

Urgent need for reform

The Knife Angel statue in front of Guildford Cathedral



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Photo: Nicola Pratt

His Honour Christopher Critchlow DL High Sheriff of Surrey 2022-23

David Kelham, High Sheriff of Warwickshire, and I held two 'Taste Match' events, the first at Denbies Wine Estate in Dorking in October and the second at Warwick Castle in February. Attendees blind tasted wines, beers and gin made in our respective counties. Over £2,000 was raised for my charity, the High Sheriff's Youth Awards, and a similar amount for Crimebeat, David's chosen charity. Artisan stalls sold their products, while Morris dancers and a brass band provided entertainment. The results were close, equitably favouring the host county.

My main theme was support for victims of domestic abuse. I invited Helena Kennedy (Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws) to speak about domestic violence at the University of Surrey on

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20 October. Her work for women's rights and for justice for victims of abuse is well known. The audience, which included many of those working to help victims of abuse, heard an inspirational talk.

In November I held a Law and Order Conference: 'The Criminal Justice System: what might be done better?' Mike Barton CBE DL (former Chief Constable of the Durham), Peter Dawson (Director of the Prison Reform Trust), and Chris Daw KC advocated raising the age of criminal responsibility, legalising

proscribed drugs, reducing the length of prison terms, and furthering restorative justice. All three believe there is an urgent need for reform and say the ever-increasing prison population (doubled since 1991) demonstrates that.

I visited three national headquarters located in Surrey: Crimestoppers, which receives over 600,000 anonymous calls a year, 150,000 of which are passed to police forces and lead to many prosecutions; the Police Federation in Leatherhead; and Police Care UK in Woking.

My wife and I and the High Sheriffs of East and West Sussex, Jane King JP and James Whitmore and their consorts, together visited the operating base of Surrey Air Ambulance, a vital life-saving service, Arundel Cathedral, and Gatwick Airport where we saw the fire and police stations. I also joined Heather Phillips, High Sheriff of Greater London, at her sobering conference on the state of the mental health services, held at the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

After a three-year gap the annual mock trial competition for schools resumed in March 2023. Surrey magistrates organised six schools to compete for the High Sheriff's Shield at Guildford Crown Court which I presented to the winning school's team. The pupils play all the roles: JPs, witnesses, advocates, defendants, ushers and clerks. It's a popular event and helps teach good citizenship.

On 1 March the *Knife Angel*, a 27' high statue made out of c.100,000 sterilised knives handed to the iron works in Oswestry by the police in 2015, was erected outside Guildford Cathedral. Since 2018 it has been erected in 35 cities or towns. Its message is one of peace and it aims to warn young people against violent behaviour. During March, schools brought pupils to see it and to

attend conferences about knife crime and county lines. Dr Neville Lawrence OBE, whose son Stephen was murdered in April 1993, attracted a large audience. Dean Coady OBE, a former paratrooper and police officer in Manchester, spoke forcefully at the cathedral to about 300 schoolchildren, pointing out the dangers posed by knives and drugs.

I arranged a mock sentencing event in the Court of the Future (a replica Crown Court in the School of Law at the University of Surrey). HHJ Robert Fraser MVO DL, resident judge of Guildford Crown Court, sentenced four defendants across the following cases: a one-punch manslaughter case; a two-handed street fight involving a stabbing; and a coercive and controlling behaviour matter. I drafted the cases and law students played all roles. Some 60 people, including teenagers, observed and learnt about the principles of sentencing.

I was a barrister and then a circuit judge until 2016, so I was therefore particularly saddened by what court staff, judges, magistrates, police, prison and probation officers recounted about the pressure they are under, how they are under-resourced and need considerable urgent investment. Covid hugely increased the case backlog, as did the Criminal Bar Association strike. One duty



At Gatwick Airport Fire Station with Jane King (E Sussex), Sara Whitmore, William King, James Whitmore (W Sussex), and Wendy Critchlow

of a High Sheriff is to support the courts and the forces of law and order, and I believe the Shrievalty should give as much recognition as it can to those hard-pressed employees of the justice system.

I met many who give great service to their community. In March, I presented 22 individuals with a High Sheriff's Award Certificate for their unselfish work. The Latin motto of the High Sheriff of Surrey is 'Beatus est dare quam accipere' – it is more blessed to give than to receive. Whatever I may have given during my year, my wife and I received a great deal more from the people of Surrey.



Surrey Fire and Rescue Service dog trainers with their dogs



High street procession for the service for the judiciary

Photo: Andy Newbold