

Paxo and Widdy are new charity patrons

By **MATT NICHOLLS**

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TWO celebrities have lent their backing to a Newham-based charity's fight against homelessness.

TV journalist and host of University Challenge Jeremy Paxman, and former shadow Home Secretary and Strictly Come Dancing star Ann Widdecombe have signed up to become patrons of Anchor House.

The Canning Town centre provides accommodation and training for the homeless and staff have helped 300 people over the past two years.

Mr Paxman and Miss Widdecombe will be helping to raise awareness of the Bark-ing Road-based charity's work and their ongoing £15.6million capital appeal.

The 50-year-old Anchor House building was originally a hostel for seafarers visiting the ports of East London and bosses say their facilities are in dire need of a revamp.

The appeal cash will help to build a new block of 25 studio flats, workshops, training facilities and leisure areas.

Director Keith Fernett said: "Jeremy and Ann are strong advocates of finding long-term solutions to homelessness and we are very pleased to have their sup-port."

"Full planning permission for the new block has already been secured and we have raised £6m so far, but more support is needed."

Volunteers were out in force at railway stations in Central London and Canary Wharf shopping centre last week, raising money to mark Homelessness Sunday.

Anchor House has picked up a clutch of awards in recent years, including four National Training Awards last year.

Staff have also scooped a Charity Times award for technology use and in 2007 and 2009 the centre won the Michael Whippman Award for Innovation in Homelessness.



SUPPORTER: Jeremy Paxman



BACKING: Ann Widdecombe

Top gon for City Airport

LONDON City Airport named the best in the industry leaders.

The Royal Docks site top prize at this year's Travel Awards.

It is the first time than 10 years it has been awarded.

London City saw a shift in attention from Gatwick, Heathrow and Southampton, with unanimous support in their decision.

The airport was praised for its continued growth in spite of difficulties for the airline industry.

Snow, ash clouds and economic uncertainty were one of its most challenges on record.

Chief executive Gooding collected the Grosvenor House Award at Park Lane from Lord Manford, who was in the evening.

Mr Gooding said he was honoured to receive the accolade, of Best Airport by this very distinction of corporate travel who are at the heart of travel policies and demands of business.

"Through continued investment in infrastructure improvement initiatives we ensure every airport's operation is as safe as possible and less fast passenger

SIR ROBIN LOSES APPEAL IN 'VANITY SPEND' ROW

NUMBER crunchers have refused to uphold a complaint against a Government minister made by Newham's mayor.

Sir Robin Wales wrote to the UK Statistics Authority in December objecting to figures published in the Coalition's local government finance settlement.

He accused Tory Communities Secretary Eric Pickles of "trying to pull the wool over the public's eyes".

But in a letter to Sir Robin, authority chairman Michael Scholar said it was

"not appropriate or practical" for his body to intervene.

"Our role is to make sure that public debate is well informed by good statistics, not ourselves to become a player or referee in the debate," he added.

Sir Robin's complaint centred on two sets of data released by Mr Pickles' department.

The first listed cuts in local authority spending power and said no council would face a cut of more than 8.8 per

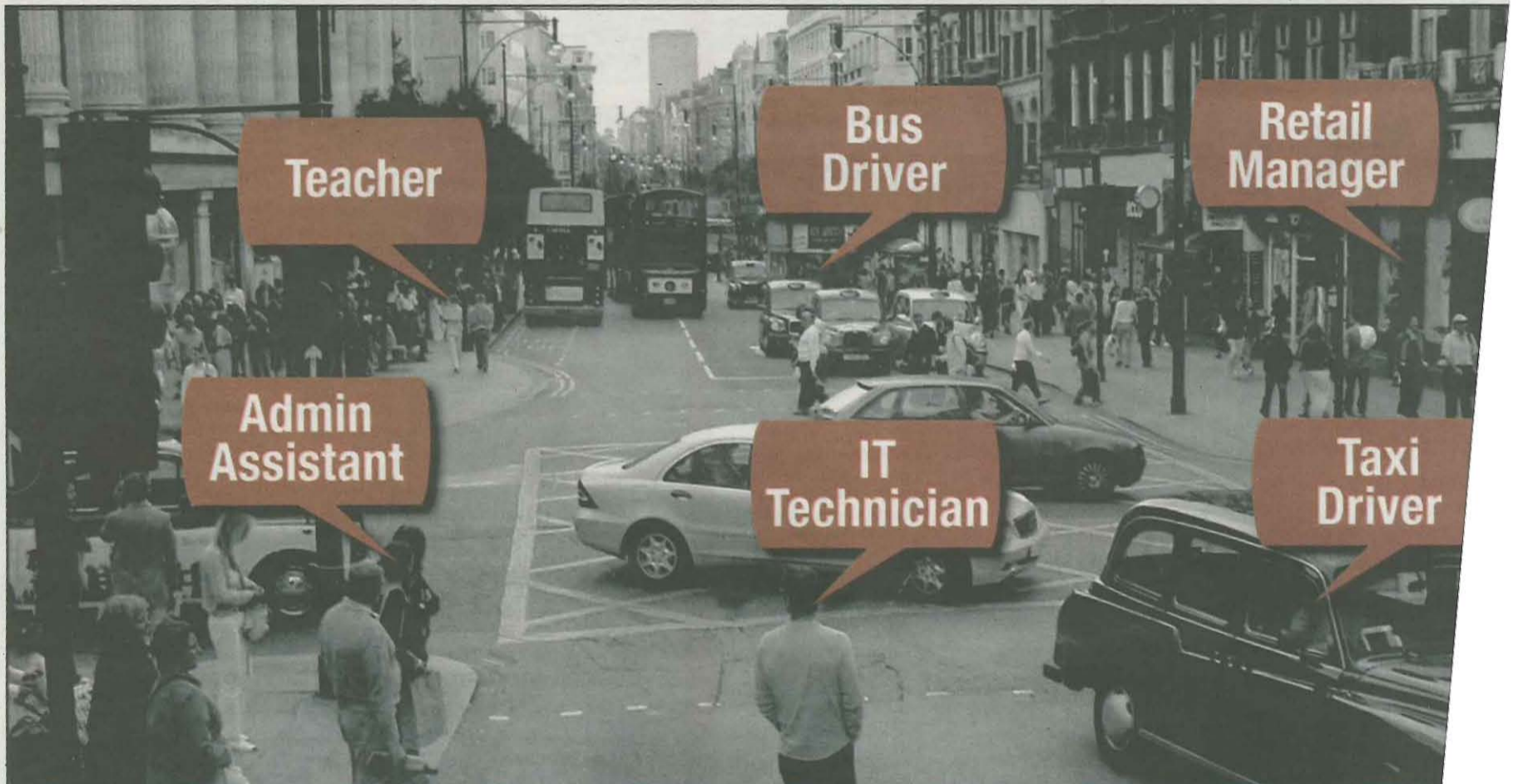
cent. The second showed formula allocations to authorities and the amount each spent by head, with more cash going to deprived areas such as Newham.

But Sir Robin said the figures masked greater cuts and pointed to research by the New Local Government Network, which showed deprived areas would take more of a hit.

Speaking after he lodged his complaint, he said: "Why use one set of statistics one week and completely dif-

ferent figures the next, if not to secure favourable headlines? Of course, the real story is that he's trying shift attention from the swingeing cuts his department has imposed upon some of London's most deprived areas, while boroughs like Richmond escape lightly."

Speaking after the authority's decision, local government minister Grant Shapps said the complaint had been a "woeful attempt to deflect attention away from Newham's vanity spending".



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