



## LOCUM CHIEF OFFICER'S REPORT

### FULL COUNCIL MEETING (FC5/67)

21<sup>st</sup> January 2025

The roof repairs to the Town Hall are progressing well and they are on track to be finished by the end of February. New windows have been installed on the south side of the Main Hall and the roller blinds are due to be reinstalled soon after the New Year. For the moment, a temporary fix for the flat roof leak at the rear of the building is in progress, which has been causing some disruption for hirers in the recent bad weather through water ingress into the side meeting rooms. Neston Town Council officers are still 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 and users of the building. We have been informed other improvements may follow in the new financial year. A new platform lift was installed at the entrance of the Town Hall in mid-December, amidst some ongoing issues with access, which the staff team is consulting with the surveyor to overcome.

Along with partner organisations including Neston Library, NCYC and the Parish Church, Neston Town Council organised and delivered the Christmas lights switch on event on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2024, which was a huge undertaking. In previous years the event has been outsourced to an independent organisation, with funding provided by the Town Council. An indoor craft market featured in the Main Hall, with hot food stalls and free entertainment and games on the Market Square. The switch on was memorable for many reasons, but one of the highlights was the Ice Queen from Narnia, Father Christmas and the Junior Council switching on the town's Christmas lights. Revellers also enjoyed musical entertainment from Port Sunlight Lyceum Brass Band and Neston Samba Pirates. Special thanks must also be offered for the valuable entertainment contributions from Little Actors. It is hoped that some repairs and improvements to the lights can be made this year, after storm damage to the Christmas tree on Parkgate Parade. Running the event was a steep learning curve, but the Council is committed to providing free festive entertainment for residents to kick-start the Christmas period.

F&A Committee approved the necessary photocopier upgrades in December and the contract for the new service was signed by the Chief Officer on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2025. The Town Council had been out of contract for several years and a combined annual saving of £300 will now be achieved, for new machines with upgraded technology and capabilities, which is excellent news for both productivity and reliability.

A sizeable proportion of my time and resources were apportioned to the Council's Extraordinary Full Council meeting, which took place on 3<sup>rd</sup> December

2024 in the Town Hall. Combining in-depth background research and ongoing communications with the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC), the Cheshire Association of Local Councils (ChALC), as well as frequent communications with other Cheshire Town Clerks to ascertain rigorous advice for Neston Town Council. 67 members of the public were in attendance at the lively meeting to share their views with the Town Council on the Civic Hall roof funding proposal. Although, it was disappointing to many that the Town Council resolved not to raise the precept to make the funding possible, Council works hard to deliver for the whole community of Neston and has to consider all residents when such strong bearings on the precept are requested.

ChALC's training sessions for the New Year have resumed and all of our new councillors attended the induction for new councillors' course. It is great to see continued commitment from our members, both new and experienced. Neston Town Council still has two vacancies for volunteer councillors which we are able to fill by co-option.

Negotiations with Cheshire West & Chester's Property Services Team are ongoing with relation to the Asset Management Agreement, an update meeting is being scheduled to take place later month. Discussions have also been raised relating to the Town Hall's rateable value, along with other premises it manages, which could see an increase in charges.

This month, Full Town Council is requested to find solutions to establish a Ranger Service in Neston for the new financial year 2025/2026. We hope this will be a well-received service from April onwards for smaller maintenance tasks throughout the town.

Full Council will set its budget for 2025/2026 on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2025. The preparation of such a broad document has involved many months behind the scenes of number crunching and review for the RFO. This also includes numerous committee meetings, and officer meetings with committee chairs to strategize and break down the figures before arriving at what will be presented at the meeting. The Mayor of Neston has been vocal about keeping the precept request at a sensible level this year, as the Council understands that many people are struggling with other rising bills and the cost-of-living crisis.

**Zoë Dean**  
**Locum Chief Officer**  
**Neston Town Council**  
**January 2025**