

# Breakfast with the High Sheriff

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High Sheriff of Essex 2024-25

Given that one of the High Sheriff's roles is to convene, I wondered what a good way to get people together would be. A dinner or supper perhaps? A lunch? The trouble is that I am impatient. I don't like doing anything for more than two hours and I'm a bit thrifty.

Dinners are expensive and will no doubt include alcohol (I have no objection), which can often mean the quality of discussion diminishes as drinks flow!

So, I decided to invite people to breakfast: inexpensive and, at a couple of hours, the ideal length... and also at a time to catch people at their best.

The first one I held at home. I prepared and cooked the food so it was ready to serve on arrival. Introductions were made over tea and coffee then followed by buffet-style help yourself – find a seat around table! I was expecting six people – and in the end eight turned up. I served extra toast and drinks as they ate, then cleared away plates.

My thinking was not to have an agenda. I invited a couple who in their spare time had started a foodbank, a representative of our county's community foundation, a thoroughly decent hard-working local councillor, a hedge fund owner, a retired accountant from a large county-wide accountancy firm and both the CEO and new chair of trustees of a homeless charity.

I sat by the side of the table and conversation flowed. I chipped in, linking people around the table with the



At the Essex Justice Service with, among others: the Honourable Mrs Justice Arbuthnot, Jennifer Tolhurst (Lord-Lieutenant), Roger Brice (Under Sheriff of Essex), and the High Sheriffs of Bedfordshire (Bav Shah), Kent (Dr Gill Fargher), Hertfordshire (Annie Brewster), Greater London (Millicent Grant KC) and David Flux (Norfolk)  
Photo: Paul Starr Photographer

conversation and occasional questions. It went very well, with people sharing challenges and people providing solutions; details were shared, useful websites made note of. Help was offered.

I had emails of thanks after the event. It did go well. A couple of days later I received another email from the new chair of trustees, who holds a very senior role in a bank in London: 'Wanted to say thanks again. I'm still reflecting on all that

we learnt on Friday and for me, I believe it was the best meeting I've attended inside outside of corporate life.'

Low cost, easy to organise and perhaps great impact – time will tell. My advice: pick your guests carefully; you never know what might be achieved.

A second scaled-up High Sheriff's breakfast took place at Garons Park, Southend, at the beginning of October. The focus this time was helping young people through sport and we had 40 or so people – a mix of organisations and real influencers met and talked. Thank you those who attended and to Active Essex Foundation for helping to make it happen. If 40 people engaged in conversation leads to just one positive outcome it was worth the bacon rolls.



October's breakfast meeting at Garons Park

