

After months of negotiations and searches for alternative accommodation through CW&C, the Lower Community Office (under Sainsbury's building) was vacated by the Refugee Assist Group on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2024. Neston Town Council officers assisted with rubbish removal and the unit has been cleaned. The paintwork will be refreshed by our caretaker in the new financial year. Working with our colleagues at Cheshire West & Chester Council, and by pursuing external advertising through local agents, it is very much hoped that the space will be let quickly, creating an income stream for Neston Town Council through the Asset Management Agreement. On 18<sup>th</sup> January, an online Teams meeting was held with CW&C officers to progress Town Hall repairs, the Council's funding bid and Asset Management discussion.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> January, myself and our Administration Assistant received fire alarm call-point testing training from our Market & Town Hall Officer. Suggestions were made to improve the efficiency of the testing process which have been followed through since this date with other building tenants in the Town Hall. Neston Town Council now ensures all fire call-points in the building are built into the weekly testing schedule. On 31<sup>st</sup> January I attended a training session on "How Local Councils Can Benefit from the Levelling Up Agenda" which was delivered online by NALC.

Unfortunately, so far in 2024 there have been several issues with the Town Hall roof across multiple areas. In mid-late January the heavy winds and storms caused the felt to lift on the flat roof over the meeting room. It was caused by excess felt that needed to be trimmed when it was first applied. This issue has now been rectified. In early February, after a huge deluge, ceiling tiles had to be removed from the Chief Officer's office due to them becoming completely saturated by water. This was the second time that water had leaked onto the desk and surrounding areas in as many months and it was very close to PC equipment. All faults are reported to CW&C as the building owners at the time of discovery.

February was a busy month for myself and Neston's officer team. All staff appraisals took place and have now and been written up, signed by staff members, and filed. Staff were consulted throughout the process as I introduced a new self-assessment style system and review format Employee Development Review (EDR). We held an open dialogue and all of the reviews were completed in depth. I am pleased to report that all staff reviews are now up to date going forward, the last time appraisals took place was in November 2021. Feedback was taken to HR Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> February and recommendations from this committee will be considered at Full Council on

19<sup>th</sup> March 2024. Staff members have also completed some additional training courses following the appraisals to make the best possible use of the Staff Training budget before 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. Training helps staff in their professional development, helps to improve confidence, self-belief and learn new skills. Training also helps staff to achieve their job descriptions.

Myself and Town Council Officers met in person with the CW&C Property Services Team and the Senior Manager of Communities and Engagement: Rural, to discuss the Town Council's funding bid in detail and look at ways to make the Town Hall more accessible. Unfortunately, when the results were announced at the end of February, Neston Town Council's bid for the government's Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF); Levelling-Up Bid was unsuccessful. Officers found the process to be extremely enlightening and hopefully this will provide a spring-board for future successful bids. The process has also developed our conversations further with our colleagues at CW&C Council with regards to future service provision.

I provided feedback on behalf of Neston Town Council to form part of ChALC's area meeting, to review Neston's experiences of the Local Council Award Scheme process. This feedback was to form part of a wider presentation, helping to ensure Neston is represented across the borough. This is in addition to the day-to day running of the Council's services, supporting staff, answering member queries, and meeting preparation in all forms. I meet with staff members regularly and also on an individual bases to problem solve and discuss any matters arising from committees or the Town Hall, i.e. gazebo insurance and lift maintenance issues. Work on the Delivery Plan has also been ongoing with M&TH and the Finance & Administration Committee.

Neston Town Council received a positive interim internal audit, with the only two points highlighted being ones that were suggested by our RFO. We look forward to tying up any loose ends prior to the end of the current financial year on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 before the accounts are closed in due course on 23/24.

**Zoë Dean**  
**Locum Chief Officer**  
**Neston Town Council**  
**14<sup>th</sup> March 2024**