

## Cyngor Tref **Corwen** Town Council

### Annual Report for 2023/24

2023/4 has been an interesting year with both negatives and positives, but I feel that we have come through as a stronger more forward-looking Council.

Addressing the problematic areas first, we had several issues to contend with.

#### **Problems**

We had, and still have, an issue with the auditors in that we have not completed the returns for the last two years and issues arising from earlier years have not been properly addressed. The current submission is with the internal auditor and I think we are on track to satisfy the requirements of earlier years, although this does not necessarily mean that there will be no repercussions arising.

We have had to deal with issues regarding the Council minutes from previous years as raised by the Ombudsman. This has involved significant meetings with the complainant, whose issues have been found to be substantive, and which have required the Council to take necessary actions to remedy these. We have come to an amicable agreement but we still need to take various actions which are now in hand.

There have been two further complaints made against the Council, one to the returning officer about the by-election and another to the Ombudsman. Both of these have been rejected. We have now received correspondence from the Charity Commission regarding the manner in which the War Memorial Park charity has been operated over the last few years. Their letter is quite detailed, and I can only assume it was instigated by someone locally.

The cemetery records have had to be completely reviewed and an external person contracted to ensure that they are now in an acceptable and digitalised format.

This has led to an unacceptable amount of the CEO and councillors' time and significant unbudgeted expenditure which inevitably come at the expense of the progress which the Council could otherwise have made.

However, it's not all gloom and doom!

#### **Re-organisation**

There have been several changes to the organisation, which I believe have enabled the Council to move to a progressive, professional and inclusive operation. As with Rome, the benefits of these will not be achieved overnight, but considerable progress has been made and we are confident that the Council will become 'fit for purpose' in this financial year.

We have appointed a new CEO who has considerable experience in local government and has good contacts and working relationship with Denbighshire CC. Unfortunately, a good deal of her time has been spent resolving the issues raised earlier but we are almost at the point where the full benefit of her expertise can be felt.

The Groundsman role has been redefined as Facilities Manager so that the Council has a single point of reference for the physical aspects concerning the town's assets.

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The committee structure has been streamlined to three committees, Finance and HR, War Memorial Park and Community Resource Management. These committees have updated terms of reference and separate budgets.

A major complaint by the Ombudsman was in the presentation of the minutes as reflected on the Council's website. We believe that going forward this has been remedied in a manner that satisfies all parties.

During the year we had an inspection by Denbighshire County Council's Standards Committee regarding the procedures and efficacy of the monthly meetings which appeared to be positive.

### **Progress**

The Council has worked closely with officers from DCC and with the local county councillors to maximise the benefits for the town under the levelling up fund from which we have benefited by a list of improvements. Details of which are available for inspection and, for the record, will be a schedule to the minutes. Most significance is the complete refurbishment of the toilets, the rebuilding of the bus shelter and the general upgrading of the appearance of the town. We would like to express our thanks to the officers and the county councillors for their commitment and interest in achieving these.

Independently of this, the Council has made significant progress in other areas. The Christmas tree has returned to the centre of the town, the fireworks display was reinstated, the War Memorial Park has received grants to improve its general appearance and facilities and can and have held various community benefit events.

The website has been completely revised with links to other organisations and hopefully is now significantly more accessible.

We have obtained a grant to provide a separate disabled toilet facility in the park

### **Future**

We are now in a position to move forward with our plans for the coming year. We are in discussions with DCC about the acquisition of the "Red" chapel, now operating as the Museum, which will allow it to have long term security of tenure. We are also discussing a way forward to resolve the issue of the pavilion land which will hopefully open new opportunities for the town. We would like to increase the footfall in the War Memorial Park and to this end we are improving the internal facilities (even a large TV) and obtaining a full operating licence (ie including the sale of alcohol) so that it can be of greater use for the community.

Above all, we recognise that the Council is here for the benefit of the community, and we will strive to ensure that it finds the means of hearing and reflecting their aspirations.