

Together we are stronger

Shahid Azeem DL

High Sheriff of Surrey 2024-25

It has been a great privilege to serve as High Sheriff of Surrey this year. This is my second term as High Sheriff as the first was much limited by the coronavirus pandemic back in 2020. I was very proud to be the first Muslim High Sheriff of Surrey. Back then I worked closely with the Lord-Lieutenant of Surrey, Michael More-Molyneux, to support the community during the pandemic and we initiated various community support groups which brought people together from different faiths in a very positive and proactive way, thereby proving my mantra – ‘Together we are stronger’.

I am now back in better times in the midst of serving the county for another twelve months and I believe I am the only High sheriff of Surrey to be honoured with the role by both a queen and a king!

There have been many highlights so far but for me my priorities have been to encourage groups of different faiths to work together for a better society, to improve health through sport and activity, to eradicate hunger in our county, to highlight charities in the county that are not on the radar, and to shine a light on the work undertaken by our emergency services.

In July I combined all of those initiatives at my garden party which was held at Sunbury Cricket Club. The catering was provided by the wonderful charity Surplus to Supper (surplustosupper.org), who used produce and drinks destined for landfill to create the refreshments for my event. Their ethos is to provide one free meal for charity from each meal catered by Surplus to Supper as part of their ‘Buy One Feed One Free’ initiative: providing free meals



Garden party food and entertainment provided by Surplus to Supper and the Include Choir



Part of the bocce team at LinkAble's fun day



Around the county for Surrey Day
All photos: Andy Newbold Photography

for people in need within our community, helping bridge the gap between food waste and food poverty locally.

The police cadets helped on the day and our Chief Constable and guests from various faith groups were in attendance. Entertainment included the fantastic Include Choir (include.org/the-include-choir/), a charity that welcomes people with and without learning disabilities or autism.

Surrey Day was a fabulous event this year wrapping up with a reception at the iconic Brooklands Museum where the resident Concorde provided a unique backdrop. During Surrey Day I also attended the Reigate Park Run, a community day in Oxted, Mandira's Kitchen at Albury and a Surrey Minority



Ethnic Forum event in Woking where I was treated to brilliant performances by SMEF members. It was great to see the creativity of the groups involved which included dance, music and poetry.

There was also cake and refreshments and lots of happy faces. The Vice Lord-Lieutenant of Surrey, Mary Creswell, and I then presented the children with gifts and met some of the performers (smef.org.uk).

One of the most memorable days for me was at Woking Sportsbox for an event organised by the charity LinkAble who held their first Paralympics community fun day, providing the opportunity for people with learning or physical disabilities and autism, along with non-disabled people and community groups, to enjoy accessible activities. It was an honour to be a part of such a well-organised community event and I joined in for a game of bocce which was great fun, as was biking around the track, which may have been even better had I realised I had to change gear – I did wonder why it was quite hard work! LinkAble and the many volunteers who helped to make it such a success did an amazing job and it was such fun for the many people who took part (linkable.org.uk).

Looking forwards, there is plenty more to do and more organisations to visit but I am very much reassured that our county is in good hands – there are a great many proactive members of the community who work hard to support those in need in Surrey. We have some real heroes and I hope to be able to identify as many as possible to say thank you on behalf of the county for their efforts – acknowledging people who make a difference is important too!