



Memorable highlights

IN MARCH 2021 I was honoured to be appointed as High Sheriff of the County of the West Midlands. And what an extra ordinary 12 months it has been. This honour coincided with Coventry's year as the UK's City of Culture. And we were still in lockdown...

I had set out to do three things:

- Celebrate unsung business and community leaders in the West Midlands
- Bring opportunities for vulnerable young adults into the spotlight
- Modernise the Office of the High Sheriff, promoting the importance of the role and drawing on its values and traditions for the benefit of today's society.

And during my year as High Sheriff of the West Midlands I would like to think I have met each of these objectives.

My shrieval year has been an incredible experience during which I have met some amazing and inspirational people. Although too many to mention, there have been some particularly memorable highlights I would like to share.

Unsung leaders

On a visit to HMYOI Brinsford near Wolverhampton I was impressed by the behind-the-scenes work of Governor Amanda Hughes and her team in helping improve prospects for the young men upon their release.

Although Brinsford had not been without challenges, under Amanda's leadership, and with buy-in from the prisoners, it was turning a corner with many young men successfully transforming their lives.

Also, Hitesh Mehta, to whom I had the pleasure of presenting an award at the High Sheriff's Summer Reception and Presentations Evening for his dedication to his role as a Special Constable with West Midlands Police for more than half his life, from the age of 18.

Opportunities for vulnerable young adults

I also met with some wonderful organisations who work tirelessly to help give our young people a solid start in life. These include Fridays, a Coventry youth club steering young people away from a life of violence, crime and antisocial behaviour. A particularly proud moment was Fridays winning the National Crimebeat Award following my personal nomination.

Learning more about Positive Youth Foundation, a charity committed to providing opportunities and brighter futures for local young people, and Warrens Hall Riding School, for vulnerable children and young adults, was also an uplifting experience.

The Office of High Sheriff

My team and I have also worked hard to promote the role of High Sheriff in the wider community. The Annual



High Sheriff presented certificates and medals at the Summer Reception (L-R) Ch Insp Helen Kirkman, West Midlands Police, Louise Bennett, Special Sgt Hitesh Mehta, Freya Pinnick, High Sheriff's Cadet



High Sheriff with police cadet leaders and cadets at West Midlands Police

Justice Service, the first held outside Birmingham, had a record attendance, with 375 guests and a further 100 people taking part in the procession. All of this was supported by an ongoing campaign of press and public relations, social media and a dedicated website.

It has been a fantastic journey, but one I could not have achieved on my own. The Very Revd John Witcombe, my chaplain, was always on hand to support and bring reverence and reflection to the role. My Cadet Freya Pinnick also provided incredible support and proved herself a great ambassador for young people. Finally, Chris Nagle, my wingman who has supported me in this role on top of his day job. To each I wish to say a huge thank you.

Finally, thank you, too, to the Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce, which generously allowed me to devote time to the role of High Sheriff while holding down my busy substantive role as Chief Executive of the Chamber.



The Rt Hon Lord Justice Haddon-Cave and the Rt Hon Lady Justice Thirlwall DBE, pictured with High Court Judges from the Midland Circuit, as they attend the West Midlands Annual Justice Service at Coventry Cathedral

◆ Louise Bennett OBE DL
High Sheriff of West Midlands 2021-22