

How can 12 months have passed so quickly?

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High Sheriff of Greater Manchester 2023-24

Life-affirming, humbling, joyful, sometimes challenging but utterly engrossing is how I describe my shrieval year.

The eight boroughs and two cities that make up Greater Manchester each contribute their distinct local characteristics to the county. Yet the thread that weaves its way through all our communities is the positive and powerful impact our volunteers have on every aspect of life across Greater Manchester.

From the outset, I focused on giving as much time as I could to the range of organisations I anticipated visiting. I'm grateful to my DL colleagues for identifying so many groups operating below the radar and I quickly learned that embracing social media gave me the opportunity to highlight the wonderful work they do to a wider audience.

As High Sheriff, once I realised I could legitimately unleash my natural inquisitiveness, there was no holding back. Without exception, I was repaid by the sheer volume of information groups shared, their enthusiasm, engagement and passion for what they do.

Two new inspiring groups I visited are doing extraordinary work to address the silence and stigma affecting men who suffer from poor mental health by facilitating better access to appropriate clinical and peer support. This need was

brought sharply into focus driving to an engagement. My husband and I witnessed a young man positioning himself to jump on to the motorway from an overhead bridge as we passed below. Our 999 alert was one of many received by GMP and, thankfully, we later learned he was safely rescued from that moment of crisis.

Happier events that will live long in my memory were my involvement with GMP Cadets (so many groups!), attending attestations for special constables, observing public order training and as a passenger with the tactical driving unit during training assessments.

The civic events were many and varied, uplifting and very moving and included: the 90th anniversary of Holodomor, Stalin's deliberate starvation of Ukraine (1932-33); and the 650th anniversary celebration of the bilateral Anglo-Portuguese Alliance with superb period organ music performed by Lisbon's Sérgio Silva.

On 4 February, the 50th anniversary service to mark the M62 coach bombing was a sombre, dignified memorial event on a wet, cold morning. A 25-pound IRA bomb hidden within the luggage locker of a coach carrying off-duty armed forces personnel and their families exploded, killing 11 and injuring 31, most of whom were from Greater Manchester. I was so taken aback to meet people I knew at the service whose lives had been blighted by such terrible and tragic personal loss.

During my final week, I was honoured



Speaking at the Iftar hosted by the Bangladeshi community with Cllr Ahmed Ali (Manchester City Council)

to attend a deeply moving thanksgiving service dedicated to 26 individuals who donated their bodies to the University of Manchester in the past year. Such altruism enables the university to continue to provide high-quality teaching and research opportunities to the 850 students annually who commence their studies in medicine, dentistry and anatomical sciences.

I've been privileged to meet the groups who cook and deliver nourishing meals to the housebound and disadvantaged. I've experienced a warm welcome to Succot, Iftar and Eid celebrations; participated in 13 citizenship ceremonies; attended four swearing-in ceremonies for 16 family and 42 crime justices; attended the swearing-in of four coroners; and championed the benefits of the Family Drug and Alcohol Courts.

The volunteer groups, individuals and young people I met are the golden threads that weave such a rich tapestry across the county, enriching all our communities. Originally part of Lancashire, Greater Manchester is a young county. As only its 50th High Sheriff, I am honoured to have served its people and I've loved every minute of this special year.



Observing Greater Manchester Police public order training



With David Cam DL (Under Sheriff of the Duchy of Lancaster) and Torsten Gill, the youngest recipient (aged six) of a Greater Manchester Young Citizen Award for raising £4,000 for a food bank, a toy bank and children being treated for cancer at Manchester Royal Infirmary