

Cross-border collaboration

Geoff Thompson

High Sheriff of Rutland 2022-23

What a year to be High Sheriff. The Platinum Jubilee, the sad loss of Her Majesty The Queen, the Proclamation of a new monarch and the catch-up post Covid have all combined to make 2022-23 an eventful and packed year.

A key aspect of my year was to focus on law and order, but for Rutland our courts and emergency services (as well as hospitals, universities, probation and cathedral) are all based in neighbouring

counties. I knew this meant collaborating with other High Sheriffs and thanks to their support I spent 25 days visiting 14 different courts – including Crown, Magistrates' (Crime, Family and Youth), County Family, and Coroners Courts as well as special educational needs and disability (SEND), employment and asylum tribunals and a day in London at the Upper Tribunal Immigration and Asylum Chamber (appeals).

I was welcomed into every court and was impressed by the dedication and professionalism of our judges, magistrates and court staff, all working with limited

resources. Judges and magistrates work hard to ensure that those before them understand the court process and are treated fairly. I saw many examples of the caring nature of our judiciary, looking behind the circumstances to tailor outcomes to the individual. Visiting our courts provided a great opportunity to thank those who deliver our world-class system of justice. Judges and magistrates have been very generous with their time to explain court procedures and answer questions and have provided follow-up information. I recommend to all High Sheriffs that they get to see as many courts and tribunals as they can and thank all those involved.

To help collaboration, it was useful to set up a WhatsApp group for the six High Sheriffs in the East Midlands and to ask if I could join the eastern group of six. Others have done the same and I can recommend it. These groups have helped us all consult with each other and share issues and solutions in an informal way, supplementing the support given by the High Sheriffs' Association.

With a number of services delivered across the East Midlands, we met as a regional group with the ambulance service, visited police forensic services and the Serious Crime Unit (kidnapping, counter-terrorism, extremism, organised crime); and outside the East Midlands, the Military Correction Centre in Colchester and a workshop on FDACs in Milton Keynes (see page 20).

My visits to police, fire and rescue, prisons, probation, courts and tribunals have one thing in common (apart from law and order) – first-hand evidence of the tremendous contribution made by officers and staff to the smooth running of our systems of law and order. We owe them our support and any opportunity to thank them for their work is hugely appreciated.

In the spirit of collaboration, I held an afternoon tea for all the ex-High Sheriffs of Rutland. They had never before come together as a group and I hope this will become a regular event.

Nearing the end of my year, I held a Community Service in Peterborough Cathedral to thank volunteers in our community for their contribution to our society. This was followed by a dinner for High Sheriffs and their consorts by way of saying thank you to them for their support.



Ten of the eleven High Sheriffs attending the Rutland Community Service in Peterborough Cathedral L-R: Nick Alston (Essex), Michael Copestake (Derby), Debbie Brock (Bucks), Geoff Thompson (Rutland), Mehmooda Duke (Leics), Lady Clifford (Beds), Jennifer Crompton (Cambs), Sally Burton (Herts), Tim Strawson (Lincs), Paul Southby (Notts)



Rutland High Sheriffs' afternoon tea Back Row L-R: Alastair Haywood (1988), Stuart Paton (2002), Michael Allen (2001), Andrew Brown (2015), Miles Williamson-Noble (2014), David Wood (2021), Richard Cole (2020), Peter Lawson (2011), Richard Chesterfield (in nomination 2024), Craig Mitchell (2017) Front row: Bart Hellyer (2012), Margaret Miles (2019), Miranda Hall (2006), Sue Jarron (2018), Lord-Lieutenant Dr Sarah Furness (2016), Geoff Thompson (2022), Under Sheriff Kate Blank, Elizabeth Mills (2009), Trish Ruddle (2013), Geraldine Feehally (2023)

Photo: Whitefoot Photography

Photo: Richard Adams