

# Reading, writing and rehabilitation

**Liz Green**

High Sheriff of Hertfordshire 2023-24

As other High Sheriffs I have much enjoyed talking to members of the judiciary and the emergency services, and visiting schools and charities across the county. Thanking individuals and groups is a great privilege, and depending on the occasion my dress code varies from smart day dress to court dress, although when in court dress (aka 'full bling') I have, on more than one occasion, been asked whether I'm a member of the royal family!

From September 2018-2019 I was fortunate to spend a year living in the Old Bailey while Sheriff of the City of London. During the year I had the opportunity to learn from the judges about young people being lured into crime, and the problems that those leaving prison face, often with only £46 (now £78) and a sleeping bag. Since June 2020 I have volunteered as an area coordinator for Shannon Trust ([www.shannontrust.org.uk](http://www.shannontrust.org.uk)), a charity which helps those in prison to teach others in prison to learn to read or improve their reading. This one-to-one model has recently been extended into teaching numeracy, as well as into the community. 'Reading, writing and rehabilitation' is my chosen theme as this reflects the reality that a lack of literacy has on day-to-day living. For those in prison, what should be simple tasks – such as completing a lunch order or using an app to ask to see a doctor or lawyer – are impossible without asking for help, as is accessing workshops and education, and many will not admit they cannot read or write.

With over 1.3 million residents in Hertfordshire, research carried out for me by Herts County Council revealed that the average number of people in the county with poor literacy is 23 per



cent. This is frankly staggering, yet it's not uncommon, with similar statistics across most of the UK. For those in that community understanding bail conditions or benefit forms, reading a road sign or bus timetable, or applying for work cannot happen. In partnership with the University of Hertfordshire I am hosting a one-day symposium in November to raise awareness of poor literacy to explore what can be done to improve literacy, and to help those leaving prison and/or probation to find work. Shannon Trust recently held an online training session for three Hertfordshire charities, which should help some of their clients improve their literacy, and their wellbeing as a result.

Visits to County, Family and Magistrates' Courts, the youth panel and tribunal services have been sobering as the reality of life

**Below: Old Bailey visit for Herts police cadets and their leaders**



**Clockwise from top left: At Windrush 75 celebrations in Hemel Hempstead with the mayors of Bishops Stortford and Dacorum Being taught to play bocce Italian style on a visit to Broxbourne borough with Cllr Paul Seeby, Mayor of Broxbourne At the Long Service Awards ceremony with Chief Constable Charlie Hall QPM At Hand on Heart in Watford, a charity which provides (among other things) stationery-filled backpacks for disadvantaged children**

for many of those having their case heard is stark. Presenting long-service awards and recruitment awards to the police was very special, not least after the ongoing negative press which the police continue to receive – it was the ideal opportunity to say thank you. I've enjoyed sitting in the police control room, visiting their firearms unit and going out with the road traffic team.

It is always inspiring to see community police officers and cadets supporting local events and engaging with the public, and I was delighted to attend St Albans community fire station to see Year 6 children spend the morning with the police, fire service, students from Oaklands College and members of Herts County Council in order to learn about safety in the home, in parks and near rivers as well as personal safety – the 'hands on' activities were extremely powerful.

My focus will remain on the work within the criminal justice system. Our Chief Constable Charlie Hall's mantra of 'prevention first' is something I'm sure everyone will endorse – how we achieve that, and what difference we can make is another matter.