

TALKING
Together

WINTER 2010

News from Public Services in West Cheshire

Christmas fun for all

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◀ **Charlie and Sam Chowdhury** at the Christmas Village in Chester

Welcome

We're ready for the spending cuts

By COUNCILLOR
MIKE JONES
LEADER OF CHESHIRE
WEST AND CHESTER
COUNCIL



We are in difficult financial times and I can inform you that your Council is ahead of schedule and well prepared for the spending cuts that all councils are facing.

When the authority was formed, we were advised by government to expect a reduction in the amount of money we would have available to us. We therefore put in place a robust and challenging plan to deliver savings. In the first year we achieved net reductions of £35m, this saving came after we had invested £8m into services for the most vulnerable adults and children in our communities and was achieved by removing over 1,100 jobs.

We have continued to look for opportunities to reduce costs and I am pleased to say that this year we plan to save a net £7.5m. Our intention is to reduce our costs before we have to cut services.

All these savings mean that we are already some way towards meeting the inevitable funding shortfalls over the next four years. It is, therefore, essential we continue to look for ways to save money whilst continuing to improve services to you. And we want you to help us do this by using the exciting You Choose tool explained on this page.

We also have an aim of a 0% Council Tax increase next April, which would be a reduction in the cost of Council Tax in real terms. We feel that this would be a significant way to help you at this difficult time.

As well as maintaining our Council Tax levels, we are focused on achieving three strategic objectives over the coming years, these are:

- developing a modern and efficient council
- delivering excellent facilities and services for residents in the areas that they tell us are important
- delivering our regeneration projects in Chester, Ellesmere Port, Weaver Valley and the Rural area.

By managing our budget effectively we can address those issues you have told us are important to you and would improve your life in the borough. These include investing in sports facilities, replacing dilapidated school buildings, ensuring dignity for our elderly residents in care and bringing our roads up to, and maintaining, a good standard.

These are very ambitious objectives but also provide a catalyst for our regeneration plans by providing good infrastructure and tidying up our towns and city, we will attract investment to create jobs for all. This is especially important for the long term unemployed and will directly improve the prosperity of the whole borough.

We have a lot to do but I am confident that we are in a strong position to improve the lives of all our residents.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you and your family a happy Christmas and a wonderful 2011.



Sites unveiled for new city theatre

TWO sites are being considered for Chester's new theatre.

Consultants have recommended a medium scale theatre offering mixed programming for shows brought in from a variety of sources and in-house productions.

It will have an 800-seat auditorium, capable of scaling down to 450 for smaller audience productions, plus a flexible studio theatre seating around 200.

Dependent on its location, the building could have the potential for cinema facilities and a restaurant, plus a theatre bar/café.

Site option: the council-owned Little Roodee car park, providing an attractive landscape for a landmark building which would add to the attractions of the riverfront and

support the development of the Lower Bridge Street and Castle area.

All-inclusive costs are estimated at around £50 million – including around £11 million for car parking, specialist building design to complement its historic surroundings and possible anti-flood measures.

Site option: the privately owned Odeon Theatre.

Overall costing for the conversion of the Odeon, which currently has 1,680 seats and which could also include some cinema provision, is estimated at £38 million.

Consultants say Chester would provide an enticing location to help meet a national demand for larger conference facilities. They recommend a flexible events venue for 1,000 to 1,200 delegates that could also stage large concerts and exhibitions.

The cost of a convention centre is £20m.

The next stage of the feasibility study will be to consider possible locations.

For more information visit:
cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk



An artist's impression of how the new theatre could look at the Little Roodee and, top, how it could look at the Odeon site on Northgate Street.

Help us choose how we spend

CHESHIRE West and Chester Council faces some difficult financial decisions over the next four years. We want you to help us make these decisions so we have introduced a new online tool.

The 'You Choose' tool lets you, as residents of Cheshire West and Chester, decide how much you would like spent on which services, and helps you understand how your decisions impact across the authority.

The tool is available online until mid January 2011 and can be accessed through the Shape Your

Services page on the council website cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

Council Leader, Cllr Mike Jones, says the council is committed to giving people the chance to have a say on how they would like their money spent. Information gathered now will be used when councillors set the 2011/12 budget in February.

"This is particularly important as we need to make financial savings following the Government announcements about significant spending reductions," he said.

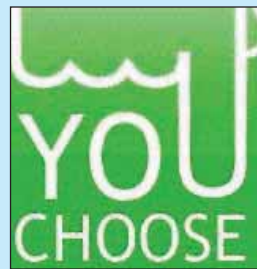
"We are always looking for new and innovative ways to engage with our

residents and I'm really impressed with You Choose. I encourage you to play your part and we look forward to receiving your feedback."

The introduction of You Choose follows a detailed consultation on the authority's 10 year capital vision.

This month a document outlining the budget proposals will also be available for people to comment on, and further meetings with residents and community groups are scheduled.

If you would like to get involved with shaping how the council spends its money but don't have a computer, you can access the You Choose function on the council's website at your local library.



Investing millions in our borough's future

ALMOST £11 million investment in a lifestyle centre in Northwich, plus:

- another £10.8 million plan for new sports facilities in Ellesmere Port
- continuing commitment to the ambitious retail-led Northgate Project and new market designed to transform the centre of Chester
- and £2.5 million spent on a major building project at Wharton Primary School in Winsford.

It is with developments and plans on this scale that Cheshire West and Chester Council is living up to its pledge of improving facilities for its residents.

Ask council leader Cllr Mike Jones why he is so confident the authority can deliver on its promises and he pulls no punches.

"We're ahead of the game," he says. "We took the opportunity as a new council to control all our costs. I would say it will take most other councils 18 months to get to the stage we're at now."

The Northwich project aims to put leisure and culture under one roof, with work scheduled for 2013.



The council is investing in the borough's sports facilities and schools.

Investment was given the thumbs-up after councillors put the town at the top of a priority list in a review of leisure facilities, both council owned and private.

The scheme is part of a new masterplan involving a proposed £59.1 million investment in West Cheshire's leisure facilities over the next 10 years.

This also takes in the £10.8 million regeneration of the ageing Epic Centre in Ellesmere Port and development of a sports centre on the site.

The town could boast a state-of-the-art sports centre as early as the end of 2013. Plans suggest the centre will have a minimum 12-court sports hall with the potential to cater for basketball team, Cheshire Jets.

The Northgate Project, scheduled to begin in the spring of 2014, is designed to help Chester reclaim its status as a leading shopping centre.

Planned in conjunction with ING Real Estate Development, it will include department stores and restaurants.

Supporting the enhancement of shopping in Chester will be a new £7m market. Locations for this exciting addition are being investigated.

Cllr Jones says it is a sign of Chester's enduring attraction that a developer is prepared to invest at a time when many other such proposed schemes in different parts of the country have either been abandoned or are at a standstill.

The 20 month development at Wharton Primary School in Winsford was finished in October and marked the start of a new era for the school.

Investment involved the amalgamation of Leaf Lane Infant School with Wharton Church of England Junior School to form Wharton CE Primary School.

Muriel Lynch, headteacher at Wharton CE Primary, said they have created a first-class learning environment for current and future pupils.



Meeting dates are now online

A list of dates and times of full council meetings and committee meetings can be found on our website at cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk in the Your Council section

If you would like this publication in an alternative format or in another language please email equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk or tel: 0300 123 8 123

Give us your feedback on this issue of Talking Together

by emailing talkingtogether@westcheshiretogether.org.uk or writing to Marketing and Communications, Cheshire West and Chester Council, First Floor, HQ, 58 Nicholas Street, Chester, CH1 2NP.

Council objects to windfarm proposal

TURBINES at a proposed wind farm at Helsby would be twice the height of the Big Wheel currently gracing Chester city centre.

The Wheel is 60 metres high while each of the 20 turbines on the planned site on Helsby's Lordship Lane would be a towering 120 metres.

Cheshire West and Chester Council is objecting to the wind farm after being told almost 4,500 homes would be within 2km of the development, with 36 per cent of them able to see the turbines.

Coloured grey and with three blades, the turbines would be visible from Helsby Hill, the Northern Sandstone Ridge and Frodsham Sandstone Ridge.

Objections raised by the council will almost certainly mean the application lodged with the Government by Peel Wind Farms (Frodsham) Ltd will go to a public inquiry.

Volunteers roll up sleeves to go green

A NORTHWICH community has gone green.

Volunteers rolled up their sleeves and planted more than 100 trees in the Greenbank area.

Representatives from Cheshire West and Chester Council, Cheshire Police and Weaver Vale Housing Trust worked alongside the volunteers to plant the trees, which were donated by The Woodland Trust.

The event, organised by the council, was part of the Safer Stronger programme, which aims to tackle community concerns and improve community spaces.

Reverend James Hughes from Christ Church, Greenbank, said: "We are always pleased to be able to be involved with our local community and this is another concrete example of the benefits of working together."

A further Safer Stronger event will take place in Greenbank from Monday, January 17 to Friday, January 21.

For further information call Joanne Byrne on joanne.byrne@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

Buy local and help our shops bounce back

IN the wake of the global economic downturn, Cheshire West and Chester Council is encouraging residents to shop local and help the region 'bounce back'.

By buying locally you'll be protecting the unique character and diversity of Cheshire West and Chester's shopping areas from rural markets to local high streets and our key town centres.

The money you spend in the area supports jobs and wages,



improves the wellbeing of your community and, as such, you become part of a chain of people making local decisions affecting your area.

Local businesses are more likely to be environmentally sustainable, especially those with local supply chains and, thanks to your custom, local businesses are more likely to survive, succeed and stay local.

As a shopper, you can pledge now to spend just some of your weekly shopping budget in Cheshire West and you'll be helping to shield our borough from the effects of the recession, bringing lasting benefits to our community.

Make your pledge at: bouncingback.org.uk

Businesses can also sign up at the same address, where local shoppers can find you among the great local shops and services already signed up to the Bouncing Back Campaign.

Together we can help protect Cheshire West and Chester from the worst of these difficult economic times.



Buzz has helped Laura Hunt, 14, pictured with mum Dawn.

Buzz opens doors

TEENAGER Laura Hunt just wants to live like any other 14-year-old girl.

She loves music, *The X Factor*, styling her hair and getting out and about with friends.

But it wasn't until she found Buzz that doors were opened to her and her wheelchair.

Laura, who lives in Winnington, Northwich, has had to overcome difficulties in her young life that most of us never have to face.

She was born with severe optic nerve damage which meant her sight was severely restricted.

Then, at around four and a half, she started showing signs of a disabling condition which would eventually take away her ability to walk unaided.

Doctors are still not sure what triggered the peripheral neuropathy, only that it scrambles messages from Laura's brain to her legs.

Her mobility slowly degenerated until, by

the time she was 12, she was forced to rely on a wheelchair to get about.

"I remember it was Christmas two years ago when I first got my chair," said Laura. "Since then I've had to depend on mum and dad if I want to go anywhere.

"I love having the freedom and independence"

"Then in June this year we were told about Buzz supported by Aiming High and everything changed.

"With them I've been to so many amazing places, met so many new friends and I have a buddy called Jessica who's 16. We go everywhere together."

Laura's blue eyes sparkle and a broad smile lights up her face as she remembers a visit to Blackpool, a trip by train to the top of Snowdon, a day out at Spookyworld in Warrington, and others to The Monkey Forest near Stoke-on-Trent and magical

snowy world of The Chill Factor in Manchester.

And all of these since June!

"I love having the freedom and independence," she said. "Without Buzz I wouldn't have been able to do all those things."

Laura's mum Dawn, a doctor's receptionist, and her dad Dave, an electrician, are delighted that their daughter's world has opened up.

"We are so grateful to Aiming High for supporting Buzz and giving Laura and other young people who are living with disabilities or overcoming problems, so much pleasure."

■ **Activity group Buzz is part of the Aiming High for Disabled Children programme. All activities are free and further details are available from the Aiming High for Disabled Children's team, telephone 01244 972305 or email ahdc@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk**

Have your say on transport

IT can save a life. It can give a child an education. It can deliver a person to work to earn a crust. And it gets us from A to B.

When you stop and think about it, transport plays a vital role in our everyday lives but is something we often take for granted.

Cheshire West and Chester Council has launched a consultation to gauge your views on local transport.

It is giving you the chance to have your say and help shape the vision for the next 15 years.

You can play your part in the new transport strategy by filling in a questionnaire or joining a meeting or

workshop in your area.

Cllr Lynn Riley, Portfolio Holder for Community and Environment, is encouraging everyone to take part.

"Transport cuts across everything," she says. "Nothing functions if transport doesn't work."

An online consultation brochure and questionnaire has been prepared which summarises initial ideas and thoughts on what policies and priorities need to be taken forward in the years to come.

Copies are available in libraries, from the council's customer contact centre, or from The Transport Strategy Team at Cheshire West and Chester Council, Planning and Transport Service,

Backford Hall, Chester CH1 6EA.

Alternatively you can phone 0300 123 7036 or email

ltip@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

Deadline for comments is Friday, December 31.

Get involved

This is just one part of our consultation activities. We have arranged meetings, workshops and special events with a large number of partners and community groups.

Why not come along to one of the meetings? Dates of forthcoming meetings can be found on our website.

Come on, don't just sit there... Get involved!

That's the message of groups and organisations large and small across West Cheshire.

Whether it be volunteering for your local school or youth club, or offering particular skills, someone somewhere wants you.

You may not have children in school, but that doesn't rule you out from being a governor.

Cheshire West and Chester Council is offering people over 18 from all walks of life the opportunity to become a school governor.

'Hands up to be a school governor' is a borough-wide campaign aimed at all sections of the community, encouraging people to become a school governor.

No special qualifications are required, just enthusiasm, commitment and an interest in education and broader outcomes.

David Williams, headteacher at Dee Point Primary in Blacon, is backing the campaign and is keen for people to find out what being a governor is all about.

Cheshire West and Chester Association of Governing Bodies chairman Dr Harry Ziman said: "Governing bodies provide strategic leadership to schools, take key policy decisions and play an active part in the development of a school. It is a responsible role, but it is very satisfying too."

Pauline Tilley is a governor at Ashton Hayes Primary school, a role that she has found extremely rewarding.

"My children had both been to the school many years ago so I felt that it was a way for me to give something back to the school," she said.

Volunteering in Winsford

The message from Winsford is that no matter what your interests or skills, there is an organisation that would welcome your input.

From sports to arts and crafts, DIY, managing a personal budget, music, IT, first aid, business know-how and many other topics, then whatever your age, why not offer your support as a volunteer?

Rachel Rathbone is volunteer and training manager with WINCAP - Winsford Community Action Project - created in 1997 to run The Edge community building with the support of Lottery Funding.

It runs a wide range of projects and Rachel says that volunteers not only have much to offer, they can also gain a lot in return.

"You are never too young or too old to play an active role in your local community and become a volunteer," she said.

"In the process you have the satisfaction of making a real difference to people's lives and enabling activities to take place that would otherwise just not happen."

Rangers at West Cheshire's country parks are on the lookout for volunteers to help with a range of day-to-day tasks.

The Volunteers and Friends of Northwich Woodlands join the rangers to help with conservation management and everyday jobs on the 1,000 acre park.

The Friends of Anderton and Marbury are also very active in volunteering and fundraising, running guided activities and projects and wildlife recording.

In a recent month at Northwich,

volunteers put in an incredible 380 hours of work at the park.

Dave James, Greenspace Ranger, said: "The work can be any practical conservation tasks, particularly at this time of year. Our volunteers get involved in all sorts of ways."

• To get involved in your local school tel 0845 141 0110 or email schoolgovernance@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk - full training and support will be provided.

• To get involved in volunteering opportunities in Winsford visit wincap.co.uk or tel 01606 551766.

• To get involved in Northwich Woodlands contact Dave James, Greenspace Ranger, Anderton Nature Park and Furey Woodland, on 01606 77741 or email david.james@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk



Dr Harry Ziman



David Williams



Pauline Tilley



Rachel Rathbone

• To get involved as a school governor tel 0845 141 0110 or email schoolgovernance@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

Why volunteering for the police is so special for Lou

VOLUNTEER special constable Lou Cadman is just the advert Cheshire Police needs for its recruitment campaign.

She has been a volunteer with the force since 1997 and she still loves every minute.

Lou works as a special constable for Cheshire Western Rural and says

volunteering is both rewarding and an excellent way to find out what working in the police is all about.

"It's quite a privilege as you have the same powers as a regular officer and work alongside the public," said Lou, 34. "I always thought I'd like to work as a police volunteer to help out with one-off opportunities such as updating websites

or helping out at events."

The constables receive training over a 21 week period and are expected to volunteer for a minimum of 17 hours a month.

"We want to look at people's skills and talk to them to find opportunities to best suit them," said Assistant Chief Constable Jeanette McCormick.

"We're very conscious that it's not just a case of free workers, we want to look at how we can help people develop their abilities so it's a two way process."

• To get involved go to cheshirepolice.co.uk or ask your at local police station.



It's time to celebrate what's special in Cheshire West

WE love to live in Cheshire ... and now we can tell everyone why.

A new online television channel celebrates all that is special about Cheshire West, showing videos made by and for local people.

Cheshire West TV is a community channel and hub for hosting videos - the ideal place for local groups, hobby and sports clubs, schools, colleges and local community projects to tell their stories, talk about their work and promote any events.

If you live, work or learn in the borough, or even if

you're planning a visit, this online video sharing channel is here for everyone to use.

If you've got something to say about where you live, show off your musical talent or even share your shopping and style tips, Cheshire West TV wants your films.

The online community channel is also the ideal place for groups, hobby and sports clubs, media students and community projects to tell their stories, talk about their

work and promote any events.

Local businesses can share their news and promote their services, and tourist attractions can show everyone just why you should visit.

Cllr Mike Jones, Leader of Cheshire West and Chester, says: "The more people contribute their films, the more important the channel will become as a destination for people who want to know what's going on in Cheshire West."

As well as celebrating why we love to live in Cheshire West, the TV channel also gives you the opportunity to get an

inside view of how the council is working towards a bright future for the area.

Many council meetings are broadcast live or on a watch again basis and they're already proving popular with the most viewed full council meeting reaching an audience of over 1,000.

■ Visit cheshirewest.tv to watch all the latest films and get involved in sharing your video stories.

Tell everyone why you love to live in Cheshire West

Stop and think... before dialling 999

ONE in four people who use emergency health services this winter could just as easily treat themselves or get a remedy from their local chemist.

Because they choose to dial 999 or go to the Accident and Emergency unit at their local hospital they are costing NHS services in the North West an extra £79 million every year.

Now the NHS has launched a campaign urging everyone to 'choose well' before putting added pressure on our already

overstretched health services.

STOP AND THINK is the message as winter sets in, bringing with it a glut of aches and pains and rising numbers of injuries caused by falls.

Stephen Moore, consultant in emergency medicine at the Countess of Chester Hospital, says there are many services people can access to make the right choice.

"People need to be very careful because they may not have the knowledge or

experience to know whether it is an emergency or not," he said.

"If in doubt they can ring NHS Direct on 0845 46 47 or their own GP surgery before going to A&E so they can make the proper choice.

"The Choose Well campaign has been introduced across the North West and suggests to the population that there are various choices available - ring NHS Direct for advice or go to your local chemist and discuss your symptoms with

a trained pharmacist."

The NHS campaign asks people to remember that their high street pharmacy offers convenient, expert and confidential advice for a range of common illnesses and complaints such as coughs, colds, sore throats, upset stomachs, and general aches and pains.

• Text "pharmacy" to 64746 to receive three free texts with the name, address and telephone number of your three nearest pharmacies.

Alison's care is helping homeless teens

Cheshire Project.

Young men and women across the city were in similar but usually far worse situations than her son - young, unhappy, vulnerable and with no place to go.

After contacting Nightspot Project manager Claire Litherland, Alison enlisted to become a host and from that day her life was changed forever.

"If someone had opened their door to my son and if

"My sons now realise how fortunate they are to have a home and people that love them"

he had a place to rest and think about things maybe our lives would be very different," said Alison, a nurse at the Countess of Chester Hospital.

"I had a spare room so I thought, why not? All I want is that they know that they can come, have a roof over their heads, a nice meal, a shower and a place of solace. Very often it's just a break from the situation they have come from and I think it helps tremendously."

The programme offers a maximum of three nights accommodation to young people from 16 to 25, about once a month, dependent on demand.

Recent statistics show that 70 homeless young people, half of whom were 16 and 17 years old and half 18 to 21 years old, have been referred to the project since March 2009.

In Cheshire West and Chester volunteer hosts have provided 102 bed nights in total.

Alison, who has taken in 12 young people so far, explained that visitors often come from broken families and have been thrown out or leave following a dispute

with a parent or step-parent. Mostly they have dropped out of school or are unemployed.

She has taken in single parent teenage girls and even young men with a criminal record, but Alison says she has never experienced any problems with any of her Nightstop guests.

"I think this is a big problem in our country - teenagers are difficult to deal with at the best of times - but put that together with a broken marriage and it's like a double whammy," said Alison, 55.

"They are lost and usually come to rest and get away from a bad situation. They are all screened very closely by the social services and have a worker attached to them.

"I have never had any trouble - they are better behaved than my own children sometimes and they are always so grateful."

The project has launched a fresh search for volunteers who have a spare bed and can offer a place of rest and comfort to a young person for up to three nights to get involved and help reduce the number of young people on the streets of Chester.

Alison added: "It is only two or three days out of your life and it's really not difficult at all - in fact it's been a great benefit to my family and now my sons realise how fortunate they actually are to have a home and people who love them."

The scheme has an excellent success rate in helping young people to return home to family and friends.

■ **To get involved as a host or driver contact Forum Housing Project manager Claire Litherland on 07740 080715 or email claire.litherland@forumhousing.co.uk**

Alison Reinbold provides a home from home for teenagers

As a single mum with three teenage boys, Alison Reinbold looked forward to a new life in Chester after moving from her home town of Port au Prince, Haiti.

But the move proved hard for one of her teenage sons. Soon mother and son were at loggerheads with no place to turn.

The loving family she once so cherished was falling apart and her son moved out.

After months of painstaking work to mend her family and the departure of another son to university, Alison collected her mail one day and found a pamphlet advertising the Forum Housing Association's Nightstop

Tell us what you think of your police service

HELP us give you the police service you want.

That is the invitation from Cheshire Police Authority which is staging a series of question time meetings in the new year.

The authority has tough decisions to make on policing in your area and it wants you to join the debate.

It remains committed to improving the police service, but it has to do this while reducing costs.

We have to ensure the police are more efficient and more effective in meeting your needs, it says.

So how can you get involved? Well it's all pretty simple.

To help shape the public debates you can submit

questions to the panel in advance by:

- leaving a message on 01606 36 66 66
- emailing your question to

police.questiontime@cheshire.pnn.uk

- clicking on the police question time icon on cheshirepa.police.uk and following the instructions

- returning a pre-paid postcard available in libraries and police stations

- or just turn up on the night.

The debates start at 7pm and the

dates and venues are:

Tuesday 11 January at Memorial Hall, Chesterway, Northwich CW9 5QJ

Thursday 20 January at St Mary's Centre, off Castle Street, Chester CH1 2DW

There are also police question time debates in Crewe, Warrington, Macclesfield and Runcorn.



Clamping down on business crime

CHESTER has a highly successful weapon in the campaign to reduce business crime. Called Chester Against Business Crime - CABC - it works within Chester Renaissance and is an active and effective partnership between Cheshire West and Chester Council, police and shops.

A digital radio system links police, council CCTV and businesses in Chester, and weekly meetings are held to share information on criminal activity and anti-social behaviour.

Photo albums of known offenders are produced and an exclusion scheme bans the more persistent among them from entering city stores.

"There are over 200 radios out on the streets of Chester, all acting as eyes and ears," says Chester city centre beat manager PC Mel Pemberton.

"Chester is one of the safest cities in the UK to live, visit, work and invest in."

■ **Get involved - if you are a business in Chester and you are not yet linked up by radio to the police and CCTV give the Business Crime team a call on 0300 999 1111.**

The good, the bad, and the ugly

ONE thing you can guarantee this Christmas is that bars, clubs and restaurants across West Cheshire will be packed.

But police are warning people not to overstep the mark where alcohol is concerned.

They have launched a campaign to focus on The Good, The Bad and The Ugly of alcohol consumption.

- **The Good** will mean making sure people enjoy their alcohol responsibly

- **The Bad** will tackle the issues caused by underage and binge drinking

- **The Ugly** will see a hard line taken against drunken violence and anti-social behaviour.

Police warn that retailers putting profit before community safety will also find themselves targeted by officers working with other agencies.

“The police are not against having a good time and we recognise that at Christmas time drinking alcohol is a social activity enjoyed by most people,” said Cheshire’s Western Area Commander Chief Supt Craig Guilford.

“We want to make sure Christmas is an enjoyable time



for everyone and we can achieve this by making sure all behave responsibly when they are on a night out.”

Sergeant Andy Smith, whose team works across Chester, says the city’s vibrant nightlife attracts many people in the run-up to Christmas

“Those who find themselves in Chester in the evening can be assured that Cheshire Police will be taking tough action against those who use alcohol as an excuse for violent or anti-social behaviour,” he said.

“We will not tolerate any behaviour that gets ‘Ugly’ on the streets, in the bars, restaurants or when travelling home.”

- **To get more about the campaign visit cheshire.police.uk**

Avoiding debt this Christmas time

CREDIT unions help dozens of people across Cheshire avoid debt at Christmas, but still afford presents for their family and friends.

There are two credit unions operating in Cheshire West and Chester – West Cheshire Credit Union and Cheshire Neighbours Credit Union.

West Cheshire Credit Union helps Rose Moulton and her sisters get their finances on track for Christmas every year.

The five sisters have all been using the credit union since it opened and say they “can’t praise it enough. They’ve helped me out lots of times, they’re fantastic”, said Rose, 47.

The mum of three from Blacon uses the service’s loans and savings facilities to help her buy Christmas presents for her children.

“The interest rates are so low,” she said. “If you want help buying a new cooker or

Christmas presents they help you out with loans and savings plans.”

Rose works part-time as a midday assistant and says she wouldn’t be able to afford Christmas presents without the help of the credit union.

West Cheshire Credit Union is a financial co-operative serving people living or working in Cheshire West and Chester. It helps people save money safely and borrow money affordably to help plan for future expenses.

The Cheshire Neighbours Credit Union offers low cost loans and savings schemes.

The service also includes free insurance on loans and savings on white goods.

- **Contact West Cheshire Credit Union on 01244 399006 or email info@wccu.co.uk, contact Cheshire Neighbours Credit Union on 0300 111 2150, email info@cncu.co.uk**

Festive fu



WHETHER it’s a sky-bound flight on the 60 metre Big Wheel or a river cruise with Santa himself, there’s so much to see and do in Cheshire West and Chester this festive season.

With the streets of our main towns and city brightly lit following Christmas light switch-on’s there’s a festive air to the whole borough.

And there’s lots happening near you...

In Ellesmere Port join Santa for a river cruise departing from the National Waterways Museum on December 18, 19 and 24.

Also in the town are Christmas carols at the Civic Centre on December 18, a 12 Days Of Christmas competition at the market and Santa’s Trail at Rivacre Valley Local Nature Reserve.

The Chester skyline in addition, a huge obelisk offering a very different view of the historic city.

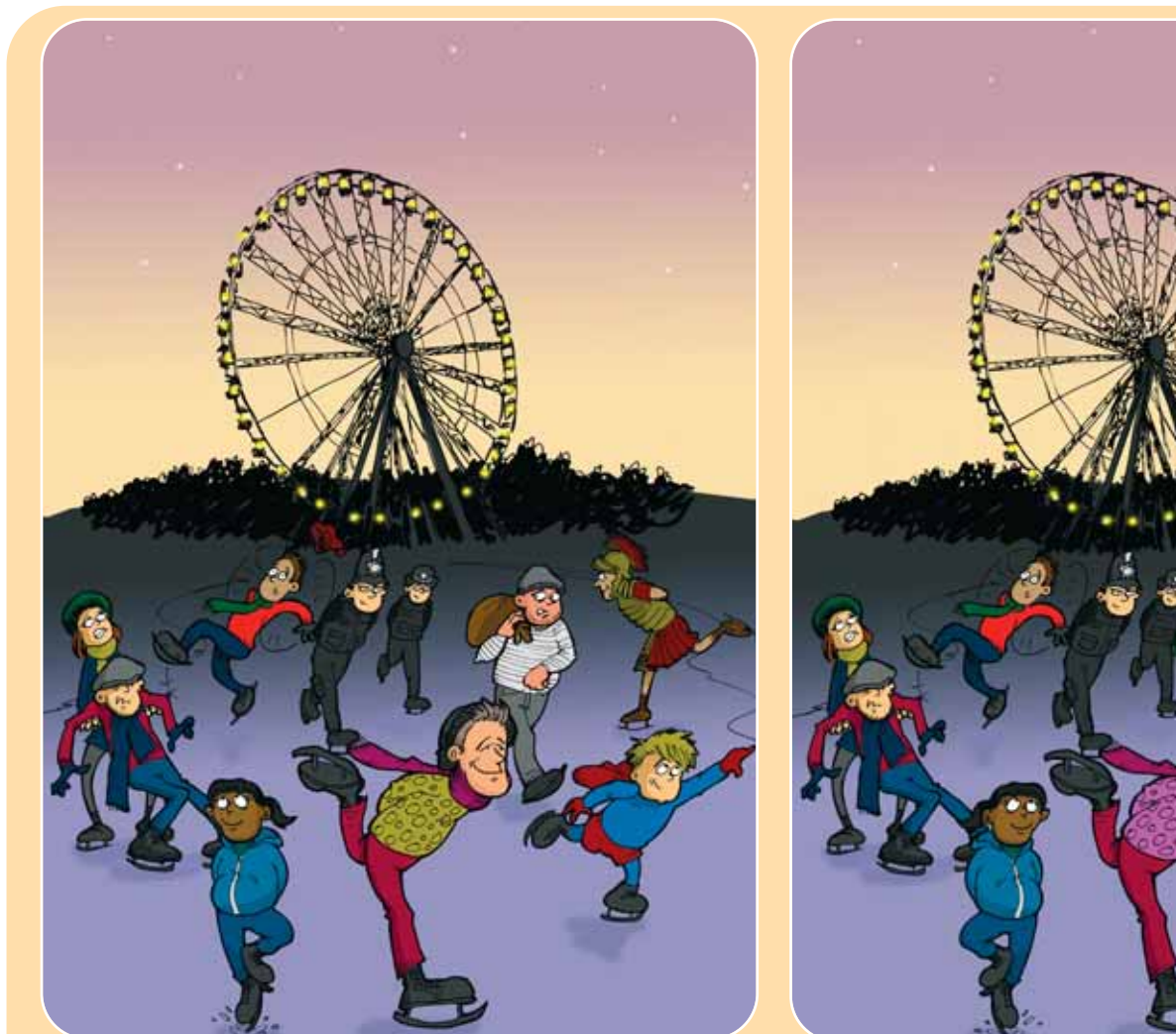
The wheel is running Yuletide splendour and Victorian Christmas which are open until the end of the year. Visit: chestermagic.com

Markets have got it all wrapped up

The indoor and outdoor markets of the borough offer a huge range of gift ideas and all the ingredients you need for a perfect Christmas. There are hundreds of independent stalls catering for all tastes and needs, from plants, bedding, cosmetics, stationery, shoes and household goods, as well as fresh fruit, vegetables, meat and fish plus a lot more.

Support your local market and grab a bargain.

thousands of people are enjoying the festive spirit. The popular celebration in Neston is all set for



Fun for all

There has a new observation wheel offering a different view of the

Alongside the ice skating rink and Christmas market, all of the fun starts on January 3. Visit cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk for booking information.

On December 16 it's the spectacular annual Roman Saturnalia Parade from the Grosvenor Museum at 6.30pm. See the Roman guard reclaim the city as they parade through the streets with torches in this hugely popular bumper

Christmas with a whole host of activities throughout December.

The Neston Christmas Festival runs right up until December 21, including numerous carol concerts and shows.

On December 18 in Northwich, Weaver Square has live entertainment including Paige, Jaywalkers and a grotto.

Visit: Talkingwestcheshire.org for full details of this event and all other events including Christmas Santa Cruises from Anderton Boat Lift.

It's panto season... oh yes it is!

Residents are spoilt for choice this year.

See Dick Whittington at the Forum Studio Theatre Chester from December 11 to 30. Or how about Snow White at Winsford Lifestyle Centre from December 14 to 31?

If that wasn't enough, Dick Whittington is also being staged at The Grange Theatre, Hartford from December 10 to January 3 while in Frodsham it's Aladdin at the Community Centre from January 9 to 15.

Full details can be found by visiting: cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk



SPOT THE DIFFERENCES

Win tickets to the ice rink and Big Wheel

TRY your luck in our spot the differences competition and you could be one of 10 lucky winners of pairs of tickets for the Big Wheel and ice rink which form the centrepiece of the Christmas festivities in Chester.

The two big attractions and a Victorian market will be in the city until January 3 next year.

For the chance to win, simply ring the five differences between the cartoons, cut out the cartoon showing how they differ, and send it to Spot the Difference Competition, Marketing and

Communications, Cheshire West and Chester, First Floor, HQ, 58 Nicholas Street, Chester CH1 2NP.

Don't forget to include your name, address and daytime telephone number.

The closing date for entries is Wednesday, December 22 and the first 10 entries drawn out of the hat will win the prizes.

The editor's decision is final and prizes will not be exchanged for a cash equivalent.

• Cartoons by Chris Wood chriswoodillustration.com

Win Snow White tickets

SNOW White, accompanied by her Seven Dwarfs of course, is coming to Winsford Lifestyle Centre.

And you could be there to join them courtesy of Cheshire West and Chester Council.

Tickets can be bought from the Winsford Lifestyle Centre in person, by telephone on 01606 550700 or online at cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

Snow White runs between December 14 and 31 and includes a matinee performance on Boxing Day.

● Tickets start from £9 and seats are selling like hot chestnuts so book now to avoid disappointment!



Cllr Richard Short with little Jasmine Whitehead and Hayley Otway, who is playing Snow White.

Competition...

Question: What famous fruit did Snow White eat to make her fall asleep?

Four winners will each receive a family ticket to the pantomime.

Send your answer to:

Email: michelle.dutton@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

Letter: Michelle Dutton, Culture & Recreation, Civic Way Offices, Ellesmere Port.

Closing date for entries is Wednesday, December 22.

Please include a daytime telephone number.

Cook up a festive treat

WASTE not, want not is a popular theme with Cheshire West and Chester Council.

So it was little surprise when one of its officers came up with a 'winning' recipe using leftover ingredients.

Stephanie Hilton says she always has turkey and trimmings to spare after Christmas.

And they are the basis of her After the Holiday Pie published in the council's The Food Lovers' Cookbook, which extols the virtue of cutting down on waste.

Stephanie, whose job with the council is to help people with disabilities into employment, submitted her recipe as a resident of Cheshire West and Chester.

Its beauty, she says, is that the quantities are flexible and

all the ingredients can be frozen until you need them.

For the record the ingredients are 400g leftover turkey, 100g leftover cooked stuffing, two or three cooked sausages, any leftover cooked bacon, leftover cooked chestnuts, one leek chopped and fried and then cooled, one onion same as the leek, 300ml of white sauce made and cooled, and a pack of bought flaky or puff pastry – or homemade using 6ozs of flour plus 3ozs of margarine and water to bind.

Shred all the meats and mix with the stuffing and chestnuts, put the mixture into a large bowl and add a large pinch of salt and pepper and a teaspoon of chopped herbs, add the cooked leeks and onions and cooled white sauce, combine all the ingredients into a sticky mixture, place into a pie dish and top with pastry, glaze with egg yolk and cook in the centre of a moderate oven gas mark 5 (190 degrees C) for around 25 to 30 minutes.

Preparation time is 20 minutes, cooking time is 30 minutes, and this is ample for four servings.

Stephanie Hilton cooked up a winner with her After the Holiday Pie.



Spectacular Moon Festival

CHESTER saw a fantastic day of celebration to mark the Chinese mid-autumn Zhong Qiu Jie or Moon Festival.

The Moon Festival is akin to a harvest festival, celebrating a successful annual crop, and centres around the giving and receiving of mooncakes – a cake filled with a range of sweetmeats.

Festivities were organised by the Wah Lei Chinese Association which promotes cultural harmony and understanding to improve the economic and social wellbeing, and prevent isolation and discrimination, of Chinese people in the community.

Mia Tan, chairman of Wah Lei Chinese Association, said: "It was just great. People were interested to learn more about Chinese culture and to take part in the parade."

For more information or to become a member of Wah Lei Chinese Association, visit: wahlei.org

New salt works attraction

A HISTORIC salt works is being turned into a heritage attraction thanks to an £8 million pound project undertaken by Cheshire West and Chester Council.

Restoration work on the Lion Salt Works site in Marston, near Northwich, is set to start next spring and is expected to open to the public in 2013.

It will be managed as part of the Museums Service of Cheshire West and Chester Council that includes the Weaver Hall Museum and Workhouse, which is the new name for the Salt Museum in London Road, Northwich.

The site is owned by the council and it is contributing £3 million to the development of the project, while the Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded a grant of just under £5 million.

For more information visit: lionsaltworks.org

We can beat the cyberbullies

TEENAGER Alex has first hand experience of being bullied online. And he has a one word description of what it's like: "Torture."

"I soon realised how quickly the bullies could spread their views on me, using the internet," says Alex, 14.

"Some of the kids seemed to find making jokes about me very funny. I found pictures of my head stuck on other people's bodies and sent out on emails.

"I began to receive messages on Facebook and MySpace. Some were people I didn't think I knew, that I had never met, but they seemed to think I was an easy target."

Social networking sites and mobile phones are favourites for the new breed of cyberbullies.

More and more people, most of them youngsters, have used the growing methods available online to target others.

The impact of cyberbullying is just as painful as in real life, with bullies able to get their messages across to a big audience.

Any youngster who has to deal with seeing jokes about them, personal pictures of themselves or a general hate campaign spread online can be left to endure a living hell, often believing there is no way of overcoming the problems.

Victim Alex tried to make changes to prevent the bullies making contact, but initially there seemed to be no escape.

"I cancelled my accounts," he says. "I set up new ones under a false name so I could be in contact with just my real friends.

"But it happened again. The bullies knew who I was and also seemed to know my phone number, sending me abusive texts with threats.

"What was worst of all was that most of what was being said about me was not true, but I could not stop it spreading."

After enduring the ongoing torment Alex finally felt the time had come to find ways of tackling the problem.

"Eventually I decided I could not face it any more. I told my parents about it as they had been worried about how I had been

acting at home.

"They didn't really understand the methods the bullies had used, but they knew it had to stop.

"My parents told my school about it and at last I was put in touch with the help I needed."

If you are being bullied, make sure you tell your school straight away so you can get the help you need

● To beat online bullies the advice is that you should keep any bullying emails or images you have been sent, take a screenshot of any comments that are threatening, note the time and date messages or images were sent along with any details you have about the sender, try changing your online user ID or nickname, don't reply to any bullying messages or get into any online arguments.

● If you are bullied on your mobile phone get another SIM card or change your number, only give the new number to members of your family and close friends, save any bullying texts, and make a note of the time you received the message and the sender's details.

● For more advice visit: direct.gov.uk/en/YoungPeople/HealthAndRelationships/Bullying



So where can victims turn for help? Thankfully there are organisations which deal with bullying.

The Young Anti-Bullying Alliance - YABA - was formed in 2007 and is for children and young people up to the age of 18.

The School Help Advice Reporting Page – TheSHARP System – is an information-gathering tool for incidents in schools and local communities, providing support for issues which affect youngsters such as cyberbullying.

● To find out more about the two organisations, visit: thesharpsystem.com or anti-bullyingalliancetoolkit.org.uk



We're making it better for our families

NEIGHBOURS Kerrie Dobbins and Kelly Littler are mums on a mission.

They want a better life for their children, their families and their whole neighbourhood. And they aren't going to stop fighting until they reach their goal.

You can't fail to see the determination that's driving the pair of them on to help turn the Rossmore Estate on the edge of Ellesmere Port into a real community.

The two Ks are chairman and vice-chairman of the Rossmore Residents' Association which was born out of a community barbecue in June organised by Cheshire West and Chester Council's Our Place Management Team.

"I don't think people here realise just what they've got," said Kerrie. "Everybody knows everybody else and that's a great foundation on which to build a real community.

"We need a central play area for the kids, a meeting place for all kinds of activities like bingo, pensioner groups, after-school sessions, and mothers and toddlers.

"The possibilities are endless. At the moment we feel we are a bit of a forgotten estate with no shops, no park, no community centre, no nothing, but all that can change."

Together with fellow residents' committee members Hayley Kehoe and Anna Griffiths, they have managed to raise £10,000 since the summer made up of an £8,800 grant for estate improvement and community enhancement, and cash from fundraising events.

Children's organisation Surestart is showing interest in Rossmore and there is a real chance of obtaining accommodation for community groups and meetings.

"At the moment, when we want to get together it has to be in Overpool which is a good 15 to 20 minute walk away," said Kerrie, who has two sons, Liam, four, and Declan, two.

"How much easier would it be if there was somewhere right on the doorstep?"

Her sentiments are shared by neighbour Kelly, who also has two children, Josh, 13, and Heidi, two.

"We're isolated from the rest of Ellesmere Port by industrial

estates and commercial land, but that could turn out to be an advantage in building community spirit here in Rossmore."

The two Ks say they could not have achieved what they have without the support of the council's Our Place team.

Community engagement officer Collette Linford is under no illusions about the value of commitment at grassroots level.

"It was a big turn out at the original barbecue that we organised at Rossmore," she said. "This is a perfect example of the council and the community working together towards a better future."



Residents' association chairman Kerrie Dobbins with her son Declan, aged two

Aiming for a difference

MAKING a difference in Ellesmere Port: that is the simple but bold aim of a new approach to issues impacting on families in the town.

Tackling child poverty and improving educational and employment prospects are at the core of the innovative project. Ellesmere Port is one of four authorities chosen nationally to deliver on a set of targets to reduce inequalities for children and young people.

The new government-backed scheme has five key goals:

- to build on skills and confidence to improve employment prospects and promote an enterprise culture
- to focus on the wellbeing of children up to the age of 15 adopting the Best Start in Life principles
- to reduce underage pregnancies
- to actively intervene to reduce anti-social behaviour, illegal money lending and domestic abuse, particularly their impact on children
- to take steps to help the community and individuals reach their full potential.



Step Back 2 Sport

WHEN Berni Flexen played her last game of netball at Verdin High School in Winsford she never imagined she would be back on court seven years later.

Now thanks to Cheshire West and Chester's Step Back 2 Sport Programme she is playing twice a week and thoroughly enjoying the experience.

Berni, 23, said: "I never thought I'd be back playing netball again.

"I loved it in school and I love it now. I played goalkeeper back then and goalkeeper now. It's a fun way to keep fit.

"We all turned up as individuals, we're like a family now, a great mix of ages but with a shared passion for netball.

"Some of us have even formed a team to play in the local league.

"It's a great idea with a great outcome."

The invitation from the council is that if you enjoyed playing netball and badminton in your younger days, now is your chance to literally step back in time.

Martin Barrett, Sports Development Officer, says the idea behind Back 2 Sport is to provide an opportunity not only to keep fit and socialise, but to have fun.

Already this year people in their 20s, 30s, 40s

and 50s have taken up the chance to play tennis at Alexandra Park in Chester and at West Cheshire College. Now the emphasis is on indoor sport and all newcomers are welcome.

Step Back 2 Netball at Woodford Lodge Sports Centre, Winsford, is now in its third year of existence.

More than 100 women aged 18 years and over have attended weekly training sessions and many of them have gone on to join or form teams in competitive leagues.

A further two sites were launched in September 2010 at Malpas Sports Centre and EPIC Leisure Centre, Ellesmere Port.

The badminton sessions take place at Cheshire County Sports Club in Upton, Chester.

● To get involved with the netball sessions contact Sports Development on 01606 288554 or email sports@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk, for badminton contact the Cheshire County Sports Club direct on 01244 318167 or email office@cheshirecountysports.co.uk

● Full details can be found on the council's website using the following link: cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/back2sport

Nordic Walking

HEALTHY exercise in the fresh air is vital to all of us, especially as we grow older.

Now Cheshire West and Chester Council's Sport Development team has certainly come up with a novel idea to keep fit. Nordic Walking differs from ordinary walking in that participants carry poles similar to those used in snow. The activity burns up to 46 per cent more calories than walking because of the additional upper body muscle usage.

It can also help to relieve and improve neck, back and joint pain by improving posture and reducing pressure on joints.

The council has delivered Learn to Nordic Walk programmes in Ellesmere Port, Chester and Neston so far this year.

The programme has been shortlisted for the Innovation Award for Cheshire and Warrington Sports Partnership.

To get involved contact Emma Brown on 01606 288559 or email sports@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

Diwali Parade

CHESTER hosted its first Diwali Parade and celebration earlier this year.

One of South Asia's most colourful festivals, it included authentic music, dance, crafts and food.

Diwali is known as the Festival of Lights and is celebrated by one million British Asians as well as Hindus, Sikhs and Jains across the globe.

Cheshire West and Chester Council supported the newly-formed Sanjhi Indian Association and the Cheshire, Halton and Warrington Race and Equality Council with their plans to hold the celebration.

Reetu Kohli, chairman of the Sanjhi Indian Association, said: "The rich Indian culture was heartily embraced by the people of Chester. They were awestruck by the colour, vigour and enthusiasm of the dancing and drumming on the streets."

How stroke survivor Peter kept his independence

Peter Wilkin didn't know who to turn to after suffering a stroke, but he soon found help was at hand.

It came in the guise of the Independent Living Centre which has bases at Hartford and Ellesmere Port.

Peter, who lives in the Northwich area, suffered a stroke two years ago with his mobility being severely affected.

He says he and wife Carole have benefited from state-of-the-art communication equipment that is on display at the ILC.

"I've been very impressed by the range of choice and the service they offer here," said Peter.

"I had a full assessment which

was very informative.

"It gave me a lot more independence so that I don't have to rely on other people quite as much."

Both Hartford and the Poole Centre in Ellesmere Port are dedicated to helping people with disabilities and older people to remain self-sufficient in their own homes.

The ILCs offer people with a disability, older people and carers professional, impartial, individual and personalised advice on a wide range of equipment and services.

To help people make an informed choice they have specially adapted bathroom, bedroom, lounge and kitchen



areas so equipment can be assessed in a realistic setting.

Cathrine Ruston, Strategic Manager (Independent Living), explained: "The Independent Living Centre came about as part of transforming the community equipment service and the introduction of a retail model for the provision of community equipment."

"What that means is that people are assessed and, if eligible, receive a prescription for equipment which is redeemable at accredited retailers throughout the Cheshire West and Chester area."

Staff at the centre are either fully qualified occupational therapists such as Sarah Lawson, or social care assessors like Julie Jones. Both are trained to a very high standard.

Cathrine says they are friendly and knowledgeable and can provide specific impartial advice as well as demonstrating equipment that could help to manage the individual's needs.

Additionally there is a wide range of equipment on display designed to help with a wide range of everyday activities.

● People can access the service by being referred by their GP, health or social care professionals, by local partner voluntary agencies or by making direct contact with the centres.

● For more information on the Hartford and Ellesmere Port centres tel 01606 881980.



At the Hartford Independent Living Centre are, from left, Cathrine Ruston, Julie Jones, Carole and Peter Wilkin, Sarah Lawson, Jackie Waring and Tracy Stothard. Above right, Peter Wilkin with Sarah Lawson.

Red letter day for Jack



ASK Jack Lloyd for his opinion of a new council employment programme and he will give it an emphatic thumbs up.

Cheshire West and Chester has introduced an innovative in-house programme – Gateway to Work.

It opens up employment opportunities within the council for people with a learning disability and a delighted Jack is its first employee.

Gateway to Work aims to support the development of 30 additional posts throughout the council of three hours per week.

All of them will be fixed term contracts for up to 45 weeks and participants will be supported in the workplace by the Cheshire West and Chester Supported Employment team.

Jack, pictured left, has only been

working as a postroom assistant for a short time, but he already feels at home.

"I am really enjoying my work so far and hopefully I can work more," he said.

When he started work in the mailroom at Goldsmith House he was helped by supported employment officer Roy Mayoh.

Jack quickly fitted into the role, now attends work on his own and is supported by his colleagues in the department.

He was happy to share his experiences so far and what he hopes will happen in the future.

Jack feels that even in the short period of time he has been there his skills have improved.

"I definitely feel like I already have more confidence in myself," he says.

Jack feels confidence is a big thing for him, but he hopes that by working as a part of a team it will help bring out his character more.

"I work with five different people in the mailroom and I get on well

with them all," adds Jack.

Jack currently works for three hours a week helping in roles such as sorting out the mail and making sure it all reaches the right destination.

He beams when describing his job, a clear indication that he is very much enjoying what he has done so far.

"I didn't really know what to expect before I started, but it has been brilliant," he said. "I look forward to every Tuesday and Wednesday knowing I will be working."

As for the future, Jack hopes that the experience he is gaining will stand him in good stead.

"I hope I can stay here for a while because I really like it," he said. "I have friends here already and my communication skills have improved as we have to work together."

It has been a very promising start for Jack who says he is very happy and content in his new position.

Have you got a plan to start a business?

THERE'S plenty of support on offer for people looking to set up in business thanks to the partnership between Cheshire West and Chester Council and advisers at Blue Orchid.

The council's Economic Development team works with a range of partners and networks to support the local economy.

It aims to raise awareness of the help available to businesses and to

"...there are many brilliant ideas out there"

encourage and stimulate events and networks and work alongside partners in delivering this support.

It has also developed a start-up grant scheme to encourage new business.

Budding entrepreneurs can benefit from additional input via open coffee mornings held monthly at Chester Enterprise Centre.

The team is looking to roll out this system of support and has several

informal meetings scheduled in the coming months.

Blue Orchid is the accredited provider of business support and training.

According to managing director Heather Hayes: "Our experience shows there are many brilliant ideas out there for a wide range of new businesses in Cheshire West and Chester.

"But making the dream a reality is not always straightforward. Our business advisers have all run their own businesses and are able to provide personal one-to-one advisory support to help individuals get their own businesses off the ground."

Blue Orchid business support services include start-up, marketing, planning, finance, legal, human resources.

It can help with funding, searches, advice, application, and putting you in touch with approved suppliers.



ONE thriving business that received a boost thanks to the support available via the council and the advice services of

Blue Orchid is Chester Travel Connection Ltd.

Gaynor Davies and Karen Park

have more than 40 years' experience in the travel industry and, as a result of an internal restructure, decided to take control and set up on their own.

They accessed the advice services of Blue Orchid and also successfully applied for a £500 start-up grant to support their developing business.

With the support of the council they identified premises at



Farrier Bob Stubbs at work at Crowton Hall Farm

Chester Enterprise Centre on Hoole Bridge.

The location offers clients free parking within accessible premises close to the railway station and within one mile of Chester city centre.

Karen said: "Blue Orchid helped us with our business plan and pointed us in the right direction in terms of what we needed to do to start the business. I would, and already have, recommended that others go to them for advice. They were very helpful with us."

BOB Stubbs spent five years as an apprentice farrier and, once qualified, decided to set up on his own.

On the advice of his local councillor he got in touch with the Economic Development team and was signposted to Blue Orchid, which provided the advice he needed to start his own business.

Bob, who comes from a farming background and has worked with horses for many years, also benefited from the £500 start-up grant from the council, using it to buy the stock he needed.

Bob's business, based at Crowton Hall Farm near Northwich, has since gone from strength to strength.

He said: "That £500 gave me a chance to buy the horseshoes and other stock I needed."

WHEN **Iain Swithenbank**, from Davenham, was made redundant he struggled to find alternative employment.

Weighing up their options, he and his wife Claire talked about the possibility of setting up their own business.

Both self-confessed foodies, they decided to look at

starting a food company.

Seeking some expert advice they were put in touch with Blue Orchid.

The couple, who now make home-produced ready meals using fresh local produce under the name of Eaton Lane Foods, have just secured their first big contract with Grosvenor Garden Centre and are on the lookout for their first business premises.

Iain said: "Blue Orchid gave us a lot of constructive advice which gave us the ability to decide whether going into business was right for us.

"We attended a number of one-to-one meetings and business start-up workshops which were all very productive."

It is an exciting time for Iain and Claire - not only have they secured a number of outlets for their wares, but their home delivery service is also becoming increasingly popular.

● **Have you got a plan for a new business? Then get in touch with the Economic Development team by calling 0151 3566560 or email business@cheshirewestandchestergov.uk**

● **For more details visit: cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/business or cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/recession support.**

● **For more information on Blue Orchid visit: theblueorchid.co.uk**



Claire and Iain Swithenbank

Why we're top of the pots

WE'RE top of the league. Or at least when it comes to dealing with potholes we are.

That's the proud boast of Cheshire West and Chester Council.

The accolade comes from the website Fill That Hole, the only independent national league table compiler of potholes.

Run by national organisation Cyclists' Touring Club (CTC), it shows the council is number one on a league table of more than 200 highway authorities across the UK.

Council leader Cllr Mike Jones says as part of its £12 million annual spend on highways, the council has directly responded to what people said they wanted and has spent a further £1 million fixing potholes since the start of the year.

The council has introduced a Road Care Scheme which invites people to become Road Care Reporters.

Reports about potholes, street lights not working, fly-tipping or blocked drains can be recorded quickly and directly via Cheshire West and Chester's website by

searching for highways fault reporting or by calling 0300 123 7036.

Meanwhile, as we move into the icy grip of winter, drivers are urged to be extra vigilant on our roads.



Cheshire Police Road Safety Team has urged motorists to be responsible this winter, a message echoed by Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service.

PC Dave Murray, the force Road Safety Officer, is keen that the message comes across loud and clear as he underlines the

guidelines. Driving requires our total concentration all year round, but the winter brings some additional challenges.

Firstly, make sure that your vehicle is ready for the winter by checking the battery is in good condition and there is enough antifreeze in the radiator.

Check your tyres regularly. It is essential that they have good all round tread and are inflated to the correct pressures to ensure maximum performance.

Before setting off make sure all windows and mirrors are properly cleared of snow, ice and mist so you can see all around.

Allow more time for your journey.

In wet or icy conditions it takes longer to stop so travel at slower speeds and keep a safe distance from the vehicle in front.

In severe weather consider if the journey is absolutely necessary.

If you must venture out make sure you have warm waterproof clothes and a blanket in case of a breakdown.

Ensure your mobile is fully charged so you can contact somebody or be contacted.



Fire officer Kev Pugh, stationed at Winsford, with timely winter road safety advice.

● **Get safe - For more information go to mysaferroads.org.uk or twitter.com/mysaferroads**



Jasmine Rowlett, age six, from Hoole, on the Cheshire Cycleway.

Take the route to greater fitness

IT'S eco-friendly and can help you to keep fit, so why not get on your bike and try out the many cycle routes in and around Chester?

No fewer than 10 new cycle routes have been introduced recently along with new maps to help people with suggested rides in and around the city.

Produced by Cheshire West and Chester Council's Cycle Chester team, the brightly coloured routes use off-road and shared-use paths along with traffic-calmed and low traffic roads.

They provide direct and safe cycle access to the city centre from residential areas in and around Chester.

The maps were launched by the council together with the Chester Go Ride Club, which offers weekly youth coaching sessions for four to 16 year

olds at Upton Youth Club.

The innovative card-sized pop out maps are available free from the Visitor Information Centre in Chester and can be downloaded on the Cycle Chester website: cyclechester.com

Brightly coloured cycling signs have begun to be put in place along the routes for people to follow to complement the maps.

Suggested routes aim to encourage more people to get out on their bike, whether it be commuting to work or school or to follow as a leisure route.

It is well recognised that cycling provides many health benefits. A cycle ride of at least two miles – to work, to the shops or to a friend's house and back – would meet the daily recommendation of physical activity for adults.

Providing care for carers

THIS happy, cuddly photo of a mum and her son hides a secret torment. For five year old Thomas lives in a locked world which, at times, is so laced with fear that he is too traumatised to walk in public and has to hide his face with a blanket.

He was diagnosed with autism four days before his fourth birthday and now he attends a special school to cater for his needs.

At home in Vicar's Cross, Chester, Thomas lives with mum Jane Soul Harding, his mum's partner Jacob and his two brothers Isaac, six, and Oliver, 22 months.

Behind his front door he feels safe and happy as long as he follows a strict routine, but once outside he is racked with terror.

"Thomas is so frightened he simply cannot walk," said Jane. "He has outgrown his buggy now so has to use a wheelchair. It has nothing to do with mobility, just fear. He is so unhappy around strangers he hides under a blanket."

It's these idiosyncracies and Thomas' special needs that make

sudden emergencies a real worry for Jane, but thanks to Cheshire West and Chester's Emergency Carers' Card she has found peace of mind.

The scheme means, for example, that should Jane collapse while out in the street with toddler Oliver, a certain chain of events would automatically fall into place.

"Because I carry a Carers' Emergency Card someone who knows all the family details would take Ollie back home and both schools would be contacted so Thomas and Isaac would be collected on time," says Jane.

"My parents, who live an hour away, would be contacted and someone would wait at the house until they arrived. Best of all, that person would be fully aware of Thomas' needs and his expected reactions.

"They would know how to make the situation least stressful for him at the same time ensuring he was safe.

"It's a wonderful service and it's free."

It might cost nothing, but it's worth a Queen's ransom to carers

like Jane.

In the meantime Thomas, who is developing new skills every day, is blissfully unaware of the contingency plans.

He is just enjoying a cuddle from mum and thinking about chicken nuggets for tea.

● **Contact West Cheshire Carers Emergency Support Service (WCESS) run by the Princess Royal Trust Cheshire Carers Centre and Eldercare on 01606 828 151.**

● **Free carers' helpline for advice and support 0800 085 0307.**



Jane with son Thomas, five. She says her Carers' Emergency Card is worth a Queen's ransom.

Top tips to protect your family

WHILE Christmas should be a time for having fun, it is important to stay safe.

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service has been working on a number of initiatives to help keep residents and workers in the region safe this winter.

One of these, the 6 Sense Christmas Campaign, offers top safety tips to help people stay safe and protect their family and home

from fire over the Christmas and New Year period.

Cllr David Topping, chairman of the Fire Authority, said: "Christmas and New Year is a great time to have fun with family and friends, but unfortunately fires can easily start if people don't take enough care.

"I recommend that we all follow the simple fire safety tips in the 6 Sense Campaign so that everyone

can enjoy the festivities in total safety at this special time."

Residents can also register to have a free home safety assessment carried out at their home which involves a fire officer visiting to check for any fire risks and installing free working smoke alarms on each level of your home.

Residents can register online for an assessment at: cheshirefire.gov.uk

Offering support for victims of abuse

CHRISTMAS can be a flashpoint in many households.

Det Insp Simon Lonsdale from Cheshire Police Public Protection Unit says violence can be fuelled by alcohol or drugs.

"But outbursts are usually a culmination of elements including high expectation turning to disappointment, financial pressures or close proximity over a period of time," he says.



DI Lonsdale says Cheshire Police supports survivors of domestic abuse using its specially trained domestic abuse officers.

On November 25 people wore a white ribbon with pride to show their support for stamping out domestic violence.

Organisations which offer support with domestic abuse:

- National Domestic Violence helpline: 0808 2000 247
- Domestic Abuse Family Safety

Unit: 01606 351375

● Chester Women's Services: 01244 314950

● Ellesmere Port Women's Services: 0151 355 4759

● Vale Royal Women's Aid: 01606 871523

● Men's advice: 0808 801 0327

● LGBT advice: 0161 235 8035

● Rape & Sexual Abuse Support Centre: 01925 221546

● For men wanting to change abusive behaviour: 01925 418430

The 6 Sense Christmas guide to staying safe

PLAN

- Inform guests of the best route to escape just in case
- Take special care of elderly people and children
- Make sure all exit routes are clear

TEST

- Test the batteries in your smoke alarm every week
- Do not cover smoke alarms with any decorations

CHECK

- Check fairy lights are in good working order and replace any bulbs that blow
- Do not overload plug sockets
- Don't let bulbs touch anything that can burn easily
- Unplug lights when not in use

CARE

- Avoid leaving children in the kitchen when cooking is on
- Keep matches and saucepan handles out of children's reach
- Put candles out before going to bed

CLOSE

- Close all doors at night or when you leave the house

CALL 999

- In the event of a fire, GET OUT, STAY OUT, CALL 999

Be bright and be seen

IT'S that time of year again, with the days growing shorter and the nights getting longer. Cheshire Safer Roads Partnership has issued some timely advice to pedestrians and cyclists.

The message is: Be Bright and Be Seen

Now the clocks have gone back, it wants pedestrians and cyclists, particularly children, to wear high visibility clothes.

Motorists are also being advised to be more vigilant with the sun rising later and setting much earlier than over the summer.

Cheshire Safer Roads Partnership manager Lee Murphy says: "If you're a motorist then you'll know how difficult it can be to see pedestrians and cyclists wearing dark clothes at night or when visibility is poor.

"It's important that children are easily seen near traffic, especially as many school uniforms are dark. Selecting a bright coat can help, as can fluorescent and reflective armbands, school bags, badges, stickers and arm straps.

"Children who have recently moved up to secondary school where longer journeys are often made on foot and uniforms are usually compulsory should also take extra care."

To help stay safe make sure you wear:

- brightly coloured or fluorescent clothing as it shows up well in daylight and at dusk
- reflective gear if out after dark to make sure they can be seen in car headlights - fluorescent clothing doesn't work after dark
- clip-on reflectors, arm bands, reflective vests, sashes, wrist bands, and stickers on clothes or school bags to improve visibility.

You should also be aware that:

- it is an offence to cycle at night without a white front light, a red

back light and a red reflector at the back, so make sure all bikes are properly equipped and working

- fitting spoke reflectors will help be seen in the dark
- finally, teach your children to choose

routes and crossing places that are well lit and make sure they always use the Green Cross Code.

"Get kitted out with hi-vis clothing and lighting so you can be seen clearly, and stay safe in the dark," adds Lee.

"Of course, it is not only children who need to ensure that they can be seen when using the road. Everyone should take precautions to ensure they are visible to other road users."

■ **Get more information by visiting:** mysaferroads.org.uk or twitter.com/mysaferroads



Emily Cross, aged five, of Winnington, shows her support for the Be Bright and Be Seen campaign.



How you can go green this Christmas

WITH the festive season upon us it is all the more important to reduce our impact on the environment.

And there are many ways to make it easy for us to have a more eco-friendly Christmas.

Few things compare to the joy of opening presents on Christmas morning. But did you know that:

There will be some changes to household waste and recycling collections over Christmas and New Year. You will receive more information directly in the form of a bin tag or bag. Alternatively you can visit: cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk or call 0300 1237026 for the latest information.

- the amount of festive wrapping paper thrown away in the UK every year could stretch to the moon if each sheet was laid end to end
- nationwide, some 250 tonnes of Christmas trees that could be recycled are simply

thrown out – find out where to recycle yours at cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

- you don't have to throw away those broken Christmas lights, if they are beyond repair they can be recycled at one of the borough's Household Waste Recycling Centres – visit: cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk for details

● don't forget the empty Champagne and sherry bottles can easily be recycled as part of your kerbside recycling scheme.

You can access a Christmas themed area on recyclenow.com which features the many ways we can all do our bit to reduce our impact on the environment.

Recycling tips

- In the run up to Christmas:
- keep your recycling containers next to the main bin so you can take out the

rubbish and recycle at the same time

- you could get your kids involved in the household recycling routine while they're on Christmas holidays
- look out for items containing recycled material as gifts this Christmas- a growing range of clothes, furniture and even electronic goods containing some recycled material will make perfect green presents
- a good way to reduce wrapping waste is to use furoshiki, a Japanese-style of wrapping presents with material which can then be reused – watch the video on recyclenow.com
- remember you can recycle your Christmas cards using your kerbside recycling scheme or by using one of the Woodland Trust collections located at some high street stores, enabling the Trust to plant thousands of trees every year.

Talking Together is published by West Cheshire Together, a partnership of Cheshire West and Chester Council, Cheshire Police, Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service, Cheshire Police Authority and NHS Western Cheshire.

West Cheshire
TOGETHER 
Working in partnership for local people

 Cheshire West
and Chester

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lary
BE SAFE, FEEL SAFE

 CHESHIRE
FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE

 NHS
Western Cheshire
Your partner for longer healthier lives

 Cheshire
Police Authority