



LOCUM CHIEF OFFICER'S REPORT

FULL COUNCIL MEETING (FC3/51)

22nd October 2024

The scaffolding installation for the essential roof repairs at the Town Hall commenced on 4th September. It hasn't all been plain sailing with some asbestos being identified in the outside section of the roof which does put pressure on timescales. Neston Town Council is working closely with the roof contractors and Site Manager in order to facilitate these improvement works with the least disruption as possible to the public.

Our summer member recruitment drive has proved very successful by attracting four prospective councillors who have come forward for co-option at the October Full Council meeting. We look forward to filling these vacancies and topping up our committee membership to encourage lively debate and fresh ideas. I have had the pleasure of meeting with all prospective co-optees ahead of their appointment.

Following the update of the Administration Assistant to the Community Engagement post prior to the summer break, all paperwork has been completed and a new contract of employment issued. Much of the work that Council officers undertake is largely behind the scenes with management team meetings to problem solve and progress matters before bringing papers and decision-making to committee. I hold regular meetings with the team, both individually, and as a whole, to ensure everyone remains well informed and on-track with targets and objectives both personally and for the Council as a whole. The administration team's new mobile phone has already proved to be a valuable asset for streamlining our social media plans and patterns, which I oversee through my role as overall manager of the paid service.

Unfortunately, the lift issues at the rear of the Town Hall have continued, highlighting the poor accessibility of the Town Hall. After the lift being out of order a number of times over the summer a visit from an engineer managed to get the equipment working again. We are still awaiting the installation of an S-Line in order to make the newly fitted call-out device functionable. The Market & Town Hall Manager and I compiled a detailed timeline of lift issues which was submitted to Cheshire West & Chester Council's Property Services Manager as we lobby for repairs to be fixed in a timely manner.

The last quarter has been ICT heavy, with several meetings taking place with the Council's ICT consultant in order to progress the updating of the photocopier contracts, equipment and background research along with explanations regarding our internet service providers and possible required updates for phonelines. It is hoped that this will promote cost-saving

mechanisms. I have been in consultation with three photocopier providers in order to reduce the Council's monthly outgoings with photocopier contracts and improve the level of equipment that we currently operate, as our current machines have become antiquated and unfit for purpose. The Town Council has also had to engage ICT support for recent Subject Access Requests which has proved time-consuming and quite costly to the Council.

In September I met with Rachael Furey to discuss closer partnership working between our two organisations and bringing wellness events to Neston. Rachael and I have since collaborated further, following an informal approach from the Civic Hall Trustees for the Council to consider raising financial aid through the Council's precept next year to fund repairs to the Civic Hall roof. I am currently investigating the feasibility and legalities of this request on the Council's behalf and I will present the findings at a future meeting, prior to the budget setting process. Full Council will receive a presentation from representatives of the trustees at the October meeting.

I am in the process of investigating upgrades to our Omega Accounting system with the potential introduction of a Purchase Ledger system for 2025/26 to streamline the Council's accounts and improve the Year-End process internally. I attended a *Successful Bid Writing* online training course on 11/09/24.

A large proportion of my time was spent researching and summarising the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and consulting CW&C Planning colleagues for advice on the next steps. This process has helped to build relationships with other CW&C officers and shows that Neston Council and its members are keen to act when the time is right. Currently, central government has not determined what the next steps are for unitary councils at the moment, prior to the changes to the framework coming into effect. We will be kept informed by CW&C.

The Mayor of Neston and I attended MP Samantha Dixon's Neston Coffee Morning in September, forging some excellent links with the MP's team of staff and contact sharing. We hope the Town Hall will be utilised as a future venue for the MP's office for meetings on some of their constituency days in Neston.

Earlier this month I conducted a tour of the Town Hall premises for Cheshire West & Chester Council's Chief Executive and other CW&C officers and councillors, where current issues with the building were highlighted.

I hold regular pre-meetings with committee chairs which ensures the meetings are well-informed and we have accurate information to hand for members.

Zoë Dean
Locum Chief Officer
Neston Town Council
17th October 2024