



Annual report for 2021-22

**Luke O Connor House Resource Centre,
21 Barter Court, Hightown, Wrexham, LL13 8QT**

Email: clerk@offacommunitycouncil.gov.uk

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Introduction

This annual report sets out to inform the residents of Offa Community Council about the activities undertaken by Offa Community Council during 2021/22 based on the financial year 1st April-31st March. The report contains a brief outline of the structure of the Council, an overview of the Council's activities throughout the year and a financial summary.

The Community Council continues to work for the benefit of Offa and its residents. All members are unpaid and work as elected representatives of the community as part of Community Council which is a corporate body.

The Community Council operates under legislation, the Local Government Act 1972 and other subsequent statutes.

Contact

The Council office is based at its resource centre at 21 Barter Court, Hightown, Wrexham and the contact for the Council is the Clerk to the Council Karen Benfield, CILCA (Wales)

Meetings

The Council has returned to hybrid meetings since 1st September 2022 based at Luke O Connor House and Zoom. The Council meets on the first Thursday of the month at 7pm, with the exception August Recess, unless urgent business arises.

Committees

The Council operates a committee structure with the following currently in place:

- Management, Finance and General Purposes Committee
- Planning Committee
- Events and Media Committee

All Committees report to the Full Council and bring forward recommendations for consideration. The membership being all members of the Council.

The Council

The Community Council consists of 18 members (Councillors) covering four wards as follows:

Brynyffynnon Ward	Five members
Erddig Ward	Four members
Hermitage Ward	Four members
Offa Ward	Five members

COUNCIL MEMBERS

BRYNYFFYNNON WARD

Phillip Wynn 6 Court Rd, LL13 7RH

Barbara Anne Lloyd 22 Alexandra Rd LL13 7SH

Steven Vale 18 Court Rd, LL13 7RH

Christine Griffiths, 25 Dolydd Rd, LL13 7TE

John Ramm 27 Thomas Court, LL13 8QN

ERDDIG WARD

David Jones 1 Green Pk, LL13 7YE

Keith Williams 2 Jarman Ave, LL13 7AT

Alex Jones 20 Dol Isaf, LL11 3DX

Angela Jones 22 Ffordd Glyn, LL13 7QN

HERMITAGE WARD

John Williams 16 Monger Rd, LL13 8QY

Linda Subacchi 2 Ffordd Gerwyn, LL13 7DX

Graham Wynn 29 Nelson Street, LL13 7YD

Graham Rogers 7 Bell Court, Hightown, LL13 8QP

OFFA WARD

R Alun Jenkins 1 Maes Glas, Court Rd, LL13 7SN

Jim Steele 1 Greenbank St, Hightown, LL13 8NY

Kenn Palmer Lane End, Bersham Rd LL14 4HD

Sarah Roberts 43 The Homestead, LL14 4HQ

Andrew Ranger 54 Victoria Rd, LL13 7SG

Contact Councillors via the Clerk to the Council Mrs Karen Benfield at:

COUNCIL OFFICE Luke O Connor House Resource Centre, 21 Barter Court, Hightown,
Wrexham, LL13 8QT

Tel: 01978 291562 Clerk's mobile: 07754377663

Email: clerk@offacommunitycouncil.gov.uk

The Community Council elects a Chair and a vice-chair at the Council's annual meeting in May serving a term of two years. The Council is supported by three members of staff; the Clerk to the Council Karen Benfield, Admin Officer Helen McCarthy and Community Agent Annmarie Ruscoe.

Training and Development

The Council actively promotes training opportunities for members and its staff ensuring that the Council is well prepared to carry out its work.

Grants and Donations

The Council supports local organisations and charities which provide a service to the Offa Community. Through the Offa Grant Scheme the Council awarded grants to voluntary or charitable groups primarily based or working in the community. In 2021/22 these groups included:

Regent St Methodist Playgp	£75
Bellevue Playgroup	£75
Cylch Meithrin Bodhyfryd	£75
Cylch Meithrin Brynycabanau	£75
Picnic in the Park event	£500
Victoria School – outdoor classroom	£200
Family Friends	£50
Wrexham Allotment Assoc	£50
Wrexham Sounds	£100
Wales Air Ambulance	£200
Parciau pensioners Gp	£120
Erddig Youth Club	£550
Parciau Indoor Bowling Club	£125
Wrexham carpet Bowls	£125
Larchwood Morris Dancers	£125
New Steps Stroke Club	£250
Wrexham Concert Band	£250
Bellevue Youth Band	£250
LOCH Management Committee	£2,000
Parciau Bowling Club	£2,000
Nightingale House	£200
Friends of Hightown Community Resource Centre	£250
Parciau Community Centre	£250
Maesgwyn Community Centre	£250

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

The Budget:

The Community Council raises most of its money via the local government precept. The precept for 2021/22 was £188,000 an increase of £2,000 on the previous year. Due to an increase in the tax base this resulted in a negligible increase in community council tax payable by residents.

The Finance Committee sets a draft budget in December each year guided by the Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer. This is then formally agreed by the full Council in January each year and the Finance Officer at WCBC notified.

The Council is subject to both Internal audit by an independent auditor and external audit by Audit Wales. Once again the council received an 'Unqualified Audit' for 2020/21 meaning no issues were identified.

Budget Monitoring:

The Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer ensures that the council works within legal parameters at all times and continually monitors the expenditure against budget. Detailed quarterly expenditure reports are presented to Council. In addition a monthly report is presented to Council on each expenditure item.

Financial Reserves:

The Council holds sufficient financial reserves to maintain its operations effectively and in preparation for future projects and services whilst carrying out its legal operational duties.

INCOME 2021/22

Precept	£188,000
Interest Received	£343
Booking Fees/Rent	£16,488
Grants	£12,000
RWF Project	£32,872
Vat recovery	£13,340
Total Income	£263,043

EXPENDITURE 2021/22

Administration	£8,549
Section 137 Payments (grants)	£8,315
RWF Project	£26,553
Service Level Agreement (youth	£29,767
Wages and Salaries	£56,696
Insurance	£3,208
Chairmans Allowance	£57
Members Expenses	£300
Subscription	£249

Training	£45
Street Furniture	£670
Community Centres SLA	£16,029
Play Schemes	£3,494
School Crossings SLA	£6,023
Environmental Improvements	£6,442
Advice Service SLA	£6,429
Play Areas SLA	£16,088
Newsletter	£2,267
Church Lights	£1,350
Contingency	£4,594
Luke O Connor House Resource Ctr	£14,727
Xmas events	£22,430
Total Expenditure	£234,382

SERVICES AND PROJECTS

1. Offa Advice Service

The Community Council invests in providing a free advice service for all residents of Offa via a service level agreement with Caia Park Community Council.

Advice offered can cover any benefit related or debt issue as well as more generalist advice on any number or range of topics. It is an open-door service with the sessions run on a “first come first served basis”. It is also authorised to issue food bank vouchers to eligible residents and complete debt relief orders. The cost of providing the service £6,500 is met entirely by the Community Council.

2. Term Time Play Provision

In 2021-22 the Community Council have funded play sessions located at the Brynycabanau play area – 1 session a week during term time. For the following year 2022/23 the Community Council intends to increase the number of sessions to include 4 school holiday sessions per week at Bellevue Park, Little Vawnog and at Brynycabanau playarea in addition to the term time provision.

The service at all sites is provided by Wrexham Play Development Team and reports confirm that the provision is well used and valued by both children and parents. The cost of play provision is in the region of £7,500 annually for 2021/22.

3. Luke O Connor House Resource Centre

Luke O'Connor House is Offa Community Council's community resource centre located on Hightown's Barracks Field estate. Formerly the Wrexham office of Wales and West Housing Association, the Community Council took over the running of Luke O'Connor House when it became vacant in early 2001 with the aid of a £33,000 Sustainable Communities grant from the National Assembly for Wales. This helped finance internal renovation, a Community Development Worker and various equipment including a computer suite for providing free IT classes. In 2004 when the

original 3 year lease expired Offa Community Council took the decision to purchase the centre with the aid of a PWLB loan.

Office space is leased to various organisations which include HAFAL, a mental health charity, which runs the Wrexham Outreach Tenancy Support (WOTS) supporting tenants with basic skills in tenancy maintenance, help with social living skills and integration into the larger community.

There are various courses and groups that run at Luke O'Connor House which are funded in different ways including computer classes, art and craft classes, music groups and a youth club.

The centre has been very successful and is a well-used facility. Operational costs currently stand at around £15,000 per annum.

4. School crossing patrols

In 2013, Wrexham County Borough Council decided to withdraw funding for the school crossing patrols based in the community as the volume of traffic and perceived risk did not meet their criteria. Accordingly, they invited the Community Council to fund the provision.

At the time, there were three manned school crossings in Offa which Offa Community Council agreed to fund:

Fairy Rd (St Josephs School)

Penybryn (St Marys School)

Poplar Rd (St Giles School).

Recently Penybryn has had a pedestrian controlled traffic light crossing installed and it was decided to discontinue that service.

Given that there are a number of children of primary school age who make their journey to and from school unaccompanied, the Community Council have always felt that this service is important for health and safety reasons. This service costs the Community Council approximately £9,500 annually.

The Community Council is committed to ensuring the safety of its school children and has recently purchased large bi-lingual signs asking parents to park responsibly outside the school gates and observe the restrictions. These signs have been presented to each of the 5 primary schools in the community.



5. Maintenance and Repair of public play facilities

In 2013, Wrexham County Borough Council decided to withdraw funding for the future maintenance, inspection and repair of equipped playgrounds within the community and offered these via a service level agreement to the Community Council or the facilities would close and any equipment removed.

There are six equipped play areas:

Brynycabanau	Howards Field	Court Rd
Bryn Offa	Maesgwyn	Bellevue Park Infants and Juniors

Adult fitness trail at Bellevue Park

These cost approximately £15,000 per annum to maintain. In addition during 2021/22, the Community Council has spent £30,000 on replacement fencing and play equipment. The Council actively seek financial opportunities to upgrade or enhance these facilities.

6. Youth Outreach Work

The Community Council fund the provision of three youth work sessions per week (2021-22) through an SLA agreement with the Caia Park Partnership. Two sessions are centre based youth clubs and one session of detached youth work. The outreach workers travel around the four community wards engaging with young people offering support and guidance as well as acting as a deterrent for anti-social behaviour.

The Community Council also funds weekly football sessions for Offa young people and children run by the Brickfield FC in various locations in the community.

The total costs for providing both the youth service and football training sessions, excluding any one-off grant payments, represents almost 20% of the Council's income.

7. Newsletter

Twice a year the Community Council publishes a 24 page A5 full colour newsletter which is distributed to every household in the community, an approximate distribution of 4,500 copies. This newsletter enables the Community Council to publicise its activities and inform residents of the opportunities available to them within the community. It contains no advertising and is packed with interesting articles relevant to Offa residents. It also gives the opportunity for the Community Council to consult with residents on various topics so Councillors are aware of the public's priorities on public spending. The newsletter costs £1,200 per publication.

8. Community Events

The Community Council arranges several free events throughout the year for its residents:

An annual Offa carnival is held in Bellevue park funded and organised by Offa Community Council. The event also includes a dog show with all proceeds going to the Hack Horse Sanctuary charity. This event has been held continually every year since 1998, until the Covid pandemic lockdown

restrictions in 2020/21 and has grown in attendees and attractions into one of the biggest events in Wrexham. The carnival restarted in 2022 at Bellevue Park and was enormously successful. The event is staffed on the day by volunteers from the Community Council both Councillors and staff. Annual cost £3,500 plus donations.



Annual Pensioners Xmas Party – The Community Council hold a special Xmas party every year in the Parciau Community Centre for its senior citizens. This is a free event funded by Offa CC who provide a 3 course traditional Xmas lunch and a small gift presented by Santa. Games/ raffles and a local choir singing carols provide the festive atmosphere. Annual cost £750 plus donations.



Santa float – for the first time in 2020-21 the Community Council staged a santa float which travelled around the area. This event proved to be such a success it is now an annual event. Annual cost £200



Xmas Lights Switch on event (2021-22)

Offa Community Council staged a fantastic Xmas Lights switch on event in Bellevue Park. The bandstand and 4 avenues of trees were lit up and the event featured a snow machine, festive band, santas grotto, festive food and arts and crafts stalls in the community centre. First year cost circa £20,000 (purchasing the lights and erection). This event proved extremely popular and will again be held annually.



Offa Citizen of the Year Award – each year the Community Council present an award to one of its residents in recognition of their voluntary work in the community.

9. Climate change/ biodiversity

The Council is conscious of the need to act responsibly and to try and influence the wider community. It has recently signed up to the 'Plastic Free Wrexham' initiative, has adopted a 'Carbon Neutral Strategy' action plan and is encouraging residents via articles in its newsletter and on social media to remove the use of single use plastics.

The Council owns a parcel of land called Little Vawnog which it has developed into a Conservation Area with 3 distinct habitats meadow, woodland and river bank. It has recently entered into a partnership SLA with Woodwork CIC to manage the woodland area. WoodsWork is a community interest company, a non profit organisation which aims to work in the best interests of the community. They are aiming to manage the area in a way that protects the wildlife and environment whilst also making it a safe, accessible and appealing place for the community to enjoy.

The Council regularly arranges litter picks with Keep Wales Tidy and the Probation Team. It also periodically hires large skips which are located in various parts of the community to enable the more isolated and vulnerable members of the community to dispose of large unwanted items which are either recycled or transported to landfill free of charge.

10. Maesgwyn and Parciau Community Centre

In 2013 the Community Council were approached by Wrexham CBC to see if it would be interested in taking on the funding and management of the two community centres as it was the intention of WCBC to close the centres following a review of their discretionary services.

Both centres were well used facilities and the Community Council took the decision to undertake the future funding in order for the 2 centres to remain open. In 2019 the Maesgwyn Community Centre was leased to the Community Council. The lease for the Parciau Community Centre is still under negotiation. A Bookings officer was employed by the CC to run the 2 centres. Bookings increased and in 2019 the centre income almost covered the annual running costs. However during the pandemic the centres were closed during lockdowns so the income stream was lost for 12 months.

11. Crime prevention and reduction

The Community Council has a close working partnership with its policing team who produce monthly crime reports and regularly attend Council meetings. Members periodically accompany the local policing team out on patrol in the community to see for themselves the issues and problems being faced.

The Community Council has also invested in mobile CCTV cameras and now has a total of 8 cameras funded and maintained by the CC.

A quarterly liaison meeting is arranged by the Town Inspector for all four town councils to get together to discuss issues and current crime trends.

12. Community Agent Scheme

The Community Council employs a part-time Community Agent for 18 hrs per week. The post is funded by Wrexham County Borough Council via a grant they receive direct from Welsh Government. The Community agent works with those aged over 50 in the community who are isolated, vulnerable or in need of support and guidance. Referrals are made by GP practices and adult social care and the agent is responsible for signposting clients to the relevant agency.

13. RWF Project



The Committee on site with sculptor Nick Elphick

For the past few years fund raising has been taking place for a project in Hightown to erect a life-size statue in bronze of a Royal Welch Fusilier together with the regimental goat in a flood-lit landscaped setting in front of the Regimental Barracks. The project is to celebrate and commemorate the regiments long association with the people and town of Wrexham going back over 300 years. The location for the monument is on a grassed area directly in front of the Hightown Army Barracks and it will be a prominent flood lit feature on one of the main routes into Wrexham.

The land is in the ownership of the Ministry of Defence and they have given their permission for the sculpture to be erected in a landscaped setting and the draft licence to occupy the land has already been agreed. The monument will be an important permanent reminder of the towns cultural heritage and will help to commemorate the many lives lost associated with the regiment in past conflicts. The landscaped setting will be floodlit and covered by CCTV. It will be fenced off by 1 metre bow topped metal fencing for added security but with 24/7 gated access along DDA compliant pathways so the site is always accessible. Bespoke metal benches depicting the regiment have been sourced and it is proposed to erect a large pitched roof noticeboard for the regimental history to be displayed. All notices and information will be multi-lingual.

Since the proposal to erect the monument was first advertised locally in the press and on social media there has been a great deal of support from the local community and further afield. To date funding totalling just over £70,000 has been pledged by other community councils, local businesses, community groups and individuals. Further fundraising continues and it is planned for a grand unveiling ceremony to take place on St David's Day 2023.

14. Competent Council

Finally, these are challenging times for community councils. The Council faces many new challenges and opportunities and it is important to be ready to be fit for the future.

A number of competency tests are emerging to help community councils determine how well equipped they are to meet the challenges ahead. These might include:

- A democracy test - % of councillors must be elected at either an ordinary election or bi-election
- A capability test – the Community Council may be required to employ a clerk with relevant professional qualifications
- A capacity test such as a minimum income of £200k
- A governance test – the Council has sound financial management (including internal and external audit), be contactable by email and have a suitable website.

In 2021-22:

- Thirteen councillors have been declared elected with 5 co-options.
- The current Clerk has the recommended 'ILCA' and 'CILCA' professional qualifications and was the first Clerk in North Wales to obtain the CILCA qualification.
- The Council's expenditure/income is in excess of £200k
- The Council has sound management and financial systems. Its internal audit is undertaken by JDH Business Services of Mold and the Council has received an unqualified (no matters to raise) external audit report since introduced in 2001. Agendas, minutes, accounts and contact details can be found at www.offacommunitycouncil.gov.uk. The community can email the Clerk at clerk@offacommunitycouncil.gov.uk

GENERAL POWER OF COMPETENCE

Under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 Section 24 a General Power of Competence is provided for qualifying local authorities in Wales. The general power came into effect on 5th May 2022 and replaces the well-being power (section 2 of the LGA2000) for all principal councils and eligible community councils. It gives Community Councils the same powers to act as individuals generally thus enabling them to do things that are unlike anything they have done before, subject to limitations or restrictions under other legislative provisions. In using the general power a qualifying local authority may undertake activities anywhere and can be used to act in their own financial interests for a commercial purpose or for a charge.

The main positive effects are a more clearly-drawn general power of competence with a reduced risk of legal challenge on vires grounds than is currently the case. There are no negative effects.

In order for a Community Council to become eligible three conditions have to be satisfied:

1. *At least two thirds of the total number of Councillors of the Community Council must have been declared elected.*

2. *The Clerk must hold the CILCA or equivalent Level 3 qualification in the National Qualifications Framework.*
3. *The Council must have received two unqualified auditor's opinions for two consecutive financial years, the latest of which must have been received during the 12 month period ending on the day on which the Councils resolution is passed.*

Once a Community Council has resolved itself to be an eligible community council it will need to reaffirm on an annual basis that it continues to meet the eligibility criteria. A council will do so by passing a resolution at its annual meeting.

At its Annual Meeting in May 2022 Offa Community Council formally declared itself an eligible community council and adopted the General Power of Competence for the following 12 months.

Partner Agencies

- Wrexham County Borough Council
- Offa Policing Team & NW Police
- Caia Park Partnership Ltd
 - Woodsworld CIC
 - Plastic Free Wrexham
 - Keep Wales Tidy
- Wrexham Play Development Team
 - Wrexham Probation Service
 - National Trust team at Erddig
 - Bodhyfryd School
 - St Giles School
 - Victoria School
 - St Marys RC School
 - St Christophers School
 - St Joseph's High School
 - Ysgol Clywedog
 - Friends of Bellevue Park
 - Friends of Wrexham Cemetery

