

In long and lasting memory

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High Sheriff of Northumberland 2022-23

I handed the baton to my successor Diana Barkes on Easter Saturday, 8 April 2023, exactly twelve months after it was passed to me. If I had begun by predicting that the shrieval year in Northumberland would start with the death of my father-in-law, conclude with the death of my father and in between we would also mourn the death of our beloved Queen Elizabeth II (of blessed and glorious memory), I would have been accused of melodrama. But that is precisely what has happened. Notwithstanding, it's been a huge, huge honour to 'bat' for the county in what, by any reasonable measure, has been an extraordinary year and one in which I have had to accommodate the unexpected in ways which I did not fully anticipate nor plan for! Timing in life is everything and I dedicate 'my year' to the long and lasting memory of all three who played a significant part in shaping my shrieval destiny.

As I reflect on my year in office I am struck by two things. First, that without the work of the voluntary sector in Northumberland – especially those responsible for looking after our young people – the social and community fabric of both our rural and urban populations would crumble.

Services for the young which were once funded by the state have been steadily eroded over many years. That the fabric holds is only because caring, committed volunteer (and largely unsung) heroes – often juggling two day jobs and a family – find precious time on a cold winter's night to keep our young engaged, entertained and free from harm's way.

Sadly it doesn't always work and on occasion there are those who slip through



1st Wooler Scout Group on learning they were to be the recipients of £1,000

the net. I sat in court during a trial and listened to shocking evidence in the case of two 'young lads' convicted for murder over a £20 note. The guilty and the victim were 'so stoned' that to my untutored mind they were incapable of rational thought or behaviour at the time of their crime. I was and remain deeply troubled by what I saw and heard in court and this, not unreasonably I believe, leads to my second strike. While I cannot condone the consequences of the defendants' actions I am left thinking there has to be an alternative or different way of solving this problem. Drugs and their shattering consequences are a blight on all our lives and underline a tsunami of crime today. I spent many hours with agencies, charities and organisations responsible for picking up the pieces. They are doing their best but their best is nowhere near what is required. We need a radical rethink in response to the dystopia of drugs.

In happier moments, of which there were many, I was treated to an extraordinary

barrage of goodwill from across the charitable sector. In the course of covering about 35,000 miles (which will prompt an awkward conversation with my car leasing company) I visited all 37 charities on the Northumberland shrieval radar and made financial grants of at least £1,000 to each of them. I ran the first ever HSON Instagram campaign offering to pay £1,000 to a charity drawn out of a hat at my awards evening, if I reached 1,000 followers. I'm pleased to report I reached 1041 and the winners were the 1st Wooler Scout Group – their picture says it all.

And as I close I reflect on another unexpected development – becoming a radio show host – and I would like to thank Jeff Pattison (Koast Radio 106.6FM) for allowing me to hijack his show on at least three occasions to broadcast the work of our charitable sector in Northumberland.

With grateful thanks to Alan Hughes and Harry Chrisp for helping to keep the shrieval show on the road.



In the studio at Koast Radio 106.6FM with Jeff Pattison



With the Cramlington Voluntary Youth Project