



The Norwich Solution

I HAD 49 fantastic weeks, and three rather quiet ones.

And that's all I'm going to say about COVID-19, other than good luck to all the High Sheriffs in post now (may they find interesting and different ways of supporting their counties) and thank you to all the heroes in the community; the obvious ones (NHS for instance) but to all the less obvious ones: prison warders, court staff, police, volunteers and those in the Norwich courts (of whom I'm especially proud) who designed and rolled out what is now referred to as The Norwich Solution – the much copied way of continuing to process cases through the court system by electronic means. In the absence of football we can't cheer on Norwich City FC but we can cheer on The Norwich Solutioners.

I'd like to share some of things I learnt and found useful in my encounters with the judiciary and all the agents of law and order in the hope that they may interest future High Sheriffs.

- Homework before you start. Read Sarah Langton's *In Your Defence* and the rather depressing *Secret Barrister*; for those with more time *The Sheriff*, *The Man and His Office* by Irene Gladwin.
- Depending on your county don't assume you'll have any visiting judges. Lots of my predecessors (the older, the more likely) tell me worrying or felicitous stories of such evenings. My grandfather for instance (High Sheriff in 1948) told of taking his judges down the marshes to look for nesting bitterns. I'd started planning a quiet boat trip to look for warblers or perhaps a nesting crane (I might have had a visit in May) but the case settled and that was that.
- A previous High Sheriff asked me and my husband to supper in February to meet our resident judge, a great way to hit the ground running when I started and his support has been invaluable.
- Invaluable also has been the charming, efficient Chairman of the Norfolk

Magistrates' Association. He organised visits for me to our three magistrates' courts early on, which then led into other areas of the judiciary, eg:

Witness Service	Youth Offending
Probation Services	Teams
Integrated Offender Management	Volunteers
180 (IOM and police)	Court staff
Visitors' Centre (HMP Norwich)	Serco/other suppliers
Coroner	Prison chaplain
	Ecumenical Criminal Justice Forum

- Prisons – our three were all pleased to see me, but are far too busy to ask you, so get stuck in early and be firm with the diaring. And decide or ask what you can do to help. One of my special moments was the evening I showed the fantastic *A Second Chance* (a documentary about Timpsons' employing prisoners) to a wider audience in County Hall, encouraging good discussions and a greater awareness to the non-converted of how important it is to look after prisoners' futures.



Above left: With Jonathan Meyrick, Bishop of Lynn, after a dodgem ride at the 817th annual Kings Lynn Mart

Above right: With Georgie Roberts (in nomination 2020-21) at Norwich City's ground hearing about police preparation for a big match, following a day with PC Paul Bassham and Broads Beat which polices Norfolk's inland waters

- Police – meet your chief constable early on. Mine was very supportive, and I hope vice versa, and gave me the opportunity to visit and support all sorts of interesting areas and projects.
- Police and crime commissioner – critically, they have a good budget to spend on many of the projects that you'll visit.
- Other emergency services – you'll all do different things in your own counties, but they need and appreciate your support.
- Police and other cadets.

To finish, here are the three most useful bits of advice I was given by my predecessors (and sometimes followed) before I started:

- Learn to say no.
- Plan to get to the venue at least 30 minutes before you have to. That will allow for tractors on the road, make-up, emergencies, speech practices, etc.
- Never underestimate the trickiness of finding a handy parking space – request one ahead, keep lots of spare change in the car, have an official looking notice saying 'HS on duty' ready for the windscreen. Or if in doubt (and your budget allows) have a driver.

◆ Clare Agnew

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