

Report to	Performance Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting	14 October 2021
Lead Member	Councillor Bobby Feeley
Chair of the Task and Finish Group	Councillor Christine Marston
Officer	Phil Gilroy (Head of Community Support Services)
Report authors	Katie Newe (Service Manager Client Services) & Jeni Andrews (Commissioning and Planning Officer)
Title	Meifod Wood Products

1. What is the report about?

1.1. The report provides information relating to the current situation at Meifod, a recent engagement exercise with priority stakeholders, and potential options relating to the future of Meifod.

1.2. The report includes the recommendation from the Member Task & Finish Group which was set up by this Committee to consider proposals for the modernisation of in-house social care services.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.1. To outline the current situation at Meifod.

2.2. To make Members aware of the engagement process, details of the feedback from priority stakeholders and other information relevant to the future of Meifod.

2.3. To summarise the potential options for Members to consider.

3. What are the Recommendations?

3.1. That Members consider the issues facing Meifod.

3.2. That Members consider the feedback from those stakeholders who have taken part in the engagement exercise, in advance of a report being presented to Cabinet.

3.3. That Members consider the advantages, disadvantages and risks associated with potential options (within the context of 3.1 and 3.2) and report their views to Cabinet.

3.4. That Members especially consider the following outcome of the Member Task & Finish Group:

“Agreed: that, having considered the issues facing Meifod and the challenges around the engagement with stakeholders, along with the feedback received from those stakeholders who had taken part in the engagement exercise, as well as the advantages, disadvantages and risks associated with the potential options put forward, the Group commends to Performance Scrutiny Committee that it recommends to Cabinet that –

Meifod should be re-opened as a Council-run service, with reduced activities and new ways of working (as per Option 1 set out in Appendix 7 to the report); and work be commenced to secure an external organisation/social enterprise to provide a range of activities for people from the existing Meifod building (this may not be woodwork-based activities) with a view to exploring the long-term sustainability of Meifod (as per Option 2 set out in Appendix 7 to the report).”

4. Report details

4.1 **Background:** Meifod is a Denbighshire County Council (DCC) managed work opportunity service for adults with learning Disabilities. It is located in a factory unit in Denbigh, for which DCC pays an annual rent. Meifod has developed a good reputation for the wood products they produce and sell and by default has become a business as well as a service. However, the original aim of Meifod was to provide learning and skills development for the people who attend and the Council has, for many years, struggled to balance the competing demands of running both a business

and a service. A 2019 review of services proposed the externalisation of Meifod but work has halted due to the redeployment of Community Support Services (CSS) staff.

4.2 **Current situation:** Meifod closed at the end of March 2020 due to lockdown and staff were either re-deployed or self-isolated. Meifod has not been able to re-open. The reasons for the delay in re-opening Meifod are outlined in **appendix 1 (current issues)**. Before a decision can be made to re-open, the Council needs to consider and review the long term future for Meifod, taking into account the cost of reopening, and the increased revenue costs, along with the views of relevant stakeholders and the impact of changes. Whilst Meifod remains closed CSS are working to ensure that the individuals affected can experience other opportunities. Some individuals do not wish to return to Meifod whilst others are keen for the service to re-open.

4.3 **Engagement:** We know that a number of people have strong views about the value of the services provided from Meifod. The priority has been to engage with the people who would be most affected by any changes to the social care funded activities provided at Meifod, namely, people who attend Meifod, their families and the staff who work there or refer people there. The engagement work has proved challenging. Coordinating this work has been difficult during summer holiday period, but this engagement work could not be delayed to Autumn as this would have further delayed a decision on Meifod's future. Full details of the engagement exercise can be found in **appendix 2 – engagement**.

4.4 **Feedback from the engagement:** Families and staff have responded in different ways. In some cases, a number of surveys have been completed by different family members of the same individual. The families/carers of 12 people have chosen not to respond. 7 citizens have taken part in the face to face, online, telephone and 1:1 engagement facilitated by an independent advocacy organisation. (See **appendices 3, 4, 5a & 5b - engagement findings** for an outline of the feedback.) Taking into account the low response rates and challenges with the engagement process, the messages are that:

- Citizens who have engaged have indicated that they value Meifod and the specific nature of the work they did at Meifod. They have found it difficult to imagine aspirational alternatives around work, but have also indicated that there is not enough choice when it comes to alternatives.
- Families and Carers value Meifod for a wide range of reasons. Almost all

respondents feel it is very important for the person they care for to have a routine and to feel like they are part of a workforce with a job to do. Most feel that the type of activities on offer and the staff are very important. Some of the additional queries and concerns raised by some families indicate that a proportion of Meifod attendees have been profoundly affected physically and emotionally by not attending Meifod.

- All of the staff who have responded feel that learning new skills is very important and almost all feel that the skills of the staff and manager are very important.
- What is less clear are the reasons why some people do not want to return to Meifod.

4.5 **Future demand:** CSS needs to consider changes in the level & type of demand.

- In the 2 years prior to lockdown the number of people attending Meifod had reduced from circa 31 to circa 24 (registers from 2018 and 2020).
- The number of sessions some people attended Meifod had also been reducing. (registers from 2012 to 2020)
- Of the 24 people attending Meifod just prior to lockdown, 7 have recently stated that they no longer wish to attend Meifod and an additional 2 have said that they are nervous about returning whilst there is community transmission of Covid.
- New referrals to Meifod had significantly reduced since the introduction of the Social Services and Well-being (SSWB) Act in 2014. In response to the SSWB Act, citizens have been encouraged and supported to access community based (mainstream) activities, rather than being provided with statutory services.
- Interviews with Social Workers in 2018 showed that they were more likely to signpost citizens to non-statutory community based activities and projects. This has had an impact on all Providers – internal and external.
- Demographic change has meant that young people with severe learning disabilities & complex health needs are now more likely to survive into adulthood.
- These factors have had a direct impact on the number of people being referred, and on the needs of the individuals being referred – referral numbers have decreased, but the complexity of the needs of those people being referred have increased. All of these factors mean that the number of people requiring a service from Meifod has reduced from circa 31 people in 2018 to circa 16 people now. See **appendix 6 (Meifod citizens)**. (NB. Most also attended other services too).

4.6 **Options for the future of Meifod:** In light of the current circumstances, there are a number of options to consider in terms of the future of Meifod. **Appendix 7 (options)** provides a summary of the advantages and disadvantages of each option, along with an outline of some of the risks.

5 How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities

Supporting people with disabilities to learn new skills supports the priority to build resilience and independence

6 What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

6.1 Prior to the pandemic the annual net cost to DCC of running Meifod was circa £170,000 per annum. The gross costs of running the service were higher than this, but wood product sales of circa £64,000 helped to reduce costs. (2019/20)

6.2 Historically, Meifod, along with most other in-house work and day opportunity services, has been more expensive (per person per session) than similar external services. (estimated unit costs outlined in the 2018/19 review data).

6.3 The cost of re-opening and running Meifod will be higher than before the pandemic. There are a number of reasons for this. These include:

- Increased cost of raw materials for wood products – for example costs have increased by 157% from £1220 to £3135 for a timber pack
- Increased heating costs – estimated Heating costs during 2019/20 were circa £5,500. These costs will be up to 50% higher with a new system
- Reduced productivity and sales due to fewer people attending
- The annual rent is set to increase by £8,000 per annum to £33,000
- Fewer people attending will mean that it will cost proportionately more (per person) to provide staffing and there will be voids due to reduced demand

6.4 Individuals who live at home are being offered alternative support via other existing services. This includes additional support hours via the redeployment of commissioned staff, people who live in supported housing being supported by additional hours from the staff in their supported living setting. Some individuals have already secured activities and services in other settings and have said that they wish

to remain in their new setting. Additional hours and alternative activities are funded by CSS.

7 What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

It was important for the engagement exercise to be carried out in order to establish the possible impact of changes on priority stakeholders. Now that this first part of the engagement process has been completed, a stakeholder group is being established which will focus on the completion of the Well-being Impact Assessment (WBIA) and on what priority stakeholders have said about the impact of potential changes. (See **appendix 8** for draft terms of reference.)

8 What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

8.1 Engagement has been focused on priority stakeholders for reasons stated above.

8.2 The Member Task & Finish Group set up by the Committee to consider the modernisation of in-house care services has considered the report and their recommendation is included in Paragraph 3.4.

9 Chief Finance Officer Statement

The report clearly sets out the problems and options for the way ahead. There are a number of constraints about what can happen, such as the length of lease remaining, which means it's likely that short term increases in costs are likely.

However, there are options available which could result in reducing the financial burden in the medium term. Obviously its right to consider these options in light of the results of all the consultations and finance will be trying to work closely with the service going forward to strengthen the financial forecasts of the various options to help inform the final decision.

10 What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

10.1 The risks associated with different options for Meifod are included in **appendix 7**

10.2 Some people have strong views about Meifod. There is a risk that individuals and groups who are not priority stakeholders become the dominant voice and/or that the voice of a few is seen as the view of many. This could result in the future of the service not being shaped by those most affected or by other relevant factors. This risk has been managed by focusing the initial engagement work on gathering the views of individuals who use Meifod and their families and staff, ensuring that it is not just the views of those individuals who make repeated representations that get heard and by funding advocacy and support to help priority stakeholders to have their say. (See **risks summary in appendix 9**)

11 Power to make the decision

Scrutiny's powers with respect to this matter are set out in Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 and Sections 7.4.1 and 7.4.2(d) of the Council's Constitution.