



Six months to treasure

I KEEP reminding myself what an honour and privilege it is to be High Sheriff of Oxfordshire and how I have one shot of making an impact within our county. From the outset, I committed to throw myself into every event I attend. This I have done and subsequently thoroughly enjoyed each and every one. I am also aware that providing short-term publicity has limited benefits compared with creating lasting, long-term impact and wherever possible I have tried to create pathways which lead to this.

The key theme of my shrieval year has been 'supporting young people from challenged backgrounds'. My year started off with Six Rackets Sports Day at Radley College where 14 teams from local businesses played real tennis, rackets, fives, squash, badminton and table tennis. Radley College were immense in their support of the event which raised c.£25,000 for Active Oxfordshire.

Next up is a corporate singing day and dinner at Blenheim Palace on 3 November where I will be raising funds for Children Heard and Seen (a charity supporting children, young people and their families who are impacted by parental imprisonment), followed by a wine tasting evening at St John's College Oxford later that month where I will be raising funds for Youth Challenge Oxfordshire.

In addition to helping my own youth charities, I have done what I can to support the broad spectrum of others in Oxfordshire and on 12 September I hosted a youth charities workshop at the Wood Centre for Innovation in Oxford. We were fortunate to have 25 of the largest youth charities in the county attend. John May, Secretary General of the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award, left the audience spellbound when describing how small acts of kindness had transformed young people's lives throughout the world. Jodie Lloyd-Lewis, Chief Executive of Oxfordshire Youth, and Katy Barrow-Grint, Chief Superintendent of Thames

Valley Police, delivered similarly compelling speeches. However, the event was as much about the youth charities sharing their experiences and having the opportunity to meet numerous business people and others offering pro bono support. Similar events are planned for Banbury in the north of the county and Didcot in the south.

Handing out awards to police, prison and fire officers, and search and rescue volunteers has been a joy and re-enforced to me the tremendous work they do each and every day on our behalf.

Over and above the more typical High Sheriff's activities, the Oxfordshire High Sheriff inspects the ladies and men's teams before the National Anthem at the rugby union Varsity Match at Twickenham and participates in the University of Oxford Encaenia, a historic ceremony where citations are read in Latin and honorary doctorates are handed out.

Coming from a world where trade unions are few and far between, I thought I would reach out to the Oxfordshire branch of UNISON. A little shocked at first to hear the High Sheriff was taking an interest in their activities, branch secretary Janie Wease and three of her colleagues made me very welcome. The meeting was extremely constructive, with a good focus on building aspirations; I left knowing a little more about the very real cost-of-living pressure the low paid in our county are facing and the way trade unions go about supporting their members.

All in all, a wonderful first six months, and my focus now turns to setting the agenda, rather than reacting to invitations and events.

◆ Mark Beard

High Sheriff of Oxfordshire 2022-23

Below: With John May, Secretary General of the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award, Grant Hayward, Champion for Business and Social Value, Katy Barrow-Grint, Chief Superintendent Thames Valley Police, and Jodie Lloyd-Lewis, Chief Executive of Oxfordshire Youth, at the Oxfordshire Youth charities' workshop

