

Be ready for anything



At the High Sheriff's Forum with (below) Judith Ford (CEO Wyre Forest and South Worcestershire Nightstop and Mediation), Rachel Tucker (trustee Wyre Forest and South Worcestershire Nightstop and Mediation), Sue Saddler and Beryl Cuckney (business mentor and coach)... and numerous others



Louise Hewett DL

High Sheriff of Worcestershire 2023-24

We are advised before we take up this honourable position as High Sheriff to 'make it your own'. I believe this allows us to play to our strengths and shape our year accordingly.

I have always worked with various charities and projects alongside my career and into retirement and recognised that there was a huge need in the area of vulnerable children and young people. It was a natural progression for me to follow my passion and it was an excellent opportunity to make this the focus for my year in office.

I researched all charities in Worcestershire that offer a wraparound service for vulnerable children and young people in distress or crisis... those facing homelessness or abuse. I arranged to meet and understand the wonderful work they do and the many challenges they face. I enjoyed being able to thank them for their brilliant and much-needed support and care.

It became clear to me that many of



Presenting a High Sheriff's Award to Charlotte Jaynes (community support leader at Birchen Coppice Primary Academy)

these charities – all working towards similar aims – could support and help each other in so many ways. In business, we have many opportunities and forums to share ideas, support, educate and network together.

From further discussion and enthusiastic response, we created the 'High Sheriff's Forum', supported by Nightstop (one

of the charities I was working with), which we held in the training room of a local business. Together we invited over 50 representatives from charities, and statutory sectors with an overall theme of prevention and early intervention.

West Mercia Police were very welcoming and encouraging, allowing me to follow my nose around various police departments, trying to understand the reality of some of the current and evolving threats to young people and the challenges they face, particularly the burgeoning online sexual exploitation of children.

I invited some of those brilliant police representatives to speak at the forum leading to animated discussion and more understanding. More than that, it became clear how much our members value this opportunity to be brought together in an independent forum. As Lia Palios-Hayden from YSS said, 'This forum has enabled us to network with other local organisations and to play a role in discussing and promoting the important issues facing children and young people ... generating external meetings and



A gala dinner was held in the nave of Worcester Cathedral

collaborations.' I have received many messages like this, enabling faster lines of support, communication and referrals towards the common goal of making children and young people's lives better in Worcestershire. I'm thrilled to say that my successor is continuing this legacy into his term of office.

Following these meetings we also have an exciting pilot initiative due to commence in September between the police, the University of Worcester and a local media communications specialist. The aim is to work together to find better platforms, format and media opportunities to communicate emerging online AI threats and to engage with all those caring for children and young people to enable them

to better protect those in their care and be as informed and updated as possible.

The opportunity to thank the outstanding individuals and volunteers I have met along the way culminated at my red carpet High Sheriff's Awards ceremony and was an absolute joy.

I also invited and thanked all the businesses and trusts at that event which had joined my 'High Sheriff's Role of Honour' by donating much-needed funds to my chosen charities. Together we raised £120,000. I must add that fundraising is not a requirement for a High Sheriff, but I was able to rally my extensive business network to give much-needed assistance at this difficult time when charities are so short of funds. It seemed



With Sir Edward Pepperall, Mr Justice Pepperall KC, who presided at my Declaration and at the end of my term in office



the right thing to do.

Hearing the stories from those amazing volunteers brought much cheering and a few tears. It was an emotional evening and

I know for sure those charities won more support and pledges of help from the businesses who attended. I love this kind of cross-fertilisation!

My final event was a glittering grand gala dinner in the nave of Worcester Cathedral to mark the end of my term in office and to raise funds for St Richard's Hospice where I have been patron for many years. A spectacular evening where local celebrity Philip Serrell (of *Bargain Hunt* and *Flog It!* fame) held the auction and we raised an amazing £40,000.

I've learnt so much in my year: sat in on Magistrates' Courts and a murder trial; entertained judges to dinner at my home; visited prisons and schools; held the High Sheriff's Lecture at the University of Worcester and so much more.

I've even sang 'Karma Chameleon' karaoke at the top of my voice at the request of one of the students at a local SEN school. You have to be ready for anything in this job... it's been joyful and I will always hold the experience close to my heart.