' for the year. Rather than supporting my usual causes, I spent time seeking the opinions of others on the issues in Hampshire. While, as one would expect, everyone had their own views, but one theme was mentioned by almost all – the absurdity of the situation where so many prisoners are being released without anywhere to go. Consequently, the reoffending rate for these individuals approaches 100 per cent and the county's resources are further stretched in re-arresting them, and in so many cases dealing with the consequences of regressing back into alcohol, drug-dependency or crime. This seemed to fit squarely into what I understood was suitable territory for a High Sheriff to focus upon.

In Hampshire we have one main prison, HMP Winchester, and I have aimed to help reduce the number of offenders leaving the prison without accommodation as one step towards reducing reoffending rates. Specifically, I have initiated a scheme to purchase and then run a new 'halfway house' situated in central Winchester to provide accommodation for those leaving HMP



Above: Havant Police Cadet Unit with (back row) Unit Leader Steve Baldwin, (front row) Inspector Marcus Cator, the Lord Mayor of Portsmouth Cllr Lee Mason, the High Sheriff of Hampshire and Chief Superintendent Craig Dibdin

Winchester. I am pleased to report Alleyne House, which contains nine self-contained units, is due to open summer 2019.

The delivery of the 'halfway house' has provided a great focus on my relationship with a wide range of individuals and organisations. HMP Winchester, the PCC, the Chief Constable and her officers, the probation services, Winchester City Council, Hampshire County Council and the local offender resettlement teams have all assisted. A real positive has been the number of local charities specialising in homelessness and addiction-support coming together to make this a reality and demonstrate our community's desire to support the reintegration of ex-offenders.

Over the year, I was privileged to

see the work of a large selection of charities leading up to the High Sheriff's Award ceremony at the Great Hall in Winchester. Some visits have certainly been more demanding than others. One of my first engagements was a sleepout at Fratton Park, the home of Portsmouth Football Club, to raise awareness of the homeless in Portsmouth. A cold night was made more challenging by a soaking at 3 am when the automatic pitch sprinkler system came on!

On the morning before Remembrance Sunday I joined the High Sheriff of Wiltshire for a skydive near Salisbury on behalf of Alabaré, a charity providing accommodation across several counties for ex-servicemen and women. We were enormously lucky to have a few hours in between autumn storms to complete the jump.

I have been hugely impressed by the police cadets. Hampshire now has 14 groups with over 350 cadets. The groups not only help foster great personal development and leadership skills for the individual cadets but make a surprising difference in the communities in which they operate. Many of the cadets have really raised their aspirations for their own lives and when I asked one what she hoped to do as a career she told me she hoped to join the police – in Delhi!

◆ Mark Thistlethwayte
High Sheriff of Hampshire 2018-19



Alabaré skydive to raise money for veterans