



## Young people first

THIRTEEN MONTHS ago I announced my priorities: to highlight the problem of domestic violence and to work to ensure that young people are fed during the holidays. I have been able to begin to address both.

Refuge is a national charity which supports women and their children fleeing abusive relationships by running four refuges in Warwickshire. I visited their Rugby refuge, where women live with their children with the support of trained staff. At my awards ceremony I presented them with a cheque and also £1,000 from the Warwickshire Freemasons to help refurbish their children's play area. I built a relationship with Costa Coffee, which provided vouchers for the women living in refuges so they could go into town to meet their mum or a friend. If you live in a refuge you have your children with you 24/7, without visitors, as your home must obviously remain secret.

Cohort4 is another local charity supporting vulnerable women by providing advice and encouragement through self-help to those who have been abused or even been to prison. Again, I presented the group with a cheque as well as acknowledging one woman who had been in and out of prison due to her

addiction. She was given the chance to go straight, and came under the wing of Cohort4 which gave her essential support. She is now in employment, finding work for other ex-offenders.

My other priority was to feed young people over the summer – even if you are in receipt of free school meals you don't get these during the holidays. I wrote to various supermarkets which provided me with food for young people through the incredible Young People First (YPF) charity. They concentrate on aspects of youth work; one such is Sharp Minds which supports young people's mental health through one-to-one support and group activities. They work with youngsters who have left care, who often end up in hostels, poor-quality accommodation or even sleeping rough. I ran a cooking session – how to roast a chicken, make cauliflower cheese and apple crumble! YPF mentor young people on the edge of criminality. They support youngsters through old-fashioned youth work; a safe place to hang out, with supportive adults to talk to.

Together we organised a conference to improve joined-up thinking about young people and the challenges they face. Over 60 people attended, hosted by King's



Above: YPF lunch

High School, Warwick. A constructive conversation took place, breaking down some barriers that have got in the way of a more coordinated approach. Our second conference is scheduled for October.

At Onley Prison, I visited the Sycamore Tree project, which assists prisoners with rehabilitation and attended its extremely moving carol service. I attended many church services, the highlight being Remembrance Day at St Mary's, Warwick, with over 64,000 poppies decorating the church.

Shakespeare's Celebrations were splendid, with my reception at Hall's Croft on the hottest day of the year, wearing full uniform, tights and high heels – something I would not recommend!

I have visited hospices, started a duck race, judged cake competitions, observed annual council meetings, visited HMP Long Lartin, presided over citizenship ceremonies, met royalty, supported The Queen's Awards and had lunch with the SAS. I sat with our resident judge and met many inspiring people associated with charitable work. I've laughed and cried at their work.

I am honoured to have been High Sheriff of Warwickshire. Time has flown by during a really memorable year.

♣️ **Clare Sawdon JP**  
*High Sheriff of Warwickshire 2018-19*



Above: At the fifth birthday lunch for Cohort4