



High Sheriff of Oxfordshire

Person Specification for the High Sheriff of Oxfordshire

For consideration by proposers

Introduction

The Office of High Sheriff is one of the oldest secular offices in the United Kingdom, dating back over 1,000 years. Today, the role remains a vital link between the Crown and the community—a non-political, independent Royal appointment for one year, serving to uphold justice, support civic institutions, and champion community cohesion.

The High Sheriff of Oxfordshire works closely with the judiciary, police, emergency services, local authorities, the probation service, the voluntary and faith sectors, and key institutions such as the University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University. The role is also undertaken in partnership with the Lord-Lieutenant and the Lieutenancy. While the position is ceremonial in nature, it provides a unique platform to foster connection, promote charitable endeavour, and highlight unsung contributions to society.

Nominations for the Office are considered with care and discernment. This person specification is designed to assist those who are considering proposing a candidate, and to ensure that the individual selected is both able and inspired to fulfil the role with distinction.

Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible, a candidate must:

- Have a right of possession to land or property within Oxfordshire, whether through ownership, leasehold, beneficial interest via trust, or as a civil partner/spouse of a property holder.
- Not be currently:
 - A member of the House of Lords
 - A member of the House of Commons, the Welsh Parliament (Senedd Cymru) or the Scottish Parliament
 - A full-time member of the Judiciary, including Tribunal judges
 - An officer of the Royal Navy, Army or Royal Air Force on full pay
- Ideally live within the county and have a strong, visible connection to Oxfordshire's life, particularly through voluntary or charitable activity.
- Be politically neutral during the year of office and in the run-up to appointment.

People over the age of 70 and ordained clergy were once ineligible to serve as High Sheriffs, but after clarification from the High Sheriffs' Association in 2024, that is no longer the case. The candidate does not have to be a British national.

Core Responsibilities

The High Sheriff is expected to:

- Represent the Sovereign in the county in matters of law and order.
- Support the judiciary, especially His Majesty's High Court Judges during their time on circuit in Oxfordshire.
- Attend and support royal visits, civic ceremonies, and public occasions.
- Encourage and recognise work that contributes to community safety, particularly initiatives that support early intervention, crime prevention, and restorative justice.
- Promote and participate in voluntary sector activity, celebrating the work of individuals and organisations that strengthen society.
- Convene and host events that shine a light on those who are seldom heard and those who make a difference behind the scenes.
- Offer awards or certificates of recognition, often to unsung heroes, in collaboration with partners such as the Lord-Lieutenant, Police, Community Foundations, and charities.
- Exercise discretion, impartiality, and sound judgement in all activities and interactions.

Desired Qualities & Experience

An effective High Sheriff will demonstrate:

Community Leadership and Selflessness

- A strong record of voluntary or public service in Oxfordshire.
- The ability to unite individuals and organisations across different sectors and communities.
- A commitment to inclusion, fairness, and civic pride.

Constitutional and Ceremonial Insight

- Respect for the traditions of the Crown, judiciary, and public service.
- The capacity to represent the Office with dignity and relevance in a modern context.
- Understanding that the role is not defined by precedent, but by personal contribution.

Independence and Integrity

- Freedom from political or contentious entanglements.
- The ability to act with independence, humility, and discretion.

Practical Commitment

- Sufficient time and personal resource to fulfil the role. The position is entirely voluntary and unpaid; while some costs can be managed modestly, there is no reimbursement for travel, hosting or clothing.
- Willingness to plan and organise engagements personally, often with the help of a family member, trusted friend, or volunteer rather than professional support.

Personal Attributes

Ideal candidates will be:

- Organised and self-motivated, with the ability to manage a busy and diverse diary of engagements.
- Warm and confident, capable of both formal address and informal, approachable communication.
- Adaptable and creative, able to tailor the role to suit their own strengths while maintaining the dignity of the Office.
- Gracious and inclusive, at ease with people from all backgrounds, and a natural champion of those who serve without recognition.
- Publicly presentable, comfortable with ceremonial attire and able to attend events representing the Crown.

A Note on Style and Legacy

No two High Sheriffs are the same. The Association and Oxfordshire's Shrievalty are clear: each individual should bring their own priorities, personality, and creativity to the role. Some may focus on youth justice, others on interfaith relations, rural life, or the voluntary sector. What matters is not replication of past traditions, but a meaningful contribution to the life of Oxfordshire and a respectful continuation of a thousand-year-old role into the 21st century.

High Sheriffs work in close partnership with many of the county's leading institutions and networks—including the Lord-Lieutenant and the Lieutenancy, the judiciary and probation service, the University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University, as well as faith leaders, emergency services, charities, and community groups. The strength of the role lies in its independence and convening power: the ability to bring people together across divides to champion justice, inclusion, and civic pride.

A Note on Affordability

Although the role of High Sheriff is entirely voluntary and comes with no entitlement to reimbursement of expenses, it need not be financially prohibitive. With thoughtful preparation, resourcefulness, and some creativity, the office can be carried out with dignity and impact at a modest cost. The High Sheriffs' Association encourages flexibility and stresses that individuals should not feel bound by precedent or pressured to replicate previous spending. Events can be small and meaningful, hospitality informal, and traditional elements like dress and stationery adapted to suit the individual's budget. What matters most is the contribution to public life, not the scale of expenditure. The Office is open to anyone who meets the statutory criteria and brings the time, commitment, and spirit of service that the role requires. Previous High Sheriffs have included charity workers, public sector employees and owners of small businesses.

A small fund is held by the Oxfordshire Community Foundation to help with incidental expenses.

For further advice, guidance from past High Sheriffs, or to discuss a potential nomination in confidence, please contact the Oxfordshire Shrieval Team.