

Uncovering the issues

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High Sheriff of Oxfordshire 2023-24

During my Declaration in April, Marjorie Glasgow BEM, Lord-Lieutenant of Oxfordshire, said, 'I think the role of Lord-Lieutenant is like a marathon and that of High Sheriff is like a sprint.' She was totally right.

Twelve months is a very short time in which to achieve any impact; however, I do believe that it is possible to achieve small outcomes in this period. I hope to make a small contribution to address some of the needs in Oxfordshire.

The theme of my year is the criminal justice system: the police, the prison service, the courts, emergency services and the many charities which work in this space.

The reality of life in Oxfordshire is not necessarily that which one might expect. The leafy lanes and dreaming spires tend to obscure the reality. The levels of addiction, homelessness, domestic abuse, etc. in Oxfordshire are remarkably consistent with the rest of England. Furthermore, these issues have a direct impact on all agencies within the criminal justice system, hence my interest.

I am spending a lot of time helping to prepare and sponsoring a report 'Oxfordshire Uncovered 2023' highlighting the needs of the county as well as identifying the wonderful work that the numerous charities perform addressing these needs.

The report is being written jointly by The Oxfordshire Community Foundation, researchers, and academics. The objective of the report is to raise awareness of the issues and hopefully also raise money. It will be launched on Giving Tuesday (28 November) and all money raised will be distributed to various charities which have the greatest impact in the county.

I have attended many award ceremonies, such as Thames Valley Police Awards, High Sheriff's Witness Awards with judges at Oxford Combined Court Centre, charity, and fundraiser awards, which I've found humbling, fascinating and truly worthy in equal measure.

The saying, you can tell you're getting older when police officers look younger was brought home to me on a fascinating experience: a ride along with my local police in Banbury. What an eye-opening experience. I began my 'shift' attending the daily briefing for all the officers and then was allocated two young and wonderfully capable PCs. Their youth in no way diminished their skill and compassion or the respect that they achieved on the shift. I came away proud to be involved with such a decent and committed service and with individuals whose role is not recognised or celebrated enough. Furthermore, the experience has equipped me with a far greater understanding of the day-to-day issues facing our police, probation, the prison service, and other emergency services.



A ride along with my local force

I see part of my role as convening meetings to link people up. An example of this is that I have introduced a charity which distributes used books (run by a retired judge) to the two prisons in Oxfordshire, HMP Huntercombe and HMP Bullingdon. Both prisons have welcomed the introduction and meetings have taken place to ensure that the prison libraries and learning workshops are well stocked with a varied and changing range of books

During the second half of my year, I will continue to focus upon the criminal justice system. I am organising a seminar on Family, Drug and Alcohol Courts which Oxfordshire does not currently have, as well as working with the judges in Oxford on a public open day for Oxfordshire, Combined Courts, as well as attending the varied and fascinating events to which I am invited.

In conclusion the Lord-Lieutenant was right, and I hope to achieve some small thing before the end of my sprint.

Left: With His Honour Judge Patrick Eccles KC, and the Rt Hon Victoria Prentis KC MP (Member of Parliament for North Oxfordshire and Attorney General for England and Wales); HHJ Eccles delivered the High Sheriff's Law Lecture at the University of Oxford Examination Schools



Photo: Nicholas Posner