

Partnerships and collaboration

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High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire 2022-23

It is a great honour to have served Buckinghamshire as High Sheriff and impossible to overstate the power of partnerships and collaboration.

The High Sheriff's Justice Dinner provided an opportunity to pick up a tried and tested partnership initiated by my predecessors. Milton Keynes College hosted my dinner, providing the catering and front of house, and Principal Sally Alexander was Master of Ceremonies. The Mansion at Bletchley Park, home of Second World War Allied codebreaking, was a historic and magical setting. I partnered with Thames Valley Police (TVP) on the evening's discussion which focused on TVP's Race Action Plan. Assistant Chief Constable Dennis Murray QPM set out how TVP is an 'icebreaker force' for the national plan to improve outcomes for Black people who work within or interact with policing by tackling systemic barriers, prejudice and discrimination.

Maureen M Dickson, author of the book *Pilots and Soldiers of the Caribbean*, talked about the lives of valiant men and women of the Caribbean who fought for Britain during both world wars, introducing many Black role models, forgotten by time. With Black people – particularly Black Caribbean people – having significantly lower than average rates of confidence

in their police forces, it's important to enable this conversation. Policing also lags behind almost every other public service as an employer of choice for Black people; just 1.3% of police officers are Black compared to 3.5% of the total population and only two Black officers have reached the rank of Chief Constable or Assistant Commissioner in policing history.

In line with the national plan, TVP has established an Independent Oversight and Scrutiny Board, chaired by Black Barrister Mr Calvin Wilson. The Justice Dinner provided great networking opportunities and possibilities for future collaborations and encouraged local people to provide scrutiny of TVP's progress by joining the board or working with it.

The event closed with poet and playwright Yaw Asiyama who wrote, performed and led the poem 'Togetherness', with which we all joined in. Art is of course a great way to connect and public art has been in existence since antiquity. Some of the earliest stone works or statues look down on the public from on high. In the same way, the National Monument against Violence and Aggression – or *Knife Angel* – arrived at Stadium MK in December to communicate powerful messages about the dangers of violent behaviour and knife crime specifically. The sculpture, made from over 100,000 knives collected during police amnesties, is a towering 27 feet tall and was created by the British Ironwork Centre in Shropshire.

The *Angel* gave rise to wide-ranging collaborations in a month of action across Buckinghamshire from its location at Stadium MK. The Safety Centre, a leading safety education charity based in Milton Keynes, was a key partner in the project and delivered 50 early intervention knife crime sessions for Year 5 and 6 primary school pupils, talking about the choices around – and consequences of – carrying a weapon. I had joined a session with Year 6 students in the summer and was impressed with the sensitive way the subject was covered.

On site a rota operated to support visitors to the *Knife Angel* and more than 25,000 conversations took place between members of the public and volunteers or PCSOs. This was made possible only by the generosity of volunteers including magistrates, councillors, Rotary Club members and police cadets, who gave



Attendees of the Justice Dinner



With Sally Alexander MK College Principal, Maureen M Dickson and Assistant Chief Constable Dennis Murray QPM



With catering and front of house students and teaching staff of Milton Keynes College



The *Knife Angel* during sub zero temperatures at Stadium MK with volunteers, PCSOs and Jason Fathers

up more than 700 hours of their time. One volunteer, Jason Fathers, lost his son Jay to knife crime in 2021 and he was at the *Angel* every day to talk about the devastating impact of violence. It was my honour and privilege at the closing ceremony to present Jason with a High Sheriff's Award acknowledging his bravery in speaking about Jay's death. I presented awards throughout my year, and was deeply impressed by the goodness, wisdom and compassion of the many people I encountered.

Joining up with High Sheriffs from other counties allowed for great opportunities to establish friendships and to support one another and through those links to grow in appreciation of the many impressive people and amazing organisations doing so much in support of our communities both in Buckinghamshire and beyond.