

Report to	Cabinet
Date of meeting	23 November 2021
Lead Member / Officer	Cllr Bobby Feeley / Phil Gilroy
Report author	Phil Gilroy
Title	Meifod Update

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1. This report follows the recommendation from Performance Scrutiny Committee and proposes the safe re-opening of Meifod as soon as possible.
- 1.2. Meifod is a well-respected work opportunity service for adults with learning disabilities, managed by Community Support Services. It is located in a rented factory unit in Denbigh producing and selling wood products.
- 1.3. The facility has been closed since March 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and as such, the Council has taken the opportunity of considering the future of the facility.

2. What is the reason for making this report

- 2.1. The Lead Member is satisfied that the options regarding the future of Meifod have been fully considered by relevant stakeholders, the Performance Scrutiny Committee Task & Finish Group and Performance Scrutiny Committee. A decision is now required on reopening the facility.

3. What are the Recommendations?

- 3.1. Meifod to be re-opened as a Council run service for adults with learning disabilities as soon as it is safe to do so, following the necessary investment into the existing building/facilities. It is anticipated that the service would be able to re-open by February 2022, although this could be sooner if works are completed quickly.

- 3.2. Officers to provide options for Members to consider through the established political process on:
- 3.2.1 new ways of working at Meifod to improve learning and skills across a range of activities, including working with timber.
- 3.2.2 alternative service delivery models for the operation at Meifod with a view to improving the long-term sustainability of the service as the lease on the building expires in 4 years.
- 3.3 Officers to establish a stakeholder group, including representative family members and individuals who attend Meifod or their advocates to ensure they are fully engaged in the re-opening of the service along with developing any future options for its operation.

4. Report details

- 4.1. Meifod is a facility much appreciated by hundreds of adults with learning disabilities, their families and carers who have benefited from the Council service for nearly 50 years. As such it has deep roots in the local community.
- 4.2. The facility had to close at the end of March 2020 in line with Welsh Government Covid restrictions and has not re-opened since for a number of reasons including health and safety, social distancing, staffing, and building repairs & maintenance.
- 4.3. Before considering to re-open Meifod, the Council have engaged with relevant stakeholders including those who attend the facility, their families and carers regarding various potential options for the future of the facility.
- 4.4. Officers reported all the relevant issues, including the responses to the engagement exercise, to a Performance Scrutiny Committee Task & Finish Group originally established some years ago to consider proposals for the modernisation of in-house social care services.
- 4.5. The Task & Finish Group reported their findings and recommendations to Performance Scrutiny Committee on 14 October. Scrutiny Committee, subject to some detailed amendments, agreed with the T&F Group conclusions and resolved that Cabinet should consider their recommendations (see Scrutiny recommendations below under the Consultation Section).

- 4.6. The one off costs to re-open the facility have been estimated at approximately £20k - £25k for which a bid is being made to the Social Care Recovery Fund. It is anticipated these works can be implemented in the next couple of months. On that basis it is anticipated that Meifod could be re-opened by February, or sooner if works can be completed more quickly.
- 4.7. It is anticipated that in the short term the annual costs to the Council of providing the facility will increase due to increased costs of the operation (e.g. cost of raw materials, heating etc). Those increased costs are unlikely to be offset by any increase in sales.
- 4.8. It is also anticipated in the short term fewer adults with a learning disability will attend the facility as some individuals have secured activities and services in other settings and younger adults prefer to use alternative community activities that have been developed since the Social Services & Well-Being Act came into force . Officers will, however, consider how best to promote the use of the facility across relevant stakeholders.
- 4.9. The lease on Meifod runs until Sept 2025, giving time to promote the facility to other relevant stakeholders, consider introducing alternative activities including potential recycling and repurposing projects (whilst retaining the current timber related activity), and considering potential new service delivery models which conform with all relevant legislation and the Council's Welsh Language policy. The aim being to improve the long-term sustainability of the facility, whilst still providing quality and well-structured support activities for adults with learning disabilities.
- 4.10 Introducing alternative activities is considered important in terms of making the facility more attractive and inclusive to a wider range of our vulnerable residents. Diversifying the offer could also impact positively on the Council's wider environmental aspirations, particularly by introducing potential reuse/upcycling activities which can be sold on as part of the wider manufacturing/retail offer.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

- 5.1. Supporting people with learning disabilities to learn and develop new skills supports the corporate 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 gross cost of running Meifod was circa £240k, with wood product sales of circa £65k meaning a net annual cost of circa £170k. Annual running costs for Meifod are likely to be higher than before the pandemic, due to issues such as, increased cost of raw materials for wood products, increased heating costs, increased rent.
- 6.2. It is unlikely that all these anticipated additional costs can be offset by increased income from the sale of the finished timber products, however the overall impact can be assessed as part of the longer term review as laid out in the Recommendations.

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

- 7.1. A stakeholder group is being established to work with individual citizens, their families and carers to understand 'what matters' to them in relation to learning and developing new skills. This group will also collaborate on the completion of the Well-being Impact Assessment (WBIA).

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

- 8.1. An engagement exercise was undertaken with key stakeholders, the results of which make it clear Meifod is valued by many. However, some individuals stated that they did not want to return to Meifod whilst some were very nervous and apprehensive about returning whilst there is still Covid-19 community transmission. Community Support Services will continue to work with all stakeholders, to explore options for meeting their needs either at Meifod or at an alternative setting if preferred.
- 8.2. Performance Scrutiny, at its meeting on 14 October, considered a report by the Task & Finish Group which had examined in detail the future service options; and the engagement feedback from key stakeholders. Following a rigorous debate on the issues put forward, Performance Scrutiny recommend to Cabinet that:
 - (i) Meifod should be re-opened as soon as possible as a Council-run service within the existing building, with additional investment being provided for the service provided there;

- (ii) work commence to explore all opportunities for new ways of working to improve and develop Meifod, including the potential of securing an external organisation / social enterprise to provide a range of activities for people from the existing Meifod building (all of which do not necessarily have to be woodwork based activities) with a view to exploring and securing the long-term sustainability of Meifod; and
- (iii) future service-provision conform with all relevant legislation and the Council's Welsh Language policy

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1. 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 Prior to reopening the facility, a thorough risk assessment will be conducted ensuring that all necessary precautions are taken to ensure that Meifod is a safe environment for all attending. Community Support Services will work with each individual to explore 'what matters' and how best to meet their individual needs moving forward.

11. Power to make the decision

11.1 The Local Authority has the power to determine how social care needs are met through the Social Services & Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.