



Much to be celebrated!

HOW TO sum up such a year? Being High Sheriff of Greater London is a challenge. The sheer number of courts, police, prisons, lawyers, agencies and voluntary sector organisations, plus 32 mayors and the Mayor of London make it so – even without the impact of Covid.

Covid and the embattled criminal justice system shaped all I did or did not do! An under-resourced system, low in morale and exhausted, with restrictions ongoing for much of the year, made normal engagement difficult – sometimes as much owing to staff shortages as Covid anxiety. There is a lack of coroner’s officers, magistrates, prison and probation staff, and many charities underpinning the system are still working remotely and short of funds.

The resilience shown to keep justice alive has been superhuman. The London Crown Courts are not unique in facing a serious backlog of cases, an exit of barristers, buildings without drinking water, leaks, lack of heating, etc. but the scale can be huge. Snaresbrook, the largest criminal court in Europe, had a backlog of 4,000 cases. Many judges and court staff are on their knees.

Celebrating unsung work during Covid was what my year was about, although not at all straightforward as it turned out – at times it was like wading through treacle. But, despite many delays and (exhausting)



With members of the Metropolitan Police pandemic response team at the reception after the High Sheriff's Thanksgiving Service at Southwark Cathedral

rearrangements, celebrations happened (I held six ceremonies in my last week) and were heart-warming.

At my Prison Awards ceremonies the accounts of going above and beyond to keep prisoners safe, occupied and linked to families – during 23 hours spent in cells for the most part during successive waves of Covid, and likened by one governor to a war – were hugely moving. Many prisoners were lifelines for others through the Samaritans’ Listener programme.

The accounts of witnesses and victims at my Justice Awards ceremonies were both humbling and a vital reminder of the role the public play in delivering justice. Always diverse, the number of young people receiving awards for acts of bravery in terrifying circumstances was marked. These ceremonies also became occasions to celebrate the work throughout the pandemic of court and witness support staff, whether establishing Nightingale courts or managing the extra anxiety of victims and witnesses.

The Metropolitan Police’s Excellence Awards highlighted the exhausting work done by the pandemic response team and the coroners’ courts and officers during the pandemic. It was a joy to celebrate this and other heroic work undertaken throughout at my Thanksgiving Service at Southwark Cathedral in November.

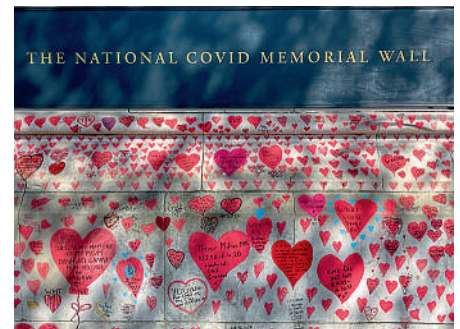
There were representatives from the justice system, emergency services,



Attending the High Sheriff's Justice Awards ceremony at the Supreme Court with the Rt Hon Lord Reed (back left), President of the Supreme Court



Dame Cressida Dick, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, with Lambeth and Southwark Police Cadets at the High Sheriff's Thanksgiving Service at Southwark Cathedral



voluntary and civic sectors, churches, faith groups and the community; also included were the Lord-Lieutenant, the General Officer Commanding, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, 11 High Sheriffs, 13 mayors, the CEO of St Thomas’ Hospital, medics, nurses, police cadets and Hodge, the cathedral cat – quite the gathering. We had emerged from masks into the light. The reception buzzed.

The week before was a different story. The choirmaster, organist, most stewards and my PA were all struck down by Covid and the bishop was in hospital. But the rallying spirit was ever present. Police cadets became stewards, my husband my PA and trusty High Sheriff friends offered to preach or lead the singing.

This friendship and support in my roller coaster year have been invaluable. Much to be celebrated!

Lynn Cooper
High Sheriff of Greater London 2021-22