

Journey towards High Sheriff



Her Honour Helen Mifflin DL High Sheriff of Gwent 2024-25

It is a pleasure to provide a personal perspective about my journey to becoming High Sheriff and to highlight the particular focus that we in the Gwent Shrievalty are bringing to the role. We have recently refreshed our selection processes for our County Nomination Panel and this article hopefully will share our journey towards making the role of High Sheriff relevant to all.

I recently retired as a Circuit Judge in

order to take up the role of High Sheriff of Gwent, where I was born and where I have lived for nearly all of my life. I was born in a small mining village, having come from generations of mining families on both sides. I was the first person in my family to go to university, then to be called to the Bar, becoming a part-time judge before taking up a full-time role in 2008, and becoming a deputy High Court Judge in 2012.

The role of High Sheriff has therefore been informed by many years sitting as a judge, primarily in the Family Court where a large percentage of my work related to child protection. I have always

Above, below and top right: Engaging with young people in Gwent – some very young!

tried to do my best for children in difficult circumstances. I feel keenly the poverty of opportunity for children and young people in my county, and have made this my shrieval theme for my year in office. It is my primary ambition to try to use my year to make the Shrievalty more relevant to young people in Gwent. Many of these young people have not heard of the Office; others know nothing about the role of the High Sheriff. Many feel that those who hold the Office have little understanding





or experience of the issues they face as they progress towards adulthood. I want to try and change that perception and give a voice to young people – through me and the office I hold.

I have actively sought to engage with young people in Gwent in particular, visiting schools, children’s play projects, youth charities and supporting our police force in their crime prevention initiatives, as well as also undertaking the more traditional engagements attended by the High Sheriff. I am conscious that this is a role only for a year and that means that there is no time to lose.

One of my key responsibilities is to recommend a candidate to serve as High Sheriff in five years’ time. To that end, our County Nomination Panel, which was reconstituted and refreshed under my predecessor last year, has been drawn together with the aim of reflecting the diversity of the communities in Gwent. We have followed the HSA’s helpful guidance in appointing an independent chair and in

appointing panel members which represent different faiths and minority communities, such those with BAME backgrounds and the LGBTQI+ community. We also have representation from business, health, education and the justice sector. Our panel’s mission is to seek out and recommend suitable candidates for the role of High Sheriff, irrespective of their background or social circumstances. While keeping the process confidential, we have put in place procedures and training to ensure that our panel members understand principles of fair recruitment and selection; we have formulated a list of key skills and qualities looked for in potential candidates for High Sheriff, and we have adopted a model terms of reference to ensure consistency and fairness in all that we do.

A key aim for us in Gwent is that the financial burden of serving as High Sheriff should not preclude a suitable candidate from taking up the role. Each High Sheriff who has recently served in our county has sought to set an example to the next

incumbent to serve without incurring significant expense, which might be seen as a deterrent to potential candidates. We are also concerned about the optics as so many families in our communities are struggling financially. This is why we in Gwent feel that the High Sheriff should not be spending monies on lavish entertainments and hospitality for judges – and I can assure you that, as a very recently retired judge, the vast majority of my brethren do not want a formal dinner after a hard day in court, but would much prefer a simple supper, or a trip to a nice pub! We know that this advice has been echoed by the Lady Chief Justice herself, Dame Sue Carr. The High Sheriff should be capable of being drawn from all echelons of society and our conduct in office must be commensurate with that impression.

I will continue during my year of office to shining a light on the poverty of opportunity for children and young people in Gwent, who I know could achieve great things with the right support and services.



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