

Opportunity to acknowledge exceptional work of unsung heroes

Police and Crime Commissioner **Alison Hernandez** salutes unsung heroes



THIS month has been an incredible one for award ceremonies which recognise the dedication, bravery and determination of individuals whose efforts have significantly helped others at times of crisis and contributed to improving community safety.

The first was the Torbay Business Awards which saw me present Andrew Bond, owner of Torquay family-run business Premier Torbay Central, with the Business Community Champion Award, sponsored by my office.

Back when I launched our Street Focus project in Torquay in spring 2025, and to this current day, Andrew

and his partner Deb have shown consistent commitment in the battle against fighting escalating retail crime in the town.

Their efforts, along with other traders in the town, are making a difference – especially those signed up to business crime reduction solution called UK Partners Against Crime (UKPAC). It is proving to be effective at tackling persistent offenders and is reducing shoplifting and antisocial behaviour.

Praise also must be given to the other two finalists in the category: Tom Sharp, chief executive of Platinum Security, and Richard Randle-Jones, Union Square Shopping Centre manager. Community safety is one of my key priorities and they both do so much to make Torquay a better place for all to live, work and visit.

The following week, the third Recognition of Excellence in Policing

Awards was held which highlights the exceptional work being carried out Devon & Cornwall Police officers, staff and volunteers. The event was held in the presence of High Sheriffs, Deputy Lord Lieutenants and the civic chairmen and women from Plymouth, Cornwall, Devon and Torbay.

A heartfelt thanks to the Museum of Policing who organised it. While they celebrate policing's history it was great they recognise the need to celebrate the best of policing of today.

At a time when policing is receiving many negative headlines, it has never been more important to acknowledge all those who go above and beyond daily to keep us safe and ensure victims of crime receive justice and support.

It was humbling to hear incredible stories ranging from those who have left no stone unturned to ensure justice for victims to those whose pioneering work is now being replicated nationwide.

Also among those recognised was Tiverton police enquiry officer Penny Reddick, who was commended for her resilience and dedication during a particularly challenging period, single-handedly keeping the front desk open to the public after three colleagues left in the space of a month.

Last week, my office sponsored the Team of the Year category at the Devon and Somerset Law Society Awards which celebrate excellence across the legal profession in Devon and Somerset.

The sponsorship reflects my commitment to support organisations



Alison Hernandez, PCC

and professionals who play a vital role within the wider criminal justice system.

Teamwork lies at the heart of both effective policing and the legal profession. Whether supporting victims, safeguarding vulnerable people, delivering access to justice or helping resolve complex legal matters, strong teams are essential to achieving positive results.

The winner was the Residential Property Team at Kitson Boyce, who were commended for clearly demonstrating the strength of the whole being greater than the parts. The judging panel also gave a highly commended in this category to Every's family team for their collaborative culture.

Last weekend, representatives from my office attended the Plymouth Youth Awards which is organised by YMCA Plymouth. The aim of the awards is to celebrate those living in the city aged under 21 who deserve to be acknowledged for their incredible achievements, feats and dedication to creating change.

This was the third year I have sponsored an award – this year renamed the Commissioner's Community Safety Award – and we had three truly inspirational finalists.

Eddie Keaney, 16, and Lucy Woodman, 18, were named in a joint nomination as one of them bravely rescued a 90-year-old man from a severe house fire and the other took on the role of being supportive to those at the scene before the emergency services arrived. The other nominee was 17-year-old Nevaeh Lake who gave vital first aid to a child who fell off their bike and suffered a significant head injury. Her quick actions before paramedics arrived saw her nominated in my category.

It was impossible to choose between the finalists because of their selfless acts which made such a difference to those in dire need. That is why they were all declared winners and the communities in which they live should be very proud of their compassion and care for others. There are also many unsung heroes we go about their everyday lives doing the best they can for others without recognition. I thank all those who make this world a better place to be in so many ways.

Gridlock: 'better bus service' is not the answer

Rail transport campaigner **Tim Steer** can see improvements coming down the line



IN the middle of the night on June 4 this year, GWR successfully sent a five-carriage class 175 test train down from Exeter St David's to Barnstaple.

Network Rail cleared the test train to run down the North Devon line, also known as the 'Tarka Line'. This train was to prove that it was indeed possible to have more than four carriages serving the North Devon line, thereby increasing the much-needed capacity at peak times.

Today, the North Devon line is already well known to be over-capacity at peak times, which suppresses demand as there is no more room.

GWR drivers will now be trained to use the five-carriage class 175s, and we may find them in operation later this year!

Exeter Central ticket gates have been expanded and improved through funding from a special programme designed to support projects that reduce costs and increase revenue, along with a contribution from the Department for Transport.

Network Rail and GWR have worked on the delivery of the ticket gates that will give many a sigh of relief, especially when college students are eager to get to lectures and catch that next train home.

The Northern Devon Railway



A Class 175 test train at Barnstaple station

Development Alliance stakeholders are meeting up in July to discuss funding for the HMT/Department for Transport-compliant Strategic Outline Business Case to improve the line so that we can have an additional frequency of two services per hour that will also solve the capacity challenges for many generations.

The Devon Metro 2 rail map is showing signs of delivery, with a brand

new Okehampton Interchange coming later this year that will act as the latest parkway station for Devon and Cornwall.

Cullompton and Wellington stations are now at a procurement stage where we will see them in operation in the next two or three years, thanks to the 2025 central government's spending review.

Wellington station is viewed as

Devon-related, although in Somerset, as it will be used by Devon rail users, and it will help ease parking capacity and vehicle congestion at Tiverton Parkway.

Talking of congestion, by now, those of you who live around Bideford and Barnstaple will be joining the daily congestion that is being caused by the B3233 being closed by Wales and West Utilities.

These new gas works are essential, but they will feel perpetual, as the road is well-known to have a network of communication, gas, electric, fresh and waste water pipes buried under its surface.

Even the Tarka Trail will be dug up in years to come to improve ductile capacity to the riser main that runs waste water from Fremington to the Cornborough cliffs.

Unfortunately, Barnstaple and Bideford are now going into gridlock due to the 11 months of utility roadworks along the B3233, and this only highlights that a 'better bus service' is not the answer.

A rail link between Bideford and Barnstaple would be the ultimate solution to allow the utility companies to close the road for future essential upgrades and repairs to the network.

Looking at the Devon Metro 2 Rail map, we can see that there will be a future Edginswell station in Torbay, Monkerton station along the Exmouth branch line, Cullompton and Wellington stations (already in the pipeline for delivery), Okehampton Interchange being delivered this year, and Plympton to service the commuters into Plymouth City.

We also have two rail extensions on the map with Tavistock to Bere Alston that will ease congestion into Plymouth (that has already had a funded and completed Strategic Outline Business Case), and Bideford to Barnstaple that will finally ease the congestion to Barnstaple and also into Exeter.