

CABINET REPORT

10 June, 2014

Cabinet Member: Councillor Gareth Thomas

Subject: The future of special educational needs provision in Meirionnydd a Dwyfor

Contact officers: Iwan T Jones – Corporate Director /
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The resolution sought / purpose of the report

The purpose of this report is to ask the permission of the Council Cabinet to commence a period of statutory consultation on the proposal to develop a new special education needs school, with a residential and short break provision, in Parc Eryri, Penrhyndeudraeth and to relocate Ysgol Hafod Lon and Uned Ty Aran to this site.

Views of the local members

Any comments by Local Members will be presented in the meeting.

I. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to ask the Council Cabinet for permission to carry out a statutory consultation on the intention to reorganise the Special Education Needs provision in the Meirionnydd and Dwyfor areas of Gwynedd. We ask that the Cabinet decides on:
 - i. The preferred model for the SEN provision for consultation, and
 - ii. The proposed new site for the SEN school to cater for the children and young people of Meirionnydd and Dwyfor that require SEN education
- 1.2 In its meeting on the 9 October 2012, the Cabinet agreed on the '*Priorities Plan – Reorganisation of Education Provision*' which included the Council's intention to amend its SEN provision.
- 1.3 The report noted the Council's wish to *amend its Special Education provision because the capacity of the existing provision at Ysgol Hafod Lon is insufficient and in need of being modernised and extended.*

- 1.4 *There is appropriate and suitable provision for the northern part of the county at Ysgol Pendalar, Caernarfon, and the new provision will aim at establishing a similar provision, at a central location, for the remainder of the county. The aim is to provide a regional Special Educational Needs Centre of Excellence and to rationalise the provision for pupils who are at present placed beyond the county boundaries. The current provision is not centrally positioned for the area it serves, and the resources within it do not meet modern educational requirements.*
- 1.5 The 21st Century Schools Programme was implemented by the Welsh Government in March 2010 as a major, long-term and strategic capital investment programme to establish a generation of 21st century schools in Wales. The programme aims to focus resources on the right schools in the right places.
- 1.6 Gwynedd Council has identified the 21st Century School Programme as a key priority within the local Authority's Strategic Corporate Plan. The Council is committed to developing high quality capital projects as an integral part of improved educational provision through ensuring schools of appropriate size and location throughout the County.
- 1.7 Gwynedd Council has identified the need for a new SEN school for the Meirionnydd and Dwyfor areas of Gwynedd as one of the priority projects within their 21st Century Schools Programme.
- 1.8 The new school will cater for any child that has a statement because of a recognised educational/medical need condition e.g autism, which is judged serious enough by experts and the Statement of Educational Needs Moderation Panel (which includes the head of Ysgol Hafod Lon and Pendalar) to require access to a SEN school. The school will not receive children with emotional and behavioural difficulties that do not have educational/medical needs.
- 1.9 The proposal to build a new SEN school would ensure that the County's **Strategic Plan 2013-2017** to provide equally and fairly for all its residents is realised, in building a new special school in the south of the county which ensures parity of access to specialist provision regardless of where pupils with more profound and multiple learning difficulties may live would be realised.
- 1.10 The development will also help meet the four aims of Gwynedd's **Strategic Plan 2013-2017** for **Children and Young People 'Supporting all children and young people to live fulfilled lives'** with particular emphasis on the 1st, 2nd and 3rd priorities, and improved prospects for fulfilling the 4th priority:
- Raising the educational standards of children and young people;
 - Equalising opportunities for vulnerable groups of children, young people and families;

- Improving the suitability of the schools system;
 - Better preparing young people for work and life.
- 1.11 The **Strategic Plan** refers to the need to: ‘improve some buildings to create a sustainable network of schools that are fit for the future’ and to ‘increase in the number of school places for children with additional educational needs in Merion/Dwyfor’, which are the most sparsely populated areas of Gwynedd.
- 1.12 The development of a new SEN School that is suitable in terms of the location, building, staffing and resources will enable the authority to respond fully to the rights of parents to choose suitable education for their children - mainstream or special school (**Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001**) and to comply with the requirements of the **Equality Act (2008)**.
- 1.13 This development will also comply with Gwynedd Council’s Welsh Language policy and latest **Welsh Language Strategy** in ensuring that the right of these pupils to be educated through their first language is met and that the wishes of their parents are respected.
- 1.14 Gwynedd Council’s decision to priorities the provision of a new SEN School which is fit for purpose, would address the recommendation (R2 continue to work with the LEA to realise the plans for improving the suitability and quality of the building) within Ysgol Hafod Lon’s school inspection report by Estyn in 2010 which stated that that ‘*the size of, and facilities at, the school are no longer sufficient for the number of learners*’ (there were 38 pupils attending the school at the time of the inspection).
- 1.15 Furthermore the **Strategic Review of Additional Learning Needs Report** commissioned from CAPITA by Gwynedd Council in 2011, makes direct links between the need to transform ALN/SEN services in conjunction with the provision of a new SEN School in the Meirionnydd and Dwyfor area.

2. The business case

- 2.1 Following the Cabinet’s approval of *Priorities Plan – Reorganisation of Education Provision*’ in its meeting on 9th October 2012, the council moved ahead with realising the project including creating a business case outlining the business needs and consideration of options for the future of SEN provision in Meirionnydd and Dwyfor. Not only would the business case set the direction of the project but would also be a necessity to ensure funding from the Welsh Government towards the capital costs of establishing the new school. The business case submitted to the Welsh Government will be based on a ‘5 case business model.’

2.2 The first stage of the business case, the 'strategic Outline Case' has already been approved by the Welsh Government. This included the case for change, business needs and the appraisal of options.

2.3 An outline of the current situation and case for change is outlined in **Appendix I**.

3. Developing options and agreeing a preferred way forward

3.1 In order to identify and assess possible options for the future provision of SEN education in Meirionnydd and Dwyfor it was agreed to set up a Working Group. During numerous meetings the Group discussed the need for change, the future SEN needs in the area and agree possible options that would meet these needs. The Working Group membership consisted of Gwynedd Council officers from the Education and Social Services departments, Local Councillors with an interest in SEN, chair of the governing body of Ysgol Hafod Lon. Head of Ysgol Hafod Lon and responsible person for Uned Ty Aran, Head of Ysgol y Gader, Dolgellau, Scope Cymru Family and Young Persons Officer and gCommunity Children's Health Officer for Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board.

3.2 During the series of meetings the Working Group came up with 8 possible options and to assess them against agreed investment objectives (see **Appendix 2**).

3.3 The result of this exercise was an agreed short-list of 4 options, including a favoured way forward. The 4 options including the advantages and disadvantages associated with each option and the reasoning behind their suitability as an option for the future provision of SEN education in Meirionnydd and Dwyfor can be seen in **Appendix 2**.

3.4 The capital and revenue costs as well as the conclusion reached on the 4 options can be seen below.

3.4.1 Option 1: do nothing

This option would mean that Gwynedd would continue with its present provision

Capital costs

If continuing with the present provision, as it is, an estimated £1.5m has been identified in order to continue with the present provision in Ysgol Hafod Lon at its present location and Ty Aran and Ty Meirion. This would not improve the provision nor increase the capacity for more children to attend the school.

Revenue costs

	Pupil numbers	Present (2013/2014)
Ysgol Hafod Lon - Allocation	46	£764,122
Tŷ Aran – Budget	3	£103,040
Tŷ Meirion - Budget	10	£240,000
Uned ABC	8	£73,178
Short term - Barnados		£62,000
Short term – other services		£52,000
Out-of-county residential and daily (education and residential)	2+5 pupils	£562,050
Mainstream pupils	59	£1,003,000
Transport costs		£447,719
Total revenue costs	133	£3,307,109
Other income		
Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board		£144,000
Total income		£144,000
Total NET cost		£3,163,109

Conclusion

It was felt that this option would result in very little real advantages for the future of SEN in the area and numerous disadvantages such as not enough SEN school places, facilities remaining not fit for purpose, location of SEN school not being central to Meirionnydd and Dwyfor, some children continue to go out of county for their education.

It was not felt that it would improve the education needs for children with SEN in Meirionnydd and Dwyfor adequately to answer the required strategic and business needs for the future. It would also not address the strategic and

business needs for a residential provision in Gwynedd that would allow children to attend the new school rather than the expensive out-of-county provision or allow short break provision for families.

3.4.2 Option 2: Developing a new SEN Centre located in Penrhyndeudraeth, consisting of a school for up to 100 children, a 6 bed residential/short breaks provision and closing Ysgol Hafod Lon and the units at Tŷ Aran and Tŷ Meirion. This option would mean:

Capital costs

The capital cost of developing the new school and residential / short term unit will be £12.4m with the Welsh Assembly contributing £6.2m towards the cost.

Revenue costs

	Pupil numbers	Present (2013/2014)
New school - allocation	100	£1,639,860
Residential / short term unit	6 beds	£550,000
Mainstream pupils	33	£561,000
Transport costs		£357,872
Total revenue costs	133	£3,108,732
Other possible income		
Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board		£0
Other Local Authorities*		£183,333
Total income		£183,333
Total NET cost		£2,925,399

* There is no guarantee of this income. Although a couple of other Local Authorities have shown an interest in the possibility of sending children to the new school in the future, as daily and residential pupils, there is no guarantee at present.

Conclusion

The advantages associated with this option include enough SEN school places, modern facilities with specialist resources, centrally located to Meirionnydd and Dwyfor, fewer children having to go out of county resulting in financial savings, residential provision and short break provision for Gwynedd families, a hub for multi-agency co-working, and lower costs.

The main disadvantage would be the removal of the SEN provision in the south of the county that allows children to partake in secondary mainstream education within a reasonable distance of their homes.

This option would address all strategic and business needs but would mean discontinuing with the provision at Uned Tŷ Meirion.

- 3.4.3 Option 3:** Developing a new SEN Centre located in Penrhyndeudraeth, consisting of a school for up to 100 children, a 6 bed residential/short breaks provision, closing Ysgol Hafod Lon and continuing with the current provision at the units at Tŷ Aran and Tŷ Meirion. This option would mean:

Capital costs

The capital cost of developing the new school and residential / short term unit will be £12.4m with the Welsh Assembly contributing £6.2m towards the cost.

Revenue costs

	Pupil numbers	Present (2013/2014)
New school - allocation	100	£1,639,860
Uned Ty Aran - Budget	3	£103,040
Uned Ty Meirion - Budget	10	£240,000
Residential / short term unit	6 beds	£550,000
Mainstream pupils	20	£340,000
Transport costs		£439,149
Total revenue costs	133	£3,312,049
Other possible income		

Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board		£0
Other Local Authorities*		£183,333
Total income		£183,333
Total NET cost		£3,128,716

* There is no guarantee of this income. Although a couple of other Local Authorities have shown an interest in the possibility of sending children to the new school in the future, as daily and residential pupils, there is no guarantee at present.

Conclusion

The advantages associated with this option include enough SEN school places, modern facilities with specialist resources, centrally located to Meirionnydd and Dwyfor, fewer children having to go out of county resulting in savings, residential provision and short break provision for Gwynedd families, a hub for multi-agency co-working, continuing with the provision in Ty Meirion which enables children from the south of the county to partake in secondary mainstream education within a reasonable distance of their homes.

The main disadvantage would be higher revenue costs due to continuing with the SEN Units in Dolgellau and that children continuing to attend these units would have limited use of modern specialist SEN resources.

This option would address all strategic and business needs but would mean continuing with the expensive and under used provision at Uned Tŷ Aran.

3.4.4 Option 4: Developing a new SEN Centre located in Penrhyndeudraeth, consisting of a school for up to 100 children, a 6 bed residential/short breaks provision, closing Ysgol Hafod Lon and Uned Ty Aran and continuing with the current provision at Uned Tŷ Meirion. This option would mean:

Capital costs

The capital cost of developing the new school and residential / short term unit will be £12.4m with the Welsh Assembly contributing £6.2m towards the cost.

Revenue costs

	Pupil numbers	Present (2013/2014)
New school - allocation	100	£1,639,860
Uned Ty Meirion - Budget	10	£240,000
Residential / short term unit	6 beds	£550,000
Mainstream pupils	23	£391,000
Transport costs		£424,008
Total revenue costs	133	£3,244,868
Other possible income		
Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board		£0
Other Local Authorities*		£183,333
Total income		£183,333
Total NET cost		£3,061,535

* There is no guarantee of this income. Although a couple of other Local Authorities have shown an interest in the possibility of sending children to the new school in the future, as daily and residential pupils, there is no guarantee at present.

Conclusion

The advantages associated with this option include enough SEN school places, modern facilities with specialist resources, centrally located to Meirionnydd and Dwyfor, fewer children having to go out of county resulting in savings, residential provision and short break provision for Gwynedd families, a hub for multi-agency co-working, continuing with the provision in Ty Meirion which enables children from the south of the county to partake in secondary mainstream education within a reasonable distance of their homes.

The main disadvantage would be higher revenue costs due to continuing with Uned Ty Meirion in Dolgellau and that children attending this unit would have limited use of modern specialist SEN resources.

This option would address all strategic and business needs and would mean discontinuing the under used provision at Uned Tŷ Aran. It would also mean continuing with Uned Ty Meirion enabling children from the south of the county to partake in secondary mainstream education within a reasonable distance of their homes.

The reason for continuing with Uned Ty Meirion

- a) The case for continuing with Uned Ty Meirion in Dolgellau is a highly relevant one for pupils who have to travel long distances for specialist education. We have pupils who live close to Powys, Conwy, Ceredigion and Denbighshire, who presently attend Ty Meirion in Dolgellau. The present pupil population includes pupils who are unable to travel long distances because of complex medical needs, and/or who are severely disabled, and/or have high sensory intolerance levels for proprioceptive activities (they cannot cope with being in a vehicle, or find it a highly distressing experience). Their morning routines and preparations before leaving home for school are on average 90 minutes long, those who need physiotherapy take longer. They presently travel approximately 30 minutes to school, which means that their mornings can begin as early as 6.30 a.m. in order to be in school by 9am. An additional 30 minutes to the proposed new school site at Penrhyndeudraeth (which is half way between both ends of Meirionnydd and Dwyfor) would be unreasonable for some of these pupils. In Dwyfor there will still be the possibility for the present Uned y Traeth to be used for pupils who have similar problems, and who live in Aberdaron/Abersoch/Botwnnog. Unlike the Meirionnydd area, we presently have no PMLD or PMED pupils with complex medical/proprioceptive needs in the far outreaches of Dwyfor.
- b) In addition to reducing travel times for complex PMED pupils in south Meirionnydd, Uned Ty Meirion continues to be an integral part of the education department's Strategic Equality Plan (Disabled Access Adaptations to Mainstream Schools), as it provides the opportunity for pupils to be integrated into mainstream secondary classes on a daily basis. The secondary school pupils at Ysgol Y Gader and Ty Meirion pupils presently share curriculum experiences including music, art, design and technology, assembly, enterprise and PSE, social and Urdd activities and competition and other extra-curricular experiences. Those pupils from Ty Meirion who can sit GCSE, Welsh Bac and entry level qualifications can do so side by side with their more able-bodied peers.
- c) The new SEN school for Meirion Dwyfor will cater for mostly learning disabled pupils, and those pupils who are not learning disabled, but are physically disabled, will continue to be educated in mainstream settings as far as possible, such as the facility provided by Uned Ty Meirion.
- d) This integration has been rated as a strength in Ysgol y Gader's Estyn inspection in 2010, and all recent consultation data demonstrates that parents, governors and local community wish this facility to continue. The last Estyn inspection carried out for Ysgol

Y Gader, Dolgellau was in December 2010. In the report there are the following references to Tŷ Meirion:

'The pupils at the Tŷ Meirion unit are integrated into the life and work of the school in an excellent manner. The school monitors these pupils' educational and social development very effectively through innovative methods.'

4. COMMUNICATION

4.1 Meetings

Following the work carried out by the Working Group it was decided to hold meetings with the staff and governing body members of the relevant schools and parents of children with SEN in Meirionnydd and Dwyfor, and a series of open days in order to consult with the wider community. These took place during October and November 2013 and consisted of:

- Meetings with staff at Ysgol Hafod Lon, Uned Ty Aran and Uned Ty Meirion.
- Meetings with the governing bodies at Ysgol Hafod Lon, Ysgol Gynradd Dolgellau and Ysgol Y Gader, Dolgellau.
- Meetings with parents at Pwllheli, Dolgellau, Porthmadog and Blaenau Ffestioniog.
- Open days at Pwllheli, Dolgellau and Porthmadog.

The main purpose of these meetings was to:

- Share the vision for the future of SEN provision in Meirionnydd and Dwyfor
- Explain the process so far and the work carried out by the Working Group
- Share early plans for the new SEN centre including size, resources and location
- Explain the work that required to be completed in order to secure the Welsh Government investment
- Receive people's opinion on the options
- Share the target timetable for completing the workstreams and opening of the new school

These meetings provided the Council with the opportunity to answer any questions and discuss any concerns that people might have had as well as collecting feedback on the plans for the school and benefits of the favoured option. A vast majority of the people we spoke to (especially parents) were very positive about the plans and looked forward to the opening of the new school.

4.2 Written communications

In July a newsletter was produced and sent to all schools in Meirionnydd and Dwyfor, including mainstream schools, for circulation to staff and parents of SEN children to

explain the objective of the project and the intention to engage with staff, school governor's and parents about the result of the work of the Working Group.

Following the meetings with staff, school governors, parents and other members of the community in October and November it was decided to create a newsletter to share questions raised and replies given during these events. The newsletter was shared with all staff, school governors and parents who were invited to the meetings and open days, whether they attended or not, in order to share the feedback with all the main stakeholders.

All communications shared leading up to, and following, the meetings were also put on the Gwynedd Council website, information was also included in the October issue of *Newyddion Gwynedd* and Local Members were updated via *Rhaeadr*, their regular information bulletin.

The preferred option, which was agreed following assessments against investment objectives and critical success factors (**see appendix I**) carried out during the Working Group meetings, received overwhelming support from the majority of people we talked to which gives us confidence in the selection.

5. THE PREFERRED OPTION

We recommend consulting on the model of developing a new SEN Centre located in Penrhyndeudraeth, consisting of a school for up to 100 children, a 6 bed residential/short breaks provision, relocating Ysgol Hafod Lon and Uned Ty Aran to this site and continuing with the current provision at Uned Tŷ Meirion. This is the favoured option because it would address the following business needs:

- a) Develop a new school with a centralised location for children living in both Meirionnydd and Dwyfor areas of Gwynedd. We aim to open the new school in the Penrhyndeudraeth area of Gwynedd which will mean that SEN children from both Meirionnydd and Dwyfor would have to travel similar distances to receive their education.
- b) Increase SEN school places in Meirionnydd and Dwyfor in order to offer provision for up to 100 children including those with more complex and profound special educational needs, including autism,
- c) Develop a school that will meet the 21st Century Schools standard, the highest standard of curriculum, alternative and therapeutic resources that meet the needs of children with more complex and profound special educational needs, including autism.
- d) Develop a school with the required resources such as a hydrotherapy pool, sensory rooms, specialist rebound therapy rooms, therapeutic external learning

environments, horticultural and small business facilities to realise the favoured model.

- e) Provide a 6 bed residential/short breaks facilities for children and young people with SEN in Gwynedd, and possibly other Local Authorities.
- f) Develop facility that will serve as a central hub to provide professional working space for key workers to fully engage with parents, specialist teaching staff and support staff on a regular basis.

By realising the objectives we envisage the following benefits for SEN children:

- Increasing school places will allow more children to attend an SEN school
- Fewer children would need to access out-of-county SEN provision which would result in cost savings
- More children would be able to live at home
- Better learning environment for the children and young people attending the new provision. A report by Estyn titled *'An evaluation of performance of schools before and after moving into new buildings or significantly refurbished premises'* noted:

'In nearly all schools with new or refurbished buildings that we surveyed, pupils' attainment and achievement have improved. '

'Most schools offer pupils more choices than in their previous buildings because they have more space and better facilities. Also, the provision the school makes for before-school and after-school activities significantly improves.'

- More space and better play provision on the school site
- More room and better provision for young people to learn life and vocational skills
- Specialist provision and equipment like a hydrotherapy pool and therapy rooms available on the school site
- Opportunities for children to use the specialist facilities outside school hours
- Based on present contracts, the majority of children would travel less to the new school
- More children could receive their education in Welsh by not having to attend out-of-county SEN schools

- A short break facility for the use of children of Gwynedd which would result in less family breakdown, and therefore the need for some long term residential placements for these children and their families
- The continuation of the current provision at Ty Meirion would allow access to mainstream secondary education to those children who would find it hard to access the new school from the south of the county
- Children would receive equal opportunities wherever they live in the county

In addition to benefits to children we envisage the following benefits:

- An opportunity to invest £12.4m in a new SEN provision
- Better working environment for staff
- The new facility would meet modern standards that one would expect for SEN children
- Specialist provision and specialist resources would be available on the site of the new centre
- Residential care available
- Possibility of raising income through offering school places and residential care for children from other counties requiring a Welsh language provision
- Option for people to use the specialist facilities outside of school hours
- Parents would have the choice to send their children to a specialist SEN school or to integrate their children in a mainstream secondary school including the SEN unit in the south of the County
- Some reduction in upkeep costs with the closure of one unit

6. INCOME AND RUNNING COSTS FOR THE PREFERRED OPTION

- 6.1 As can be seen from the table below it is anticipated that the running cost of the preferred option will be £2,820,860 and transport costs of £424,008, which is a gross total of £3,244,868.
- 6.2 This compares with a present gross cost of £3,307,109 which means it would be £62,241 less.
- 6.3 An assumption has been made that we could attract an income of £183,333 from other Local Authorities paying for education and residential provision for

children from their counties. We do not envisage any contribution from Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board towards residential costs of the new development.

- 6.4 This compares with an income of £144,000 from from Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board towards out-of-county residential provision art present.
- 6.5 If the predicted income is realised it would result in a reduction of £101,574 to compare with the present net total.

	budget 2013/14	preferred option	+ / -	
Cost of provision	£2,859,390	£2,820,860	-£38,530	Lower cost
Transport cost	£447,719	£424,008	-£23,711	Lower cost
Gross total	£3,307,109	£3,244,868	-£62,241	Lower cost
Income	£144,000	£183,333	£39,333	Possible income increase
Net total	£3,163,109	£3,061,535	-£101,574	Possible difference

- 6.6 It must be noted here that there is a risk attached to the assumed income as there is no guarantee of income from other Local Authorities. Although a couple of Local Authorities have expressed an interest in the possibility of sending childre to the new school as day or residential pupils in the future there is no guarantee that this will happen. There is a need for fuarther work in order to try and gain a more concrete commitment from other Local Authorities.
- 6.7 Because of this risk there is the possibility that no additional income will be attracted. If so, as can be seen from the table below, Gwynedd Council will need to find a further £31,759 to its present budget towards the cost of the new SEN provision.

	Budget 2013/14	Preferred option	+ / -	
Cost of provision	£2,859,390	£2,770,860	-£88,530	Lower cost
Transport cost	£447,719	£424,008	-£23,711	Lower cost
Gross total	£3,307,109	£3,194,868	£112,241	Lower cost
Income	£144,000	£0	£144,000	No income

Net total	£3,163,109	£3,194,868	-	Possible higher cost
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* The cost of provision is lower because there will be no need for a residential provision for 2 beds which means the running costs of the residential/short break unit will be lower.

6.8 The Children and Family Support Department and Education Department have agreed to cover any deficit if the income from other Local Authorities is insufficient to cover the running costs.

6.9 In order to reach a situation where there is no need to identify any extra money there would be a need to realise an income of £81,759 which is equivalent to slightly less than offering one residential bed to another Local Authority, as can be seen from the table below.

	Budget 2013/14	Preferred option	+ / -	
Cost of provision	£2,859,390	£2,820,860	-£38,530	Lower cost
Transport cost	£447,719	£424,008	-£23,711	Lower cost
Gross total	£3,307,109	£3,244,868	-£62,241	Lower cost
Income	£144,000	£81,759	£62,241	Possible reduction in income
Net total	£3,163,109	£3,163,109	-£0	

7. COMMUNITY, WELSH LANGUAGE AND EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

In accordance with the Welsh Government's *Statutory Code Document 006/2013* an assessment was conducted on what effect the change to the present provision would have on the community, the Welsh language and equality (**Appendix 4**). As can be seen from the report no negative impact is expected on the area where the present provision is located or on the children who attend and that the new provision will create positive opportunities for the future.

7.1 Community

Following an analysis of the community use of the present provision and their contribution to the communities and an assessment of the impact the new system would have on this, it was concluded that there would be no impact on the areas where the current provision was and on the pupils who attended and that the new provision would create positive opportunities for the future.

As no negative impact was recognised of relocating Ysgol Hafod Lon and Uned Ty Aran, no mitigating measures have been identified.

When implementing the proposal of establishing the new school, in order to make full use of the new provision it is intended to promote community use for the community on a wider level, especially those with special needs.

7.2 The Welsh Language

In brief, what was noted in the assessment is that any change to the present provision would not have a negative effect on the use of the Welsh language in the schools/unit where they are located or on the local community as the majority of children travel from a number of dispersed locations to receive their education.

It is felt that establishing the new school would create more opportunities to reinforce the use of the Welsh language, especially for those who would have attended the units as there would be an opportunity for them to mix with more children through the medium of Welsh. Attending the new school would also be an opportunity for those children who would have to go out-of-county (to a non-Welsh provision) under the existing system to receive Welsh education and an opportunity to mix with children through the medium of Welsh.

It should be noted that it is difficult to measure the potential impact of schools re-organisation on the Welsh language. The main positive points that derive from the impact assessment are the advantages to the provision in terms of education. Although the current category of the school in terms of language would not change, the proposal is an opportunity to improve education and strengthen the Welsh medium education of children with SEN in Meirion and Dwyfor.

7.3 Equality

A full equality assessment of the impacts of different models was undertaken and as a result we are confident that arrangements would be in place to ensure that the proposal complies with relevant policies to positively promote equal opportunities and that measures are in place to ensure that no discrimination takes place. There is a need to emphasise that it is a SEN school that is under consideration here, therefore disability equality is a key part of all the considerations and that the ultimate aim is to improve the provision for SEN pupils.

8. LOCATION OF THE NEW SCHOOL

- 8.1 As noted in the Cabinet Report on 9th October 2012 *the current provision is not centrally positioned for the area it serves, and the resources within it do not meet modern educational requirements.*
- 8.2 In addition to this it was noted in the suitability assessment of the present Ysgol Hafod Lon that the present site is totally unsuitable for any development because of the size of the site. The suitability report (1.7) in **Appendix I** notes that Ysgol Hafod Lon could reasonably be expected as a stand-alone special school for 49-50 pupils to be more than 3 times the floor area it is and on a larger site.
- 8.3 Because of this it was recognised that the construction of a new school on a new site would be required in order to address the increasing need for SEN school places in the area, should the option to develop a new school be taken, it was decided to recognise an appropriate site.
- 8.4 Because it was recognised that any new provision would need to be located central to Meirionnydd and Dwyfor it was decided to search the areas of Porthmadog and Penrhyndeudraeth for appropriate sites.
- 8.5 Following recognising a number of possible sites and conducting an assessment (see **Appendix 3**) it was concluded that the Parc Eryri site in Penrhyndeudraeth was the best option.
- 8.6 It is therefore recommended that we should consult on the intention to develop a new SEN school on the Parc Eryri, Penrhyndeudraeth site as the best option to ensure a modern fit-for-purpose and sustainable school that is centrally located for both Meirionnydd and Dwyfor.
- 8.7 It is envisaged that the cost of developing a new school and residential / short break unit on the site will be around £12.4m and a business case will need to be presented to the Welsh Government in order to secure 50% of the this investment. The first stage of the business case has already been submitted and approved by the Welsh Government.

9. CONSEQUENCES OF THE RECOMMENDATION

- 9.1 .This recommendation means that Ysgol Hafod Lon and Uned Ty Aran, Dolgellau would be relocated to a new SEN school in Parc Eryri, Penrhyndeudraeth.

9.2 Following carrying out a community, language and equality assessment (**Appendix 3**) it isn't envisaged that there will be any negative impact resulting from the relocation of Ysgol Hafod Lon or Uned Ty Aran.

9.3 However, as part of mitigating any impact of school closure in any area, if there is any local interest in developing the existing sites for the benefit of the community the Council will ask the Regeneration Officer to assist the community to develop any ideas for the use of land and buildings that become vacant as a result of school reorganisation. This is done in accordance with the policy and protocol adopted by the Council in 2010.

9.4 **Staffing Considerations**

9.4.1.1 As we are in fact moving the present school /unit to a new site the present staff will also be offered the opportunity to move. We are already consulting directly with staff and unions and will continue to do so during the statutory consultation period and following any decisions resulting from this process. Gwynedd Council has developed a comprehensive staffing policy, in conjunction with trade unions and headteachers. Clear and open communication with staff will be a pivotal part of any proposals.

9.4.2 Whilst developing the new school, it is required that the Governing Body take responsibility for developing and agreeing the staff structure required. The Council's Personél Department will be available to give advice and assistance to the Governing Body and help with any new requirment required.

9.5 **Establishing a new school**

9.5.1 Whilst woking to open the new SEN school the present Ysgol Hafod Lon Governing Body will be responsible for agreeing the school constitution and staff structure and recruitment.

9.5.2 The school budget will be based on the number of pupils attending the school in line with the school budget formula in accordance with Section 52 of the School Standards and Framework Act 2013.

10. NEXT STEPS

- a) Note that the action taken thus far is all part of the process of gathering information in order to put together initial proposals.
- b) Circular 006/2013 *Schools Organisation Proposals* was published by the Welsh Government and these proposals were made with the help of these guidelines.

- c) It is therefore confirmed that the steps taken to put together these proposals are not part of the statutory process. The discussions thus far are in addition to what Welsh Government expects. We must now decide on a model on which to conduct further consultations, in accordance with the Schools Standards and Framework Act 2013, because of the following:
- i. Site transfer
The transfer of any school to a new site or sites unless a main entrance of the school on its new site or sites would be within 1.609344 kilometres (one mile) of any of a main entrance of the school on its current site or sites
 - ii. Increase in pupil numbers
Except where the school is in a hospital, an increase in the number of pupils for whom the school makes provision which, when taken together with all such previous increases in the number of pupils, would increase the number of pupils by 10% or the relevant number of such pupils (whichever is the lesser)
 - iii. Residential provision
The introduction or ending of a residential provision, or the alteration of residential provision such that the number of pupils for whom provision is made is increased or decreased by 5 pupils
- d) If the Cabinet decides to move ahead with the recommendations in this report a period of statutory consultation will need to be held in accordance with the Schools Standards and Framework Act 2013 and the guidance in the Circular 006/2013 *Schools Organisation Proposals*. It is predicted that this consultation period will be held during the coming weeks. During the consultation period information and the findings of the community, language and equality impact assessments will be published.
- e) Afterwards, a further report will be submitted to the Cabinet, detailing the results of that consultation. The Cabinet will have to consider the consultation, and subject to a recommendation by the Cabinet, a decision will be made whether a Statutory Notice should be published to implement the proposal. If a Statutory Notice is published, a period of 28 days will be allowed for any objections to be submitted. Following this a report will be submitted to the relevant Council committee for a final decision.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

II.1 Therefore the recommendation is:

To commence the process of a statutory consultation in accordance with the requirements of the School Standards and Framework Act (Wales) 2013 to relocate Ysgol Hafod Lon and Uned T? Aran to a new site in Penrhyndeudraeth on 1st September 2016, increase the school's capacity and add a residential (and short break) facility as outlined in the report.

VIEWS OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS

The Chief Executive:

The report makes it clear that the recommended case for change is clear and sensible and the Head of Finance notes the financial considerations clearly in his comments. I do not have anything further to add to the report except to note my support to the recommendation.

The Monitoring Officer:

Legal input was provided whilst developing the proposal and I am content with the recommendation from a propriety and legality perspective.

Head of Finance:

I note that the purpose of the report is to ensure a decision by the Cabinet to conduct a period of statutory consultation in order to develop a new special education needs school in Penrhyndeudraeth to include a residential and short break facility. I support the intention to reorganise schools in a fair and logical manner, despite the challenge to try and do this in a very challenging financial context. With a capital grant of £6.2m in the balance, it is clear there will be risks with any delays and the report recognises some possible future revenue benefits.

From the project's capital perspective, I note from section 2.2 of the report that the Welsh Government has already approved the first stage of the business case to attract a grant from the '21st Century Schools Programme', that is, the Government has approved the outline strategic business case which included the case for change, business needs and option appraisal. In addition, I confirm that the Council's Asset Management Plan has already committed to provide the required match funding, that is, the Council has reserved £6.2m, which is 50% of the capital cost, for realising this project.

From the continuous funding perspective (annual revenue budget) resulting from the preferred option, section 6.5 of the report shows how the project could result in annual savings of £101,574. Of course, that is to be welcomed in the current financial climate, though the risk should be noted (as recognised in sections 6.6 and 6.7 of the report) that there is no guarantee of attracting the income from other counties to the Council. In the context of this risk, I understand that the Education Department and Children and Family Support Department have thoroughly considered the scheme within their savings strategy, and it is clear that these departments will be responsible for addressing any deficit in the revenue costs of the new development.

Statutory Director of Social Services:

I support the proposal to commence a period of statutory consultation to develop a special educational needs school in Penrhyndeudraeth that will include a residential and short break provision. A residential and local short break provision as part of the development would certainly improve results for children who presently have to be placed in provision outside of the county and increase the ability to offer short break provision to support local families.

Appendices

Appendix 1	Existing arrangements and associated business needs
Appendix 2	Option appraisal
Appendix 3	Site considerations
Appendix 4	Community, language and equality impact assessment