

News

Worker injured in ceiling collapse given £250k after eight-year battle

By **PIERS MEYLER**
Local democracy reporter

piers.meyler@reachplc.com
@meyler123

A WOMAN has received £250,000 from Essex County Council after suffering serious injuries when part of a ceiling collapsed on her and then later narrowly missed being hurt when a second section gave way.

But Susan Williams only won the money from the council after a lengthy legal battle, which included an attempt by the council to discredit her by using covert filming of her outside of work.

Ms Williams had been sitting in a chair in a council building in 2016 when a large section of the ceiling suddenly gave way, falling directly on to her head. She suffered multiple injuries, including lacerations that needed stitches, but also long-term psychological trauma.

She was later diagnosed with post-traumatic fibromyalgia by a consultant rheumatologist, which was confirmed by pain specialists.

Despite her best efforts to return to work, initially on reduced hours, Ms Williams' symptoms persisted and significantly affected her mobility and quality of life.

But then, five years later, in 2021, while she was attempting to recover from the incident, another section of the ceiling collapsed, narrowly missing her while she was working in the same building.

This second incident retriggered Ms Williams' symptoms and led to severe psychological distress, ultimately resulting in her being medi-



cally retired at the age of 58.

After devoting her career to serving the council, Ms Williams found herself isolated, unable to walk long distances and left with a considerable disability, her lawyers said.

Ison Harrison solicitors, who represented Ms Williams, said that despite the clear responsibility for the unsafe building conditions, Essex County Council vigorously defended the case for more than eight years.

While the council eventually admitted liability for the initial incident, it denied the extent of the injuries and tried to attribute her symptoms to pre-existing health conditions, even after its own experts acknowledged she had a

pain condition, the law firm said.

It added that in a further attempt to discredit Susan's claim, the council introduced covert surveillance footage after eight years, showing her going to the vet to take her sick pet for treatment and attending a pilates class.

Ison Harrison solicitors said the footage was not only irrelevant but also non-compliant with surveillance rules, and clearly designed to undermine her credibility rather than support a fair resolution.

Diane Askwith, partner at Ison Harrison, said: "I am very pleased to have obtained a favourable outcome for our client. It is such a shame it took so long. The council's behaviour has been, at the very least, dis-

appointing - arguing at every stage, even in the face of clear medical evidence.

"Ms Williams was injured through no fault of her own and lost a career she loved. I hope this result enables her to begin rebuilding her life. I also hope the council and Government commit the necessary funding to repair public buildings so that such preventable, life-changing injuries never happen again."

Essex County Council Lib Dem group leader Councillor Mike Mackrory said: "It seems extraordinary that Essex County Council vigorously contested the claim over a long period despite the medical evidence and that a further incidence of a collapsed ceiling occurred in another part of the building affecting the same member of staff.

"It would seem grossly negligent for the rest of the building to not to have been thoroughly checked after the first collapse. I hope lessons have been learned so that staff are not put in further danger."

A spokesperson for Essex County Council said: "We are very sorry for what happened to Ms Williams and accepted responsibility at a very early stage in these proceedings.

"When agreeing compensation, we must always make sure the compensation claimed is justified. Unfortunately, there was a dispute about how much compensation was due.

"We are pleased that ultimately we were able to agree an amount of compensation which we felt was justified."

IN BRIEF

Top rating for third year running

ESSEX County Council has achieved a top rating for efforts to cut emissions and strengthen climate resilience.

The CDP (originally the Carbon Disclosure Project) has awarded the council an 'A' rating.

This is the third year running it has received the top rating. It also remains the only county council in the UK to achieve this.

As part of the assessment, the CPD found the council high performing in its efforts to:

■ Strengthen climate resilience, including protecting residents from flooding, overheating and water shortages.

■ Cut greenhouse gas emissions while fostering a sustainable, low-carbon economy.

Councillor Peter Schwier, the council's cabinet member for environment, waste reduction and recycling, said: "Earning an 'A' rating for the third year in a row shows our commitment to driving positive change to protect the Essex environment."

Firm wins King's award

A WITHAM firm has won a prestigious King's Awards for Enterprise 2025, recognising its outstanding achievements.

Aconda Industrial Carriers, Witham, a specialist in the design and manufacture of machines which are used to move heavy loads in challenging environments, was given the award in the innovation category.

The prestigious awards are available across four categories - innovation, international trade, sustainable development and promoting opportunity through social mobility. As well as an invite to a royal reception, successful firms are able to display the awards' emblem.

Milestone for DigiGo service

ESSEX County Council's on-demand transport service, DigiGo, has officially reached 100,000 passenger journeys.

This marks a major milestone in improving connectivity across rural and suburban areas.

Since launching in April 2022, DigiGo has transformed local travel, providing vital connections for residents.

The service has no fixed routes or timetables. DigiGo offers flexible travel that can be booked via the TravelEssex app.

Invitation to residents during Care Home Open Week

A GROWING luxury care home in Chelmsford is throwing open its doors to invite neighbours to experience life in the "village".

Broomfield Village Care home opened behind Broomfield Hospital in January.

The 137-bedroom home includes a beauty salon, cinema room, sweet shop, indoor gardening room, an inhouse pastry chef and a therapy pool.

The home caters for residents needing residential care, dementia care, nursing care and respite care.

Now, staff and residents are inviting visitors to take a look around and sample life in Broomfield Village during Care



Broomfield Village Care Home

Home Open Week. The national event, by Championing Social Care, is an opportunity to showcase the services care homes offer and to demonstrate how care in a modern setting supports people to thrive.

During the week, starting on Monday (June 16), events include:
■ Monday, 3.30pm to 4.30pm - snacks, scones, cake, ice cream

cones and fruit platters.

■ Tuesday, 2.30pm to 3.30pm - live singer and open kitchen taster session with mini canapes of starters and desserts

■ Wednesday, 10am to 2pm - wellness day with pamper sessions, Tai Chi, fruit water, smoothies, fruit platters and yoghurts.

■ Thursday, 2.30pm to 4.30pm - dementia friendly cinema with popcorn, chocolate and ice cream from the sweet shop.

■ Friday, 2pm to 4pm - afternoon tea and dance.

■ Saturday, 11am to 3pm - garden party and BBQ.

■ Sunday, 10am to 12pm - doggy picnic in the garden with doggy

treats, coffee and cake

The care home's co-founder Ash Goyal said: "We had been working towards opening Broomfield Village for a number of years and we now have an opportunity to welcome the local community into the home.

"We welcome you to come and have a look around Broomfield Village and to enjoy some events which will give you a little insight into what life is like here. We hope this provides a more relaxed opportunity to visit us, rather than the formality of booking an appointment. Our residents cannot wait to show off their home."

■ Visit principle-carehomes.co.uk/broomfield.