

# Helping one another

## Colin Weston MBE JP

High Sheriff of Dorset 2023-24

It's hard to say quite what I expected from my year as High Sheriff of my beautiful home county of Dorset. Of course, I knew I wanted to respect and celebrate the historical ceremonial role, but much more than that, I wanted to find a pathway through the year that acknowledged the everyday challenges which face our various communities, and which allowed me to say thank you to the individual people and organisations that protect and care for the rest of us, day in and day out.

During my career in Customs and Excise and as a magistrate I have learnt that 'helping one another' is key to working successfully. The main reasons we see people before us in court are addiction, coercion, desperation or greed, and it is vitally important that we try and break that cycle and help them to stop reoffending. But, equally, we must never forget to support the victims and the witnesses whose lives are so often destroyed by crime. To do that all agencies and charities associated with law and order need to 'help one another'.

I not only wanted to support, encourage and thank those working in law enforcement and the emergency services, but to encourage others to help break that cycle of offending. I visited and went out with various police teams including road traffic. I was even thanked by a speeding motorist who said, 'I suppose if you are going to be caught speeding it is nice to be able to say it was by the High Sheriff of Dorset.'

I spent two shifts with Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue. At Weymouth I got stuck some 30 feet in the air at the top of the turntable ladder. I visited several HM Coastguard training sessions and the RNLI at Poole, Swanage and Weymouth and attended an event in Poole called 'DocBike' – a charity putting a highly trained trauma doctor or critical care paramedic on two wheels. Working alongside local emergency services, they provide lifesaving critical care and help to prevent crashes from happening in the first place. DocBike started in Dorset ten years ago and is now being rolled out to other counties. I also learnt about the work of the Yeovil Freewheelers Blood Bikes, a service which provides a time-



With certificate recipients and the Bovington Military Wives Choir



Meeting His Majesty King Charles in Poundbury  
Photo: Neil Crick ARPS

critical emergency medical motorcycle courier service free of charge to the NHS and which is run entirely by volunteers.

During National Volunteer Week I held an event at the RNLI College in Poole to showcase the wonderful work of our emergency services and the various voluntary organisations which support them. We heard from the smaller organisations which skills and resources they had to offer and the main blue light emergency services were very interested in working more closely with these other organisations in the future. It was a great success and it is hoped the event will be held on a biannual basis.



HM Coastguard training day

Numerous civic days across the county demonstrated the wealth of work that takes place in smaller villages and towns – the initiatives that make a daily difference, and the many unsung heroes who perform countless tasks to help others. There is so much going on that most people are totally unaware of and it was a constantly steep and fascinating learning curve. I also had the enormous privilege of meeting Their Majesties King Charles and Queen Camilla.

I finished my year with an awards ceremony at the Dorset County Museum, giving out 22 certificates to those who had very much endorsed my ethos of 'helping one another'.

I tried to make every handshake count and I said thank you many times every day to wonderful people who work tirelessly for the people of Dorset. Some provide professional skills within formal organisations, but so many are just ordinary folk who volunteer their time for no reward, and to them I extended particular thanks and recognition.

It has been the most extraordinary year of my life, and also for my wife Ruth who put in almost as many miles! I was utterly privileged to hold this distinguished Office and to have the rare opportunity to give thanks, face to face, to all those who are constantly 'helping one another'.