

# Reflections and inspiration



So proud to attend the Somerset Police Cadets Awards for the Weston-super-Mare team which was held at police HQ in Avonmouth



Wearing my ceremonial coat Photo: Mark Pickthall

## Janet Montgomery

High Sheriff of Somerset 2025-26

Reaching the halfway point of my year as High Sheriff, I've been reflecting on what this unique role really offers. It is, of course, rooted in history and tradition, but it is also forward-looking, providing a bridge between our past and the communities we serve today.

When I first put on my ceremonial coat, with its silk lining I had specially designed with a vintage map of Somerset, I knew I wanted to set a clear focus for my year: to champion children and young people with opportunities that build their self-confidence and enable them to develop the personal skills that allow them to reach their best potential. That lining reminds me each time I wear it of the breadth of our county and of the next generation who will inherit it.

Over these six months, I've seen how creativity, opportunity and care can transform young lives – whether through

inclusive sport, outdoor learning or resilience-building programmes in schools, I've been struck by the commitment of those who believe in giving every child the chance to thrive. Many of these organisations share the same principle: children flourish when they are included, supported and given space to discover their own strengths.

A particular highlight has been time spent with the police cadets in Weston-super-Mare. Their enthusiasm, discipline and willingness to serve are inspiring. The cadet leaders, many of whom have given many years of voluntary service, embody the best of community spirit, guiding young people with patience and commitment. Watching the cadets grow in confidence and responsibility has reinforced for me the importance of encouraging young people into positive pathways where they can feel proud of their contribution.

Another strong thread of the year has been recognising bravery and service. From presenting Crown Court Awards to members of the public who intervened heroically to save a life, to acknowledging the tireless work of volunteers, the theme is the same: ordinary people can do extraordinary things. These ceremonies show the depth of courage and compassion alive in our communities.

Alongside recognition, the role also offers opportunities to provide practical support. Through High Sheriff's Awards, I've been able to offer meaningful grants to charities and community groups. From inclusive circus projects to children's creative workshops, these awards highlight not only the remarkable individuals leading such initiatives, but also the value of a little funding combined with public recognition.



It was an enormous pleasure to recognise Devito's Circus and Children's World with High Sheriff's Awards for the remarkable difference they continue to make to children and young people across Somerset photo: Mark Pickthall

The role has also provided a privileged window into the work of our emergency services. Visiting control centres, fire stations and ambulance hubs has shown me the professionalism, skill and courage of those who keep us safe and, just as importantly, the volunteers who stand shoulder-to-shoulder with them. It's easy for the public to see the uniform but not the human being behind it; this role gives you the chance to meet those people, hear their stories and carry their voices back out into the county.

It has also become clear to me that the year is most rewarding when approached with openness and curiosity. The diary quickly fills with ceremonies, services and official duties, but the real richness lies in the smaller moments: conversations over coffee, the laughter at a village fete or the unexpected humour of a busker in Glastonbury striking up 'I Shot the Sheriff' as I walked past in full court dress. These encounters remind me that the High Sheriff is not a distant figure but a part of the community.

Above all, setting a clear focus has been invaluable. For me, children and young people are at the heart of everything, and by holding that as my compass, I've been able to see connections across organisations, amplify their work and celebrate their achievements more fully. It has given shape to the year and, I hope, will leave something lasting beyond it.

The role of High Sheriff is not just ceremonial. It is relational. It is about standing alongside those who serve, those who volunteer and those who strive to make our county a better place. After six months, I feel both humbled and energised, and I look forward to the next six with gratitude, curiosity and a sense of possibility.