



Would I do anything differently?

IN WRITING an article for this magazine, there is a danger that the outgoing High Sheriff will produce words similar to an end-of-term school report. In an attempt to avoid this, I thought I would reflect on whether, if I had my time again, I would do anything differently.

Given that prospective sheriffs have a long run-in, there is plenty of time for thinking, making plans and, for some, getting anxious about the prospect. Of course, the Association is supportive and the day at Burghley informative and helpful. The reality of my year proved different to what I expected. For instance, I became more involved with the military, university and business sectors than I had envisaged. In many ways, I felt an important part of my role was to promote Shropshire which I was happy to do but wasn't expecting. Like us all, I was keen to promote local charities and openly acknowledge all the volunteers. I did feel guilty by the fact that many charities I

would have liked to support remained unvisited. Twelve months is a short time, but could I have done better? Perhaps if I had planned more, I could have done, but there is a danger in being too prescriptive that other opportunities might have passed me by. Clearly, sheriffs will prepare and act differently and find a way of working which suits them as individuals.

Outside exalted circles, there remains an ignorance of the role of the High Sheriff. I tried my best by blogging and writing articles in the local media. I'm not convinced that continuing to wear 18th-century court dress outside formal legal, civic or religious settings helps our cause (not for the men at least!) but suspect my view will be in the minority in the Association. I don't think my relationship with the Lieutenancy was quite right. In Shropshire, any event attended by our own Lord-Lieutenant was truly graced but there were some events where the presence of us both caused confusion: I should have delineated our roles better at the onset of my year. I also attended some award ceremonies simply as a guest and did not

participate. In retrospect, these were wasted opportunities as a High Sheriff's Award at the time would have both acknowledged an individual(s) and raised the profile of the Shrievalty.

In my year, I remained at work (as a hospital specialist) and being employed kept me grounded although my time was full on. As a professional, I was surprised how little I knew about other professions (particularly the judicial and military). The response of the emergency services to the flooding in February and the NHS to COVID-19 was and is impressive. I have a much better understanding of the intricacies of civil society. The contribution of volunteers and the charitable sector can no longer be considered as an add-on or luxury but as an essential component to what has been termed the 'big society'. Like all High Sheriffs, I hope I have contributed something to these endeavours but thankfully this is for others, not me, to judge.

◆ Dr Josh Dixey
High Sheriff of Shropshire 2019-20

Below: Josh and Diana Dixey in high-vis jackets with the Shrewsbury Street Pastors at 3.00 am on New Year's Day morning, 2020

