

A must for every High Sheriff..

Tim Wates DL

High Sheriff of Surrey 2023-24

Time has flown by and I now sit here as the previous High Sheriff of Surrey having handed over to Shahid Azeem DL at an excellent event at Royal Holloway University. The past six months have been busy and satisfying in equal measure and it will be a struggle to fit them into the strict word limit rightly imposed by *The High Sheriff* magazine!

'Are you a pirate?' – a question posed by a pupil at Ewhurst Infant School. Closely followed by: 'Do you live in a castle?' A visit to your local primary school is a must for every High Sheriff... The children are agog at the outfit and the history and who cannot laugh at some of the questions posed. I also enjoyed visits to special schools and secondary schools where I was privileged to address school assemblies, meet superb and dedicated staff, and be quizzed by school councils.

Engagement with civic life was busy – I saw the Coroner's Courts and the Family Courts in action – sharing a sandwich lunch with a dozen family judges was quite an experience. I was there for (humbling) bravery awards in the Crown Court and I supported the Lord-Lieutenant at the (uplifting) British Empire Medal presentation ceremony. Vespers at Arundel Cathedral with the High Sheriffs of West and East Sussex was a special event as was attending the High Sheriff of Greater London's Judiciary Service at Southwark



At Guildford Crown Court with a bravery award recipient and HHJ Fraser MVO DL, HHJ Rufus Taylor and HHJ Patricia Lees Photo: Jean Dimond



With Mary Creswell (Vice Lord-Lieutenant), Michael More-Molyneux (Lord-Lieutenant) and Sir Stephen Lamport (previous Vice Lord-Lieutenant) for British Empire Medal presentations at Loseley Park Photo: Andy Newbold Photography

Cathedral and the installation of the new Archdeacon at Guildford Cathedral. I also enjoyed prison visits to HMPs Bronzefield and Downview where I saw at first hand the pressure on our prison system and some great work training and supporting prisoners for life after their sentences.

I met with numerous charities and my theme of mental health was a consistent topic whichever charity was concerned. All charities are finding that the pervasive impact of social media and the backwash from Covid have reduced the resilience of many people. Despite this my visits were all marvellously positive. I met wonderful people doing superb work who were really pleased and happy to see the High Sheriff, giving me a sharp insight into why the role of High Sheriff – including thanking and acknowledging people and organisations – is so positive for society. To pick out a few: York Road Project and Transform Housing & Support provide supported housing, allowing people to flourish and lead their best possible lives; Lighthouse in Woking and Surrey Care Trust mobilise hundreds of volunteers to help others; Citizens Advice and St Catherine's Hospice continue outstanding work at the very centre of our communities; Artventure Trust and the Grange bring joy to the lives of those with physical and learning disabilities via art and other activities.

Continuing with my theme of mental health, I concluded my specific work on 'Understanding the impact of police as first responders to mental health crisis cases', working closely with Surrey Police, Surrey County Council, the third sector and the NHS. The final report was launched after Christmas and I was humbled and delighted that it catalysed positive action from all parties involved in this fraught



A visit to Artventure where they use art to have fun and build community and self-esteem Photo: Andy Newbold Photography



Meeting a funny, talented young man at the Grange – unfortunately it transpired he was a Chelsea fan! Photo: Andy Newbold Photography

and difficult issue. This will benefit the police and all involved in the system, not forgetting those individuals who are suffering a mental health crisis – they are unwell and need to be cared for and protected in the best way possible. The convening power of the High Sheriff's role, especially around areas of law and order and the police, was what enabled us to make such positive progress.

It has been an honour and a privilege to serve as High Sheriff of the great County of Surrey.