

Mental health is a common concern

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High Sheriff of Surrey 2023-24

I have had a varied and enjoyable first six months as High Sheriff of Surrey and I am pleased to pick out some highlights:

Guildford Cathedral – modernist from the outside but wonderful height and light when you are inside. I have enjoyed numerous services there including the Joint Services Matins, the farewell to the Dean and of course my own Declaration. And more to come as Remembrance Day and Christmas approach.

Engagement with judiciary – very special and insightful, from sitting in the various courts to presenting prizes for bravery. The service for the judiciary was wonderfully warm and wholesome. We all found it rather amusing that the cheekier children, bussed in from local primary schools to attend the service and watch the procession afterwards, bowed extravagantly as we paraded past them up Guildford High Street. The Surrey judges are most stimulating company – I am much looking forward to entertaining them at my forthcoming dinner for the judiciary.

Engagement with the police and fire services – I have admired the team



With HH Mrs Justice Hill and members of the judiciary for the Judiciary Service in Guildford

approach and commitment to public service shown by the police and fire services. They have excellent kit and it has been fun seeing it all demonstrated: very large fire engines at Gatwick Airport and extremely well-equipped firearms cars for the police. Not to forget the police sniffer dogs – well trained and keen on tennis balls.

Volunteer Police Cadets – I had not heard of the Volunteer Police Cadets before I became High Sheriff and, therefore, their patron. I have been impressed with the organisation and the young people I have met – as well as with the adult volunteers who make it possible. The cadets engage positively with the community and have a lot of fun in the process. Their favourite activity? Throwing things at police doing riot training! Abigail is my cadet for the year; she has been excellent and a real support.

General engagement with civic society and charities – in Surrey we are lucky that we have warm engagement between the Lieutenancy and the Shrievalty and the county and the boroughs. It has been good to see the mayors and civic leaders at many events and to understand their priorities and concerns. Charity visits have been an absolute highlight. With my theme of mental health I have concentrated in this area and there is such great work being done in the county seeking to alleviate this ever-increasing affliction that is so miserable for those suffering. I have visited many specialist mental health charities but have found that mental health is a theme in conversation in nearly all of my visits.



At my tea party with Mr Saj Hussain (Chair of Surrey County Council) and Faarai Sahi (consort and daughter) and Cadet Abigail (Head Cadet at Surrey Heath Cadets)



Visiting Dapdune Wharf as part of Surrey Day 2023



Recognising local heroes at South East Coast Ambulance Service, Banstead

This brings me to my specific theme which is focused on police and emergency services' response to people who are suffering an acute mental health crisis – putting themselves and others at risk. I have commissioned a report on this written by Police Care UK and the University of Cambridge with the full cooperation of Surrey Police. The draft report showed how the present situation is dysfunctional for all concerned with immense strain placed on the police and those suffering not receiving the right care. As a result, the Chief Constable of Surrey Tim De Meyer has committed to prioritise this issue and I will be discussing progress with him in early December and then again in February. I am grateful to the Chief Constable for being so open with Surrey data and for his positive response.

In conclusion, a wonderful and illuminating first six months giving back to the great County of Surrey where I am so lucky to live.