

Finding fulfilment in unexpected places

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High Sheriff of Norfolk 2025-26

I'm about six months into my year in office and it's proved to be as eye-opening and interesting as everybody said it would be. After the comprehensive training sessions provided by the High Sheriffs' Association I felt well prepared for my year and ready to hit the ground running. But of course the real learning takes place on the job and there is no substitute for just getting on with it. All the previous High Sheriffs I had spoken to in preparation for my year had emphasised that one should do it in one's own way and that indeed is the truth. Everybody has their own style and as I compare my activities with other High Sheriffs in my region I see that not only do individual High Sheriffs have subtly different ways of doing things but so do the individual counties. And long may that continue.

Of course, the areas of activity of a High Sheriff can be broadly divided into traditional justice and law and order work; civic activities; more formal set-piece occasions such as large church services and visits by members of the Royal Family; and visiting and encouraging any number of charities. In preparation for my year I gave a lot of thought to what the correct balance between these various activities



At the Norfolk Constabulary Long Service and Good Conduct Awards with Sarah Taylor (Police and Crime Commissioner) and Paul Sanford (Chief Constable of Norfolk)

the police and the courts, etc. but also the voluntary sector involved in areas such as drug rehabilitation charities, youth charities and homelessness charities. I have enjoyed all my areas of interaction immensely.

One of the surprises of my year has been that some of the events and functions I am invited to that I am perhaps most uncertain about have turned out to be the most interesting and fulfilling things that I have done. For example, I had expressed an interest in meeting a probation officer who had been recruited by

the probation service because of her 'lived experience', having herself spent time in prison. When I sat down with this individual I was not sure what to expect, but after a couple of hours of fascinating discussion, during which they were extremely open in revealing their life story, I became incredibly interested in their work and the possibilities their recruitment opened up. They now lead a successful team of a dozen or so similar people. They are able to empathise with newly released prisoners and the prisoners can relate to them in a way that perhaps they may find more difficult with a 'professional' probation officer. This team are living examples for newly released prisoners of what can be achieved and that, despite all the many and real difficulties faced by such individuals, it is possible to get back on the straight and narrow and turn your life around. I was also incredibly pleased to be able to assist in putting the probation officer in touch with a charity that could provide her with support for newly released prisoners who seemed to be falling through the cracks. A small thing but fulfilling nonetheless.

And there have been more such experiences that I would love to relate if space permitted. Suffice it to say that my year so far has been fulfilling and eye-opening. I have been welcomed with open arms by so many people and institutions. It really is a rare privilege to take on this role.



At RNLI Wells with Sarah, Countess of Leicester (Norfolk 2013) and Lady Lyons