

Never forget the 'day job'

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High Sheriff of Kent 2025-26

The role of High Sheriff brings with it many privileges: the opportunity to meet many exceptional people and attend some memorable events.

The visit of His Majesty The King to the Cinque Ports of Deal and Walmer on the most glorious summer's day in July and the 85th Anniversary of Operation Dynamo, where we witnessed 66 little ships dispatched to Dunkirk – perhaps for the last time – will stand in the memory for a long time.

But, for all the wonderful occasions, one should never forget that the 'day job' is supporting all the different parts of the justice system. I have visited the Crown and Magistrates' Courts, probation service and prisons on many occasions to witness numerous hard-working and highly experienced people in action, and I have enjoyed each and every one.

I have nothing but praise and admiration for the 7,000 individuals who work for Kent Police – a great team who all seem highly committed and skilful in keeping our communities safer. To see how hard these officers work to ensure community cohesion, notably at the Vaisakhi in Gravesend, when 15,000 Sikhs process with members of the local community to the Gurdwara, is highly impressive.

One particular theme that has captured my attention is the constant battle to rehabilitate ex-offenders. I have visited all six prisons in Kent and am struck with how different their needs and challenges are. Our prisons are overcrowded; we have the highest reoffending rate anywhere and sadly sufficient time and resources do not



Carrying the Baton of Hope to raise awareness for suicide prevention in Sheerness

exist for the team to train new skills so as to reduce the chances of reoffending.

Yet, if you scratch the surface, there are some remarkable organisations helping ex-offenders find a new pathway:

- 2makeit offers rehabilitation through programmes in creative skills such as music, art and writing
- Glasshouse is a social enterprise offering second chances to women through horticultural training, with realistic prospects for employment thereafter
- Lime Bird is a company which trains and delivers qualifications for chefs
- HMP Rochester has an outstanding stonemasonry workshop
- HMP Maidstone has one of the largest textile workshops in the country.

We have been so impressed by all these activities that I showcased three of them at my garden party in July – there was some amusement at having 15 ex-offenders onsite serving senior members of the

judiciary, police and the local community.

Wherever possible, I have engaged with many different youth organisations. Two charities which tackle some of our toughest societal issues to bring positive change stand out in particular:

- The Baton of Hope is the largest ever suicide prevention campaign
- Charlie's Promise is dedicated to helping the fight against knife crime.

But, perhaps one of the most uplifting observations of the year is to see how many young people are engaging with the scouts, police and service cadets. All have waiting lists. I have attended many events and can see first-hand how these organisations develop lifelong skills of leadership, teamwork and communication, as well as building resilience and self-confidence.

It has been a highly enjoyable, stimulating and varied year... and we are only halfway through!



Joining the procession through Gravesend to celebrate the Sikh festival of Vaisakhi



Meeting His Majesty King Charles III in the Captain's Garden at Deal Castle in July