

Engaging with people is a privilege

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High Sheriff of Shropshire 2023-24

Having been one of the last High Sheriffs to make their Declaration in mid April it has been an absolute joy to be able to travel around the incredible County of Shropshire meeting so many kind, generous and committed people who make our communities such better places. My focus has been to continue to celebrate our volunteers who are so essential, and in particular those who work with disadvantaged groups.

With the Coronation so close to the beginning of the shrieval year I visited some schools and had the privilege of distributing Coronation medals to their pupils and of explaining the role of the High Sheriff – speaking to children and explaining how the role of High Sheriff has evolved through time is great fun.

I have observed the work of the magistracy – such committed volunteers – and had the privilege of sitting alongside a family court judge for the day which was eye-opening to say the least. I look forward to more opportunities to spend time with the judiciary, and especially to continue to learn how the Family Drug and Alcohol Court system could potentially offer a new solution in our rural communities.

It is, however, the ability as High Sheriff to engage with such a wide range of people that makes the role so special and such a privilege: from attending a marvellous police station open day



In the Cold War Hangar at RAF Museum Midlands, Cosford

and seeing the engagement from the community at the event – including a long queue of youngsters and their parents determined to be locked into a police custody cell for a short while – to opening revitalised village halls and community centres. As High Sheriff it is being able to talk to people from all over my county and hear their views and what they do which is so incredible. I met a wonderful 11-year-old who single-handedly raised the funds for a defibrillator for her town which is at least 50 minutes from a district general hospital; then there is the army veteran who, in struggling with his own PTSD, decided to train as a therapist and now provides support

Below: Presenting a High Sheriff's Award to 11-year-old Jess for her fundraising in the town of Clun with Katherine Garnier DL, Cllr Ryan Davies (Mayor of Clun), and Robert Andrews (Chair of the Clun Memorial Hall and Playing Fields Charity)



The Revd Richard Hayes and Mrs Hayes at the 'Celebration of Shropshire Heroes'

through sports coaching to other veterans struggling with their mental health.

The launch of the Shropshire Community Foundation this year has enabled the formalisation of a High Sheriff's Fund within that organisation which will enable us to provide grant support to organisations working with young people to co-produce initiatives seeking to reduce the attractiveness of crime. We have a serious problem across our predominantly rural county with County Lines and organised crime, including growing exploitation of young and vulnerable people. We are encouraging some of our charities and community groups to look at projects that could go forward to the National Crimebeat Awards.

Lastly, I was honoured to be able to invite over 280 wonderful people who give so much to our Shropshire community to join me for afternoon tea at the iconic RAF Museum Midlands in Cosford where all attendees had the opportunity not only to view the incredible Cold War display but also to be entertained by a magician, have their portrait drawn by a great caricaturist and enjoy entertainment provided by morris dancers and a 10-piece brass band.

