

LOCUM CHIEF OFFICER'S REPORT
FULL COUNCIL MEETING (FC6/82)
20th January 2026

It is hard to believe that the festive period has already been and gone. Neston Town Council organised and funded the 2025 Christmas Lights Switch On which took place on Saturday 29th November as well as the festivities leading up to the big day. We also hosted Santa's Grotto in the Lower Community Office which was a brand-new location for the year. The Community & Environment Team worked tirelessly and performed miracles to pull all of the strands of this event together during a tight timeframe. For the first time, Neston Town Council hosted a three-week long Christmas Tree Festival in the Town Hall which featured 20 real trees. Visitors and residents really enjoyed seeing the wonderful trees all beautifully decorated, showcasing the individualism and creativity of the local groups in our town who are so passionate about their causes. The thought and imagination involved in decorating the themed Christmas trees was very special indeed. Free events and craft activity sessions also took place during the afternoon at NCYC, the Civic Hall and the Town Hall, with everyone culminating at the Cross in the High Street for the switch-on. Thank you to all of our volunteers and supporters.



We welcomed a new councillor into our midst at the extraordinary Full Council meeting in November – Cllr Colin Dignam-Gill. Col has lots of experience in his field of work: event safety and security and we look forward to working alongside him. This leaves just one casual vacancy now for the final position in the Neston Ward. We remain hopeful that an applicant will come forward ahead of this month's Full Council meeting.

Winding back over the past three months, Neston has enjoyed a very busy autumn and winter season with services for Remembrance Day taking place in the town on both Remembrance Sunday 9th November and a short service outside the Church of St Mary and St Helen at 11am on 11th November 2025. The council's mid-year internal audit took place at the Town Hall on 15th December. The Mayor, Cllr Davies, has attended a number of events recently including volunteering at the Christmas Lights Switch On, The Mayor of Mold's Civic Service and the legal service at Chester Cathedral for the High Sheriff of Cheshire.



Even during the particularly busy periods of the year the usual office work, procedures and protocols must still rumble on behind the scenes. I have started work on the Assertion 10 data requirements, holding a meeting with the RFO to analyse the council's data fields. Our findings have been submitted to the Council's auditor so that any gaps in the council's compliance can be identified. This goes hand in hand with reviewing the council's data requirements, researching GDPR training refresher courses for the team, and seeking advice regarding upcoming changes. I attended the ChALC Larger Councils meeting hosted by Jackie Weaver at Northwich. These meetings are a great opportunity to network and share experiences and knowledge with other Town Clerks.

Town Hall maintenance remains a never-ending task. We continue to pursue our Cheshire West colleagues for assistance with faults over and above our financial cap. The Market & Town Hall Manager and I met with the council's H&S provider in November to check and update the General Risk Assessment and Fire Risk Assessment for the building. Neston Town Council employs a small and dedicated team who continuously keep on top of any issues to ensure we remain compliant across all aspects of health and safety. We have recently been finalising options for the automatic bollard repairs on Brook Street. We hope this issue will be resolved soon. Neston Town Council hosted an additional market on Tuesday 23rd December to ensure residents had the opportunity to shop for any last-minute items and pick up food orders from our regular traders. Neston Market enjoyed a two-week break following a busy run up to Christmas.

Budget setting is always a hectic and stressful time for councils and local public services alike, because the public purse is under more strain than ever. The Town Council is heading into 2026/2027 in a stronger financial position than it has since the pandemic. For this, first and foremost, we thank our diligent Finance Manager/RFO but thanks must also be offered to our whole team of councillors and staff for always striving to secure the best prices and utilising local services where possible, to help ensure the best value for money for the council, as per the Town Council's Financial Regulations. All of the council committees begin working through their budget requirements at the September committees for the figures to be able to work their way through the system and be scrutinised by the Finance & Administration Committee twice before January's Full Council. This year we added an extra level of financial scrutiny, once the taxbase figure had been confirmed by CWaC, to ensure complete accuracy. Members of the F&A Committee, along with myself and the RFO, hosted a finance working group meeting during the first week of January to study and analyse the effects three different percentage rises could have on the overall 2026/27 budget. 83% of the properties within Neston are in Bands A-D. I feel confident that members can now make an informed decision on next year's precept. These options will be presented to all members at the meeting on 20th January 2026.

I hope everyone is feeling refreshed after the Christmas break and ready to tackle the year ahead.

Zoë Dean
Locum Chief Officer
Neston Town Council
15th January 2026