

Young people are the present



Visiting Wealden Volunteer Police Cadet Unit led by High Sheriff's Police Cadet Cleal



With Fire Cadets Jasmine and Simon, together with Chief Fire Officer Dawn Whittaker of East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service at my High Sheriff's thanksgiving service and summer reception



At the East Sussex County Council Annual Youth Voice Engagement Event including youth cabinet, youth mayors and two High Sheriff's cadets



With former mayor and now trainee teacher Mr James Bacon and head girl and head boy at ARK Little Ridge Primary Academy in Hastings

Richard Bickersteth

High Sheriff of East Sussex 2023-24

I have never been entirely happy with the phrase 'children are our future' as I don't think it tells the whole story. From my experience with three sons, they are definitely our present as well as our future. This is probably reinforced by having worked in the toy and games industry for twenty years.

Young people today are growing up in a world of challenges we never had to face. So when I took on the role of High Sheriff, although not a formal theme, I did have 'supporting young people and all those who work with them, especially those who are overlooked or vulnerable' as one of my areas of focus.

I started by appointing two police and two fire cadets – my very own High Sheriff's posse! This has been one of the most fulfilling aspects of my year and they have made me very proud. As well as having key roles at my Declaration Ceremony, summer reception, judges' service and awards ceremony, I also tried to include them in as many other events as possible, subject to their academic commitments. So we did not overburden our hosts I usually only had one or two cadets at any event.

For safe-guarding reasons, we agreed that their parents would ferry them to or from any events. This worked well and meant the parents could occasionally enjoy the event too. Seeing how they all grew in

confidence during the year has been very moving; the shy cadet at the start was by the end happily engaging with the Duke of Norfolk, bishops or High Court judges. In fact my two police cadets' units both secured a National Crimebeat Award. When I visited their cadet units I understood why, as I saw how their leadership skills were also being developed. As a result I was pleased to give High Sheriff's Awards to both the police and fire cadet leaders in East Sussex.

I also engaged with young people during my shrieval year by visiting youth groups across the county which highlighted the need for more leaders and finance. Some were growing – such as Brighton Table Tennis Club, Kidz Klub and Ticehurst Youth Group – thanks to inspirational leadership. Maybe this is why the uniformed organisations that I also visited – such as Brownies, Sussex Police, East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service and St John Ambulance cadets – are so vibrant.

I also supported young people by joining in many school assemblies. The secret

was having lots of photos to show them. The response of primary school children to my wearing court dress was priceless. Their questions always raised a smile, the most common being: 'Is the sword real?'

The shrieval year goes so fast and yet I know that the time I gave to encouraging young people, from youth mayors to my police and fire cadets to primary school pupils, may well have had more impact on their lives than on those of all the judges, magistrates, police and fire officers that I also thanked. As one of my fire cadets wrote: *It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. This year has been by far one of the best years of my life. I have been to places I never thought I would have visited and met people I never thought I would have the chance to meet.* I could not have put it better myself and I know he is talking about the present, not the future.



With Fire Cadet Jasmine's Uckfield unit for a specialist animal rescue demonstration