

# Magistrate recruitment initiative



With Vishavpreet Bhatia, Dr Derrick Anderson CBE (Lord-Lieutenant), Kate Wright and Gurpreet Bhatia at a Sant Nirankari peace mission event

experience enhanced my understanding of the challenges faced by the judiciary, particularly in the Family Courts of the Black Country. As I interacted with the magistrates it became clear to me that recruitment was a significant issue and one which I felt needed some real focus from myself as High Sheriff.

Recognising this challenge, I looked to address it by developing the 'High Sheriff's Magistrates Recruitment Programme'. After initial discussions with the Bench Chair Magistrates for the West Midlands, I focused on enhancing efforts to recruit a diverse group of magistrates. I firmly believe that a wide range of perspectives and backgrounds among our magistrates will not only enrich our justice system but also ensure that it meets the needs of our diverse community.

I began by hosting an online recruitment information session in June this year supported by experienced magistrates who shared their insights about the role and the application process. The session was designed to clarify the position and encourage individuals from all walks of life to consider this vital voluntary role in public service. I then held an in-person information session at the Grand Theatre in Wolverhampton, which provided an opportunity for in-depth discussions and a question and answer panel.

These sessions were not only beneficial for potential magistrates but also served to inform employers about the advantages of their staff becoming a magistrate. There has been an almost 700 per cent uplift across the Black Country in people applying to become magistrates since I launched this initiative. I am now exploring the possibilities of expanding this programme across other courts in the West Midlands particularly in the Birmingham courts.

My office will be delighted to share our work around communications and the magistrate recruitment programme should anyone like to read the detail – I believe it will have significant benefit and applicability if rolled out in other counties or, indeed, nationally.

## Douglas Wright MBE DL

High Sheriff of the West Midlands 2024-2025

In preparing to become the High Sheriff of the West Midlands in April of this year, I quickly realised how enormous the county is, comprising seven boroughs with such geographical spread. As such my first task was to write an electronic brochure about my shrieval year which I could share with people in the West Midlands. I particularly wanted a resource about the history and role of the High Sheriff that I could send to schools, colleges, organisations to educate them about this prestigious role and how my year would work. This has been a very powerful tactic which we have also supplemented with a High Sheriff's monthly electronic report which is now opened by over 6,000 subscribers who read and share my monthly news.

Nothing will ever replace visits but the awareness of the High Sheriff has been greatly increased by having a digital strategy to run in parallel with the activation part of the role. Awareness and advocacy are vital to ensure the longevity and relevance of a High Sheriff. To ensure that my efforts reach a wider audience, I

have embraced social media as a powerful tool for communication. By combining my presence on Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram, I am committed to providing regular updates on my journey as High Sheriff. This includes information about events, initiatives, and insights into the important work being done across the West Midlands. Additionally, all engagement bookings and contacts are now managed digitally through our website.

At the beginning of my shrieval year I had the privilege of spending three days at the Birmingham Law Courts. This



With Matt Jones and Gurpinder Bhullar on a visit to the Birmingham Civil and Family Justice Centre to present High Sheriff's Awards to the court staff