

Thanking the extraordinary volunteers holding the criminal justice system together



Amelia Riviere JP DL

High Sheriff of Hampshire 2023-2024

Becoming High Sheriff is a bit like a brick on a piece of elastic... you know that all being well you will be High Sheriff, but your year always feels quite a long way off... until it isn't.

This is also true for the assumed elements of your year. You know that you'll be hosting a church service to celebrate the law and suddenly it's on you and – like a wedding day – all too quickly in the rear-view mirror, with snatched conversations and photographs all that is left of it.

In preparation you've sat on the Shrieval Committee and listened to the experience of others; the Lord-Lieutenant has told you how marvellous you'll be; the Under Sheriff has read the riot act and wondered if you'll be troublesome – you've pretended you won't be. You've ordered far too much stationery. You think you know how the year will pan out and then you're off.

Being High Sheriff is a great privilege and offers so many unexpected opportunities. It has been a tremendous honour to be involved in royal visits and award ceremonies. I have enjoyed the pomp and circumstance hugely. The 21-gun salute at Portsmouth Naval Base on Coronation Day was wonderful and a tale for any future grandchildren.

But the greatest honour has been meeting extraordinary people contributing to the running and community of the county without any thought to themselves

Hampshire Law Sunday at Winchester Cathedral with the Rt Revd Nicholas McKinnel (Devon), Henry Robinson (Glos), Nigel Atkinson (Lord-Lieutenant), Mrs Christine Atkinson, Sharon Foster (Bristol), Dawn Haig-Thomas (Isle of Wight), Simon Muir (Berks), Colin Weston (Dorset), my Chaplain Alastair Barron, Robert Drewett (Somerset), Mr Justice Saini and clerk, Mrs Justice May, Toby Ashworth (Cornwall) and Pradeep Bhardwaj (Wilts)

and with limited understanding or acknowledgment from the public.

Half the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary are civilians fulfilling all the back-office roles that frontline officers couldn't function without. Ten per cent of the force are volunteers, from the Special Constabulary who are police officers in all but name but bring with them the knowledge and experience of their day jobs, to the retiree who maintains the Marine Unit's boats and the young man with learning difficulties who helps clean the vehicles.

In the courts, prisons, and police stations the NHS funded Liaison and Diversion Service provides on-site mental health assessment to ensure detainees are safe and judges have the fullest possible information when they decide on sentencing. Prison officers trained to run towards danger unseen behind high walls rarely receive the respect they are due for the care they provide to the most dangerous and the most vulnerable in society on our behalf.

Then there is the glue that helps to hold the criminal justice system together: the

voluntary sector. There is the magistracy, nearly as old as the Shrievalty, dealing with over 90 per cent of all criminal cases. There are also the volunteers of the Independent Custody Visitors, the eyes and ears of the public, in police stations, and of the Independent Monitoring Board fulfilling the same role in prisons. Witness and Victim Support who help people through the arduous process of a court case. Street pastors working in the night-time economy supporting the police to take care of the vulnerable who are out and about at night whether they are street sleepers, the young who have over-enjoyed happy hour or indeed anyone needing pastoral or practical help. The huge group of professionally trained search and rescue volunteers who the police rely on to help find missing persons, any time of the night or day.

I have hardly scratched the surface. There is a myriad of charities working in crime prevention, education and youth projects in either rehabilitation or diversion from the courts.

Being High Sheriff of Hampshire has made me even prouder of my county and of the criminal justice system than I ever thought I could be.



Above: Out on the Solent with the officers of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary Marine Unit

Below: Training with the volunteers of Hampshire Search and Rescue (HANTSAR)

