

As we motor towards the final quarter of the current financial year, we are looking forward to lighter days and early signs of spring, as well as realigning our aims and objectives for the next three months. Following the Christmas break, Neston Town Council's staff team met to refocus our minds and share where we are up to with the current state of play. Budgets have contributed towards a large portion of time being taken up for officer discussions and committees lately, with Council on course to set its budget for the 2024/25 next week.

Neston's administration team worked tirelessly in the run up to Christmas to submit a detailed and comprehensive application for the government's Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF); Levelling-Up Bid. Neston, as a destination within the Cheshire West & Chester borough, was highlighted as an area for potential funding, should the bid meet the criteria. Neston Town Council is pursuing an application under E11: Investment in capacity building and infrastructure support for local civil society and community groups. If we are successful, this could pave the way for future funding bids and it would be groundbreaking in helping to make the Neston Town Hall a much more easily accessible and useable public space for all.

Neston Town Council's staff team happily volunteered for top-up health and safety training back in November which updated up the Council's protection for ladder training, working at height and fire safety. Both myself and our new Administration Assistant completed these training courses, with our Caretaker/MEO joining us for the ladder safety training. November was a Health and Safety focussed month with the Town Hall's annual H&S inspection and site visit by Terrain HR Ltd. Both the Town Hall Risk Assessment and Fire Risk Assessment documents have been updated. These will be received at the upcoming Market & Town Hall Committee next month.

Neston Town Hall's front windows were decorated in-house for the festive period with a winter wonderland, candy-cane lane theme. Cost-effective LED net lighting was purchased online and installed by our team in the rear glass windows over-looking Market Square. This made a great saving compared to professional quotations received, meaning that the Community & Environment committee could focus its Christmas budget elsewhere. These activities also provided a good opportunity for team building and for us to release our creativity! Decorations were sourced locally, all coming in under budget.

Plans are afoot to kick-start reception/meet and greet services when phone logistics have been arranged. The beady-eyed amongst you may have already noticed we have a hot-desk in the warm and welcoming space to allow for basic staff cover at the front of the building for several hours per week. This

shows Neston Town Council's continued effort to provide an accessible and front-facing service for the community.

A number of meetings were held between officers, as well as the Chair of Market & Town Hall Committee, as the new Market Policy reached completion. The updated policy will be implemented on 1st April 2024. The much-anticipated 2022/23 Financial Report was received and scrutinised in depth to ensure accuracy and to assist members in grasping a firm understanding of the figures that amount to the operation of both the Market and Town Hall. Further meetings were held in the form of an Extraordinary M&TH meeting where the breakdown was considered in detail. In addition to a meeting in early December between NTC and officers at Cheshire West to study this report and take the findings forward. Talks are ongoing with CW&C officers regarding an extension of the Town Council's Asset Management Agreement; a strong wish of Neston Town Council, which was reaffirmed during discussions in the autumn.

The Corporate Support Officer and I met with regards to streamlining the maintenance sheets and feeding back on procedures for weekly/monthly maintenance tasks. Additional fire-exit signs have been installed in the basement area to the market stall access doors. Work is ongoing to make repairs to the outside meter cupboards, at the side of the Town Hall. Maintenance requirements have been highlighted for a number of outside areas across Market Square, which will be scheduled for completion in the spring. Senior officers met to determine the gazebo buy-back situation and to gather information regarding any insurance implications.

Unfortunately, October did see a fresh ceiling leak in the Chief Officer's office and there is still currently a leak in the small meeting room ceiling. CW&C has been informed and Council contractors have visited site. We expect the repairs to be carried out by the close of the current financial year.

In general house-keeping terms, staff leave sheets are now up to date for the current year, all following the same system for booking and signing off required leave. Work continues in the background on the Town Council's Delivery Plan which has been discussed in depth at Community & Environment, Market & Town Hall and Finance & Administration Committee. These committees have broken down the plan into committee-focussed sections and now decided on which goals to focus on for the coming year.

Moving forward, staff appraisals are currently being scheduled to take place next month to ensure positive ongoing development throughout the team. I continue to hold an open dialogue with our colleagues at Cheshire West in order to contribute to improvements at the Town Hall premises and to lobby for Neston.

Zoë Dean
Locum Chief Officer
Neston Town Council
18th January 2024