



# The bedrock of all our lives

**HIGH SHERIFFS** – along with everyone else – have responded to repeated changes of regulations, and navigated the multiple and complex consequences that organisations have experienced through the pandemic. Now two years on from the first lockdown, the ways in which we all live and work have been reshaped in previously unimaginable ways. The pandemic’s effects will reverberate and overshadow many of us for years to come.

Central government asks more and more from those who work in law and order and the emergency services, and there are now increased interventions in education, literacy and numeracy, skills, training, physical and mental health care, and addiction therapy – all woven into strategic planning and budgeting. Many of these services are provided by quietly dedicated and exceptional people, a large number of whom give their time and expertise voluntarily.

The warp-speed development of digital enabled the Crown, family, district, coroners’, magistrates’, and tribunal courts to continue their work. Essential commercial law and civil law continued to be a vital support underpinning business and society. Nevertheless, physical presence will always be desirable for both professionals and those engaged with the judiciary.

The emergency services worked even more closely together. The fire service has driven ambulances to free up paramedics. Devon Air Ambulance, search and rescue teams, the police force, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency,



A well-deserved High Sheriff’s Award went to the Covid testing team at HMP Channings Wood, received by prison officer Debbie Winney

and the RNLI all respond to those in trouble on our coasts and cliffs, moors, roads and in our rural areas. Much has happened under cover of the pandemic; for example, rising levels of abuse within families, cyber-crime, child exploitation and fraud. At the same time, serious and organised crime continues, including the threat of modern slavery to desperate and vulnerable migrants and refugees.

Lockdowns, furlough and working from home led to isolation, and relationship and family friction. We lost the pleasure of a spontaneous smile and a warm hug of welcome. We were brought closer by shared experience while at the same time being pushed further apart in our individual experiences of lockdown. The anguish of separation from loved ones, particularly at times of heightened



Planting a tree with and for the future, marking Her Majesty The Queen’s Platinum Jubilee and Her Green Canopy initiative

life experiences – birth, illness, death, annual civic, county and social events, anniversaries and birthdays – resulted in intense stress and anxiety for many.

Much is changed, but not all is changed utterly. We have always been a nation of volunteers, and we have seen more come forward to support their communities in this time of need. There are many organisations and charities that support those who have made poor choices, whose lives have gone awry, and those who do not have the matrix of a stable family. Law and order, the administration of justice, response in times of emergency, and care for those in need are the bedrock of all our lives. There are many hundreds of Devonians working and volunteering in these often unglamorous and deeply challenging areas of life. They have worked under exceptionally difficult and compounding circumstances over the last two years.

Devon is blessed to have such committed professional and voluntary people working across the essential bedrock services of justice, law and order, and emergency response. It has been a heartfelt privilege to meet so many of them.

### ◆ Lucy Studholme

*Lady Studholme, High Sheriff of Devon 2021-22*



At a Magistrates in the Community visit to Kingsacre School, Branton