

Helen Bowden

I have been deeply honoured to serve as High Sheriff over the past 51 weeks (I was deprived of the extra week!). Nothing truly prepares you for what the role entails but it didn't take long to work out it would be life-changing, with unprecedented opportunities to make a positive contribution. As testimony to the endeavours of all who served before me, there is a universal welcome extended to the High Sheriff. This made the many ceremonial duties all the more enjoyable, but also opened doors to meet people at all levels in our community. The role of High Sheriff is tied closely to supporting the judiciary and this has shaped the work I have done and the people I have tried to help. I've appreciated the access and support I have had throughout, from Superintendent Helen Wain and colleagues in the Police service, Herefordshire magistrates led by Bench Chair, Sue Furnival and the Crown Court with Their Honours, Judges Jackson and Burbidge. I was delighted to attend the official opening of the newly refurbished Crown courtroom at the Hereford Justice Centre in October, restoring jury trials in Hereford. I've also spent time working closely with excellent Herefordshire Council departments including education, SAFE Team and housing.

I've spent considerable time in court, in prisons, and with probation, youth justice service and rehabilitation teams. It is so evident there is a spirit of care and respect for everyone in the process - an unflinching duty to justice but with understanding and compassion in equal measure. I was also drawn to the defendants and perpetrators, often victims themselves, and have learnt much about the role of trauma and adverse childhood experiences. I'm advocating for the introduction of a programme of therapeutic support for first time defendants in court, successful with reducing youth and sibling re-offending in other areas.

As a netball coach and county chair for decades, I was perhaps naturally gravitated towards youth support. I have spent time seeing first hand the wonderful work of diverse organisations, such as rugby, boxing and cheerleading clubs, Hereford cycle track, youth centres and young carers, to structured support at the Cartshed, Hands Hub, and farms such as Jamie's, Longland, Blakemere, Herefordshire Community Farm and The Houghton Project. I have also spent time with youngsters listening to their voices, most notably the Hereford Youth Council, St John Ambulance Cadets and several schools and alternative providers (and a special treat for me, I formally opened a brand new netball court at QE!). A couple of memorable events to mention, the School Games in summer with over 2,000 children in attendance, and the Young Farmers inter club competition - so much fun and I got to judge the 'Pimp My Tractor' contest!

Young people are crying out for more provision and this is recognised in the sector. There is positive momentum, particularly in Ledbury, and I have been collaborating with dedicated volunteers to achieve similar in Leominster and Bromyard. A mention here for the support provided by Will Lindesay of HVOSS and Talk Community. I am particularly proud to have

been part of a team of kindred spirits behind the launch of 'The Lemner', a new and much needed youth hub for Leominster.

In a similar vein, I am pleased to have helped instigate 'Getting Court', a programme bringing 15 to 18 year old school and college students to a morning in the Crown Court in Hereford or Worcester with the High Sheriff and Judge. The students have a unique opportunity to see proceedings first hand, and learn about the varied work of the professionals in attendance, with a lively debate about the session afterwards. This programme is underway, feedback is great and our new High Sheriff is pledged to continue a rolling programme so as many students as possible can experience this for themselves. It opens minds to career opportunities within the Judiciary as well as deeper thinking about the reasons for crime. I am grateful to Ian Smith, High Sheriff of Worcestershire, for sharing his knowledge of 'Getting Court', and the aforementioned Judges for embracing it with such gusto.

I have enjoyed many services in this beautiful cathedral and I pay tribute to the team who make this such a special place of celebration. I think back to a wonderful service for the Little Princess Trust, my own Shrieval Service, the Encore Choirs, and poignant services of remembrance.

Just to keep me busy, alongside my High Sheriff duties, I have kept up my netball coaching and squeezed in time for my day job. I am indebted to the teams at Orphans Press and eighteen73 for compensating for me during my excursions! I am particularly grateful to Becky Bufton, my PA for pushing me out the door and in the right direction and picking up the pieces left behind. And Consort Andy for a very similar role!

In closing I'd like to thank the band of previous High Sheriffs for sharing their goodwill, and the Lord Lieutenant and Victoria for their ever present support, including providing warm hospitality to Lord Sumption and his wife after his memorable and thought provoking talk on free speech at the Shrieval Lecture.

Thanks to all who have put their hands in pockets for the High Sheriff. A contender for bravest fundraiser must be Sue Furnival for jumping out of a plane with me from 15,000 feet. She shouldn't have said yes, has vowed to never do it again, but is as delighted as I am with the £7,000 + raised.

I am grateful to all of you who have opened your doors to explore ideas to improve the lives of people in our community who just need a helping hand. Life is complicated, and funding is tight for all the challenges, but you are all working to make a difference, and I'm grateful to you for sharing your time and knowledge with me. There are too many of you to mention which is why, with generous help from Herefordshire Freemasons, I held a special 'Thank You' dinner in March at the Green Dragon Hotel for those I have worked most closely with. An

undoubted highlight was presenting High Sheriff Awards to a number of young, and not so young, people who do unstinting good work, often under the radar.

It's been an honour and a privilege and I wouldn't have missed it for the world.