

Championing inclusion and young talent



With Baroness Floella Benjamin DBE at Buckingham Palace for a reception in celebration of the Windrush Generation. Their Majesties unveiled the ten portraits of Windrush elders, newly commissioned by HM King Charles: *Windrush: Portraits of a Generation*

Sharon Foster

High Sheriff of the City of Bristol 2023-2024

What a momentous year! From when I took the oath of Office and reflecting on when I was nominated, I can truly say that my journey has been incredible...

This year, among many other takeaways, I found that good partnerships and bringing communities together can foster unity and better understanding. During the last twelve months, I have gained significant insight into the valuable contributions made by various sections of our community.

My main priority for the year has been the project 'Inclusion Not Exclusion' under the agenda of 'child exclusion' – this important project was initiated and driven by the concerns of school children and the young people of Bristol. The figures allow just a small insight into some of the challenges that we are facing within education today and to have had the opportunity to communicate with young people and children who have been excluded from school has been truly humbling.

Inclusion not Exclusion focuses on the detrimental impact of school exclusions and suspensions and seeks to reverse the trend which has worsened since the pandemic. School exclusions and suspensions disproportionately affect vulnerable children, jeopardising their education, well-being, and prospects. I do acknowledge, however, that there are some local schools that have successfully reduced suspensions through innovative and inclusive practices. Ultimately, I would like to see all schools working together in a concerted effort to tackle the problem.

On the 2 April 2024, to mark the culmination of my year in office, I held a



Outside City Hall, Bristol, on Remembrance Sunday with the Peaches Golding OBE (Lord-Lieutenant), Cllr Steve Pearce (Acting Lord Mayor), Avon and Somerset Police ceremonial mace escort, and Richard the sword bearer

momentous event at the newly opened Bristol Beacon. The evening – produced by Creative Connex CIC and serving as a platform to shine a light on the project – brought together families, community members, civic leaders and supporters for a celebration of young artistic talent curated by Creative Power Town, a dynamic youth agency fostering creative exploration.

High Sheriff's Awards were given to the most deserving community members and young people. Award categories included Outstanding Young Leader, Outstanding Beacon of Light and Outstanding Young Visionary Motivator among others. Local TV news celebrity Alex Lovell and Deputy Mayor Asher Craig helped with the presentations. I am especially proud that the showcase featured Bristol's burgeoning creative talent with captivating performances by some of the most talented and creative young people of the city of Bristol.

The evening was not just limited to artistic expression. Keynote speakers included Dayton Powell (a specialist in gang culture and violence reduction), Hannah Woodhouse (Executive Director of the Children and Education Directorate, Bristol City Council) and Deniece Dixon, a local business owner and parent. They delivered thought-provoking speeches on tackling the scourge of knife-crime, education and advocating the needs of children with special educational needs.

I am pleased that the showcase was a resounding success. It celebrated the power of arts and storytelling, highlighting the importance of educational inclusion, and it recognised the vibrant talent of



Awaiting the arrival of Her Majesty Queen Camilla with Cllr Paul Goggin (Lord Mayor of Bristol) Peaches Golding (Lord-Lieutenant), Sir Terry Waite (President of Emmaus UK) and staff and volunteers at Emmaus Bristol, a homelessness charity



Welcoming Her Majesty Queen Camilla to Emmaus Bristol with Peaches Golding OBE (Lord-Lieutenant), Dom Wood DL, Cllr Paul Goggin (Lord Mayor of Bristol) and Deborah Griffiths (Lady Mayoress)

Bristol's youth. The event also served as a springboard for continued dialogue and collaborative efforts to foster a brighter future for children and young people in Bristol at the end of my term as High Sheriff.

It is truly an honour to have been offered the opportunity to serve as the High Sheriff for the County and City of Bristol – the first Black Caribbean woman to have been offered and to have held this office.

My experience demonstrated the importance of having strong engagement with a diverse community and various organisations across the city – taking the Shrievalty across the city both to where it had been, and where it may not have otherwise been.