

MEETING	Gwynedd Council Cabinet
DATE	15 June 2021
CABINET MEMBER	Councillor Cemlyn Rees Williams
OFFICER	Gwern ap Rhisiart
TITLE OF ITEM	Ysgol Abersoch

1. THE DECISION SOUGHT

The Cabinet is requested to consider the observations received during the statutory consultation period and the response to those observations, and determine whether to:

- i. Approve the publication of a statutory proposal to close Ysgol Abersoch on 31 December 2021, and provide a place for the pupils at Ysgol Sarn Bach from 1 January 2022.
- ii. Approve the issue of statutory notices on the proposal in (i) above in accordance with the requirements of Section 48 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013.

2. THE REASON FOR THE NEED FOR A DECISION

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to report to the Cabinet following a statutory consultation period on the proposal to close Ysgol Abersoch and provide a place for the pupils at Ysgol Sarn Bach.

3. INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 At its meeting on 17 September 2019, the Cabinet supported a recommendation to commence formal discussions with the governing body of Ysgol Abersoch in order to consider options for the future. The decision was made following recent concerns about the reduction in pupil numbers at the school.
- 3.2 Three meetings were held between October 2019 and January 2020. During the first meeting, an initial discussion was held on the options. It was explained that there was a need to consider options that would respond to the challenges facing the school. The second School Review Panel (SRP) meeting was held on 13 November 2019. During the meeting, the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats of all options were appraised. Further comments were also received from the governing body after the meeting. The conclusions of the appraisal were considered, and the list of options was whittled down to 3. These options were presented during the third SRP meeting on 6 January 2020, and the intention to undertake further assessments before making a decision on the preferred option was noted.
- 3.3 During the meetings, a number of options were considered for primary education in the Ysgol Abersoch catchment area in order to ensure a sustainable provision for the future, and respond specifically to the main challenges facing the school.
- 3.4 At its meeting on 15 September 2020, the Gwynedd Council Cabinet resolved to hold a statutory consultation process, in accordance with the requirements of section 48 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013, on the proposal to close Ysgol Abersoch on 31 August 2021 and to provide a place for the pupils at Ysgol Sarn Bach from 1 September 2021. The decision was confirmed by the Cabinet at its meeting on 3

November 2020, after the original decision was called in and referred back to the Cabinet by the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 8 October 2020.

4. BACKGROUND

4.1. The Main Challenges facing the school

4.1.1 The school has been prioritised for a review of the educational provision as it faces a number of challenges. Pupil numbers at the school have reduced consistently since 2016 and the figure has been fragile for some time.

4.1.2 As a result of the current low numbers, the school is in a fragile position and under increasing budgetary pressures, specifically:

- i. School numbers are concerning. In September 2020, there were eight full-time pupils and two nursery pupils.
- ii. The class sizes are small - with 10 pupils being taught in one mixed-age class.
- iii. Projections show 10 pupils in 2021, 12 pupils in 2022, and 12 pupils in 2023.
- iv. September 2020 data shows that 26 pupils live in the Ysgol Abersoch catchment area with 21 of them attending other schools. It also shows that 5 pupils from outside the Abersoch catchment area attend Ysgol Abersoch.
- v. Ysgol Abersoch receives an additional amount to the usual allocation via the minimum staffing protection policy (which ensures at least a headteacher and teacher at each school, and a headteacher and an assistant in schools with fewer than 15 pupils). The total additional funding for the 2020/21 financial year (based on the numbers in September 2019) is £52,582.
- vi. The per pupil cost for Ysgol Abersoch during the 2020/21 financial year is £17,404, compared with the county-wide average per pupil cost of £4,198 for the same period.
- vii. Number of surplus spaces - 76% surplus places at the school (32 in total)

4.2 The Strategic Context

4.2.1 At its meeting on 18 December 2018, the Cabinet approved the principles of a 'Fit-for-Purpose Education' which will form the foundation to deliver the vision of the Education Department and develop a system to ensure high quality education for the children and young people of Gwynedd for the twenty first century. This would be achieved specifically by rationalising the range of ages in classrooms and give headteachers the opportunity to focus on matters of leadership at primary schools.

4.2.2 The Council had been implementing the 'Excellent Primary Education for Children in Gwynedd' strategy since its adoption in April 2009. Within this strategy, factors to support the process of reviewing catchment areas or specific situations are noted. See details of these factors later in the report (Section 4.3.2).

4.3 Choosing the preferred option

4.3.1 During the local meetings, many possible models were proposed and discussed, specifically:

- Do nothing (continue with the status quo)
- Amend the age range of Ysgol Abersoch from 3-8 to 3-11 years
- Amend the age range of Ysgol Abersoch from 3-8 to 3-9 years
- Federalisation with a nearby school
- Federalisation with a nearby school, locating the Foundation Phase on the Ysgol Abersoch site, and KS2 on the site of a nearby school

- Federalisation with nearby schools, locating the Foundation Phase + Years 3 and 4 + Years 5 and 6 on the sites of three different schools
- Close Ysgol Abersoch and offer a place for the pupils in an alternative school
- Locate a Language Centre on the Ysgol Abersoch site
- Establish a Cylch Meithrin at Ysgol Abersoch
- Change the age range of Ysgol Abersoch from 3-8 to 3-9 + establish a Cylch Meithrin at Ysgol Abersoch

An appraisal of these options can be seen in **Appendix A**. The appraisal was reviewed after the consultation period.

4.3.2 In accordance with the 'Excellent Primary Education for the Children of Gwynedd' strategy, a number of factors were considered when appraising the options for dealing with the situation, and these included:

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|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| • Class sizes (and age ranges) | • Financial Resources |
| • Pupil numbers | • The Welsh Language |
| • Leadership and Staffing | • Geographical Factors |
| • The Community | |

4.3.3 After appraising the advantages and disadvantages of the above options against the factors of the Excellent Primary Education for the Children of Gwynedd strategy, three options became evident as the most viable and realistic to address the school's situation, namely:

- Change the age range of Ysgol Abersoch from 3-8 to 3-11 years
- Federalisation with a nearby school
- Close Ysgol Abersoch and offer a place for the pupils in an alternative school

4.3.4 A report submitted to the Cabinet on 15 September 2020 elaborated upon the challenges facing the school and the need to take further steps to address them. Whilst the option of maintaining the current situation has been considered, the Authority was not of the opinion that it would deal with the school's fragile situation. By doing nothing, the challenge of low numbers, small class sizes and financial challenges would continue.

4.3.5 Impact Assessments were conducted in line with the requirements of the Schools Organisation Code 011/2018. Amended versions following the consultation period are included in **Appendix D**.

4.4 REASONABLE OPTIONS TO CONSIDER FOR THE SCHOOL

4.4.1 Amend the age range of Ysgol Abersoch

4.4.2 Two options to extend the school's age range were discussed, namely extending to 3-9 and extending to 3-11.

4.4.3 It should be noted that the option favoured locally was the option to extend the school's age range to 3-9, including the development of the Cylch Meithrin. This option was preferred locally for practical reasons such as better use made of the empty space in the school building, providing a location for the Cylch Meithrin, and to mitigate against the potential impact that the change could have on the numbers at Ysgol Sarn Bach (the school that provides an education for the 9-11 year old pupils from the Ysgol Abersoch area).

4.4.4 When comparing the two options, it was concluded that the best option to be considered further was the option to extend the age range to 3-11. The 3-9 option was discounted for many reasons, specifically:

- It is not anticipated that adding one educational year would lead to a sufficient increase in the numbers. Consequently, the challenges facing the school would continue.
- The age range would not be consistent with the majority of the county's primary schools.

- It would not allow for the school to offer a comprehensive KS2 provision. The pupils would continue to transfer to Ysgol Sarn Bach to complete their primary education.

4.4.5 It is believed that the option to extend the age range to 3-11 would offer more advantages from the perspective of having an opportunity to increase the numbers at the school. The option would also rationalise the age range with the rest of the county's schools, and would mean that the school offers a comprehensive KS2 provision.

4.4.6 In order for the option to respond to the challenges facing the school, this increase would have to be substantial. Nevertheless, it is likely that any increase in the numbers at Ysgol Abersoch after extending the age range, would cause a reduction in the numbers of Ysgol Sarn Bach and, potentially, at nearby schools.

4.4.7 After further consideration, it was concluded that the option would not be a sustainable solution for the future for the school, and that it could affect pupil numbers in nearby schools.

4.5 Federalisation

4.5.1 As seen above (para. 4.4.1), three different forms of federalisation were discussed and considered. It was concluded that the most reasonable option to consider further was the option to federalise with a nearby school.

4.5.2 This model would ensure the continued presence of the school in the village of Abersoch by means of a collaboration agreement with a nearby school under the leadership of a headteacher or headteachers and one Governing body. The governing bodies of the individual schools would be revoked and a federal governing body (new) would be formed. The identity of the school in question (including name, ethos and school uniform) would continue, and it would enable the possibility of sharing staff, resources, IT, buildings and expertise.

4.5.3 However, it is unlikely that the option would address the challenge of a reduction in numbers, and consequently, the school's financial challenges would continue.

4.5.4 While considering this model, there is a need to assess any potential impact on how both schools would operate. Whilst noting the challenges facing Ysgol Abersoch, there would be a need to consider whether such arrangements could offer advantages to the children and young people of the federalising schools by improving the educational provision.

4.5.5 Discussions were held with the headteachers and chairs of governors of the two nearby schools (Ysgol Sarn Bach and Ysgol Llanbedrog) regarding the option to establish a federation with Ysgol Abersoch.

4.5.6 After weighing up the advantages and disadvantages, it was concluded that the option would not be a sustainable solution for the school. Should this option be realised, it is anticipated that the challenge of low numbers, small class sizes and the financial challenges faced by the school, would continue.

4.6 Close Ysgol Abersoch and offer a place for the pupils in an alternative school

4.6.1 This model would mean closing Ysgol Abersoch and offering a place for the pupils to receive their education at Ysgol Sarn Bach.

4.6.2 Ysgol Sarn Bach is considered as the 'alternative school' for the following reasons:

- Geographically, Ysgol Sarn Bach is the nearest school to Ysgol Abersoch. The school is located 1.4 miles from the Ysgol Abersoch site.
- Ysgol Sarn Bach already accepts pupils in year 4 from Ysgol Abersoch.
- 40% of the children (3-8 years) from the Ysgol Abersoch catchment area already attend Ysgol Sarn Bach.
- Ysgol Sarn Bach has capacity to accept the current pupils of Ysgol Abersoch.

4.7 The Proposal

- 4.7.1 This proposal means that Ysgol Abersoch would close, and pupils would be provided a place at Ysgol Sarn Bach.
- 4.7.2 The aim is that the proposal will lead to more consistent opportunities for the children in the catchment area by aiming for Gwynedd Council's aspiration to 'offer education of the highest possible quality that will give the County's children the experiences, skills and confidence that would enable them to develop to be bilingual, successful and full citizens'; this would include:
- Class sizes (and age ranges) - pupils to be educated in more suitably sized classes than the current situation. Implementing the proposal would lead to better consistency in class sizes and reduce the age range within primary school classes in the area.
 - Population and Pupil Numbers - pupils to be educated at a school where the numbers and projections are more robust and sustainable for the future, and reduce the rate of surplus places in the area's schools.
 - Leadership - robust leadership and management in a school with numbers that gives fairness to the Headteacher to be able to professionally lead and manage at the school.
 - The Community - To mitigate any potential negative impact on the community should the proposal be implemented, the assessment notes the importance of ensuring that the community of Abersoch is included in the activities of the alternative school, and to encourage community collaboration between the alternative school and the Abersoch community.
 - Financial Resources - Rationalising the cost per pupil in schools which would reduce the range in the cost per pupil for all Gwynedd children. It is estimated that realising the proposal would lead to a cost per pupil of £4,683 at Ysgol Sarn Bach compared to the current £17,404 per pupil cost at Ysgol Abersoch. The county-wide average for the same period is £4,198 per pupil. It is estimated that the proposal would create an annual saving of £110,062, less additional transport needs costs (£14,000) - which is approximately £96,062 per annum.
 - The Welsh Language - pupils to be educated at a Welsh-medium school, as the current situation, and at a school where social use of the Welsh language is strong.
 - Geographical Factors - pupils would continue to receive their education at a school within reasonable distance of their homes and receive transport in accordance with Council policy.
- 4.7.3 As part of this proposal, a place would be guaranteed for the current pupils of Ysgol Abersoch at Ysgol Sarn Bach. In accordance with the Authority's Admissions policy, parents have the right to choose and apply for a place in any school for their child, and that school is not necessarily the catchment area school. Should this proposal be realised, parents would have the right to make an application to any school as they wish. A place for a child in their chosen school is not guaranteed.
- 4.7.4 It should be noted that Ysgol Sarn Bach already accepts pupils from the Ysgol Abersoch catchment area at the beginning of September following their eighth birthday.
- 4.7.5 If the proposal would be implemented, the Ysgol Sarn Bach catchment area would be amended to include the existing Ysgol Abersoch catchment area.

Map 1: Current catchment areas of both schools



Map 2: Ysgol Sarn Bach Catchment Area if the proposal is implemented



5. THE STATUTORY CONSULTATION

- 5.1. In accordance with the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and the statutory requirements of the School Organisation Code (011/2018), a period of statutory consultation on the proposal was held with relevant consultees between 12 January 2021 and 13:00 on 23 February 2021.
- 5.2. The Education Department originally commenced the consultation on 5 January 2021, but as no child attended Ysgol Abersoch that day due to the latest Covid-19 restrictions, there was local discontent that the authority had not acted in accordance with the requirements of the School Organisation Code to publish the consultation on a "school day". Subsequently, on 7 January 2021, Welsh Government published a temporary amendment to the Schools Organisation Code 2018, which permitted proposals regarding school organisation to continue, where not all schools are open, from 8 January 2021 onwards. Although the Education Department continued to be of the view that 5 January 2021 was a "School day", for the avoidance of any doubt or oversight, it was decided to re-publish the consultation after the 8 January 2021, and hold the consultation between 12 January and 23 February 2021.
- 5.3. A statutory consultation document was drawn up in accordance with the requirements and guidance of the School Organisation Code (011/2018) and a copy was distributed to all relevant consultees, by sending an e-mail which included a link to a particular page on the Council's website (www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/modernisingeducation). In addition, hard copies of all documents were sent out at the request of consultees.
- 5.4. Electronic copies of the consultation document were sent to the two schools that are part of the consultation, and headteachers were asked to distribute them to parents/guardians, pupils, staff members and members of the schools' governing bodies.
- 5.5. In addition, a background pack was published which included impact assessments of the proposal on the Welsh language, the community and equality along with assessments on the probable impact on travel arrangements, the quality and standards of education and an assessment against the aims of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015). The documents were also available to download from the Council's website.

5.6. During the consultation period, Gwynedd Council officers held virtual "drop-in" sessions held over the Microsoft Teams software. Invitations were sent out to Governors, teaching and ancillary staff, parents/guardians of Ysgol Abersoch and any stakeholders from the community of Llanengan who wished to ask questions about the proposal. During the sessions, officers from relevant departments were available to explain and respond to enquiries, in order to enable the individuals to contribute to the consultation. 7 people attended the virtual drop-in sessions.

5.7. Also, a consultation document was created for primary school children with accompanying questionnaires. Arrangements were made for an independent facilitator to hold virtual sessions with schools who were part of the consultation in order to ascertain the views of pupils. An analysis of the responses received during the sessions has been included in **Appendix C**.

5.8. 154 responses were received to the statutory consultation, including a response from Estyn in the form of a report. Responses to the consultation were received in the form of letters, response forms and e-mail.

5.10 The table below shows the form and language used to respond to the consultation:

Type of response	Welsh	English	Bilingual	Total
Response form	9	14	0	23
E-mail	26	85	7	118
Letter	7	5	0	12
Report	0	0	1	1

5.11 Unfortunately, after the consultation closing date, it became apparent that the representatives of the Cylch Meithrin had not received a copy of the e-mail, informing them of the statutory consultation. As noted in the consultation document, we had included the Cylch as a consultee in the distribution list for sharing information about the consultation, but it appears that the Cylch's e-mail address was spelt incorrectly and so the information was not received. We would like to apologise for this error.

5.12 In order to ensure that the representatives of the Cylch Meithrin had an opportunity to consider the consultation document in accordance with the timetable provided in the Organisation Code, the Cylch was given an opportunity to send any further comments to us by 1pm on Wednesday, 21 April 2021. No further responses were received from the representatives of the Cylch during the extended consultation period.

6. Observations received during the statutory consultation

6.1 The purpose of this part of the report is to present some of the main points that came to light during the statutory consultation period. It is not possible to respond to each comment in detail in the body of this report, however, attached (**Appendix B**) is a copy of a table that includes a more detailed analysis of the responses as well as the Council's response. Copies of the individual responses can be seen here: www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/modernisingeducation. Personal information on the responses have been blacked out in order to comply with the requirements of the consultee, the Data Protection Act 2008 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

6.2 Although the consultation document stated that these responses would not be counted as objections, but comments, in terms of the overall response during the consultation, it can be noted that the majority of responses received express objections to the a proposal to close Ysgol Abersoch and offer pupils a place at Ysgol Sarn Bach.

6.3 The responses received elaborated on the following matters:

- Objections to the proposal
- Comments on the statutory process
- Alternative options
- Educational Matters
- Financial Matters
- Assessment against the Well-being Act
- After-use of the School Site
- Nearby Schools
- Transport and Travel
- The Community
- The Welsh Language
- Abersoch Cylch Meithrin / Cylch Ti a Fi
- Other

6.4 **Objections to the proposal**

6.4.1 **The majority of responses received during the consultation period objected to the proposal to close Ysgol Abersoch and offer a place for the pupils at Ysgol Sarn Bach.**

6.4.2 *As explained in the statutory consultation document, the school has been prioritised for a review of the educational provision because it faces a number of challenges. Pupil numbers at the school have reduced consistently since 2016 and the figure has been fragile for some time. In September 2020, only 10 pupils were registered at the school.*

6.4.3 *Should the proposal be realised, the Council is of the opinion that there will be an opportunity for pupils to be taught in groups of peers with a smaller age range and an opportunity to improve the extra-curricular and social experiences of pupils. It would also reduce the number of surplus places within the schools and teach the children in more suitably sized classes. As a result of the current low numbers, the school is in a fragile position and under increasing budgetary pressures; the proposal would lead to reducing the range of allowance per head for all pupils in the County and ensure that the children transfer only once in their primary and secondary education, rather than twice.*

6.5 **The Statutory Process**

6.5.1 **A number of comments were received noting discontent with the decision to hold the consultation, specifically in relation to the Covid-19 restrictions and asking to postpone the consultation. In addition, some responses expressed discontent with the decision to hold virtual meetings instead of public meetings. Some responders were of the opinion that the decision had already been made.**

6.5.2 *Despite the Covid-19 restrictions, the Education Department are confident that the statutory consultation process held was in compliance with the requirements and guidance of the School Organisation Code 011/2018. As part of the statutory consultation:*

- *A consultation document was published, as well as the relevant background documents, in the form of an electronic copy on the Council's website (with hard copies available upon request).*
- *Electronic copies of the document were distributed to the relevant stakeholders.*
- *Written observations/responses were received through the post and via e-mail.*

6.5.3 *The Code does not impose a requirement to hold public/consultation meetings. Instead, the Code notes that proposers may use other methods of engaging with consultees, as they see fit.*

6.5.4 *In previous consultations, the Education Department has held "drop-in" sessions to discuss the proposal with the parents, governors and staff of the school in question. As a result of Covid-19 restrictions, it was not possible to conduct the "drop-in" sessions in the same manner. Nevertheless, in order to ensure that the*

stakeholders of Ysgol Abersoch have the same opportunity to receive information, ask for an explanation and make insertions, "drop-in" sessions were held via virtual meeting software. A maximum of 3 was set for each virtual session in order to ensure that everyone who attended benefited from a comprehensive and fair discussion. Nine sessions were offered over four evenings, and seven people attended the virtual drop-in sessions.

- 6.5.5 *In addition, an opportunity was given to stakeholders to submit questions regarding the proposal via e-mail to the Education Department.*
- 6.5.6 *We sympathise with the concerns of holding a consultation during the pandemic; nevertheless, it is emphasised that we, as an authority, cannot commit not to deal with the school for an unspecified time. In addition, the Welsh Government published a notice on 8 January 2021 to allow proposals regarding school organisation to continue, where not all schools are open.*
- 6.5.7 *It is believed that the number of responses received to the consultation is evidence that conducting it during this Covid period has not disrupted too much on the consultees' ability to participate.*
- 6.5.8 *In response to the comments that the decision has already been made, it is emphasised that it was a consultation on the proposal to close Ysgol Abersoch and offer a place for pupils in Ysgol Sarn Bach that was held between 12 January and 23 February 2021. No decision has been made to date. In accordance with the requirements of the Schools Organisation Code 011/2018, following the statutory consultation, a report on the consultation must be submitted to the Cabinet in order to summarise the matters raised by the consultees and note the Council's response to those matters. It is only after considering the report that the Cabinet will decide whether or not to proceed with this proposal.*
- 6.5.9 **Some responses noted discontent with the process of consulting with children and young people.**
- 6.5.10 *In accordance with the Schools Organisation Code, it is required, as part of any statutory consultation, to hold a consultation with the children and young people of the schools that are the subject of the consultation in order to ascertain their feelings about the proposal.*
- 6.5.11 *As noted in section 5.7 above, virtual consultation sessions were held with representation from primary pupils who are the subject of this consultation. Arrangements were made for an independent facilitator to hold virtual sessions with schools who were part of the consultation in order to ascertain the views of pupils.*
- 6.5.12 *As part of the consultation with children and young people, appropriate documents were prepared for the pupils of Ysgol Abersoch and Ysgol Sarn Bach school council, and arrangements were made that a facilitator held three meetings over the web (Google Meet), with both schools to discuss the proposal with the children in order to ensure that they understand what is being proposed and in order to give them an opportunity to express an opinion about the proposal. The parents of Ysgol Abersoch were present and they were encouraged by the facilitator to speak on behalf of their children in order to strengthen the process of ascertaining the views of the children about the potential impact on them, should the school close.*
- 6.5.13 *Each session took forty-five minutes to complete, and after dividing them into three groups, Year 3 Pupils in Ysgol Abersoch, Foundation Phase Pupils in Ysgol Abersoch and Ysgol Sarn Bach School Council. It included an explanation of the proposal and giving the pupils an opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings.*
- 6.5.14 *A report on the consultation with children and young people is included in **Appendix C**.*
- 6.5.15 **Some responders expressed concern about the outline timetable noted in the consultation document, noting that implementing the proposal in August 2021 would not be reasonable because of the lack of time to inform parents of the final decision.**

- 6.5.16 *Despite the consultation being held on the proposal to close Ysgol Abersoch on 31 August 2021 and provide a place for pupils in Ysgol Sarn Bach from 1 September 2021, in response to these comments, we now recommend changing the implementation date of the proposal to close Ysgol Abersoch to 31 December 2021 and provide a place for pupils in Ysgol Sarn Bach from 1 January 2022.*
- 6.5.17 *After considering some of the comments received in the consultation, we are of the opinion that deferring implementation until 31 December 2021 would allow more time for the Education Department to put arrangements in place in order to ensure a smooth transition for pupils from Ysgol Abersoch to Ysgol Sarn Bach.*
- 6.5.18 **Some comments were received which noted the opinion that the impact assessments and the details noted on the response form were insufficient.**
- 6.5.19 *As part of the statutory process, when developing a proposal(s) for school reorganisation, the Authority must carry out assessment in accordance with the School Organisation Code (011/2018). We are of the opinion that the assessments submitted as part of the consultation corresponds with Welsh Government's national guidance for school reorganisation. Similarly, the Authority is confident that our processes and response form addresses the requirements of the School Organisation Code 011/2018.*
- 6.5.20 **A number of responses were received noting that the Cylch Meithrin had not been included in the consultation process.**
- 6.5.21 *We received a response from Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin and Cylch Meithrin Abersoch as part of the statutory consultation. Unfortunately, after the consultation closing date, it became apparent that the representatives of the Cylch Meithrin had not received a copy of the e-mail, informing them of the statutory consultation. As noted in the consultation document, we had included the Cylch as a consultee in the distribution list for sharing information about the consultation, but it appears that the Cylch's e-mail address was spelt incorrectly and so the information was not received. We wish to apologise for this error.*
- 6.5.22 *In order to ensure that the representatives of the Cylch Meithrin had an opportunity to consider the consultation document in accordance with the timetable provided in the Organisation Code, the Cylch was given an opportunity to send any further comments to us by 1pm on Wednesday, 21 April 2021. No further response was received from the representatives of the Cylch during the extended consultation period.*
- 6.5.23 **Some responses noted concerns about the impact of the threat of closing the school on the staff and on the pupils' education.**
- 6.5.24 *In response to those observations, note that the potential negative impact on the pupils' education has been noted as a risk on the statutory consultation document (7.15). To mitigate the risk, it is noted that the Council will monitor the school in accordance with the Education Department's policy and offer support as needed.*
- 6.5.25 *Should the proposal to close Ysgol Abersoch be implemented, it is anticipated that the staffing implications would lead to redundancies as the posts would end when the school closes. There will be consultation with staff and Union representatives specifically as part of the statutory consultation period. Any redundancies arising as a result of the proposal would be required to comply with the relevant employment law and the Gwynedd Redundancy scheme. Clear and open communication with staff will be a core part of the implementation of any proposal.*
- 6.5.26 *During the consultation, virtual drop-in sessions were held where arrangements could be made for staff from the Council's Human Resources Service to be in attendance, if any member of staff wishes to discuss his/her situation. Staff were informed that they were welcome to contact the Human Resources service*

directly if they wished to have one-to-one discussions. A support package will be offered, including training, if appropriate, to all staff affected by the proposal.

6.5.27 **Some noted that there were errors in the consultation document, and that this undermined their confidence in the consultation.**

6.5.28 *The Council is confident in the accuracy of the information submitted in the consultation document. The Council accepts that the location of Ysgol Sarn Bach on the map in the document is incorrect but that this does not affect the consultation.*

6.6 **Alternative Options**

6.6.1 **A large number of responses were received asking the Council to delay the process and give an opportunity for the school to increase the numbers and give the Cylch Meithrin an opportunity to thrive.**

6.6.2 *The Council notes the comments. However, we as an authority cannot commit not to deal with the school for an unspecified period. Pupil numbers at Ysgol Abersoch have reduced consistently since 2016 and the figure has been fragile for some time. The Authority is of the opinion that continuing with the current education provision was not a viable option for the future. The Education Department is of the opinion that it is impractical to continue with the current situation, mainly because:*

- *Very small classes.*
- *Low numbers and a lack of daily opportunities for pupils to socialise and collaborate with peers.*
- *Projections for the future shows that numbers will continue low over the coming five years, with 9 pupils attending by 2025.*

6.6.3 *The Council is aware that the Cylch Meithrin and Cylch Ti a Fi has opened on the school site in February 2020. However, and despite acknowledging the potential positive impact that locating the Cylch Meithrin on the Ysgol Abersoch site can have on numbers, it is not possible to guarantee that it would lead to a substantial increase in numbers, and it is anticipated that the school's challenges will continue.*

6.6.4 **Many noted that the option to extend the school's age range to 3-9 years or the option to federalise had not been considered in full. One response was received, asking the Council to explain why they stated that the transition of pupils during their primary education had a negative effect on education.**

6.6.5 *In any such procedure, it is key to give detailed consideration and weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of any model, and this is what can be seen in the Full Options Appraisal.*

6.6.6 *As noted in the consultation document (section 6.4), the option favoured locally was the option to extend the school's age range to 3-9 years, including the development of the Cylch Meithrin. This option was favoured locally for practical reasons, such as improved use of the empty space in the school and providing a location for the Cylch Meithrin, and to mitigate the potential impact that the change could have on the numbers of Ysgol Sarn Bach (the school that provides an education for 9-11 year old pupils in the Ysgol Abersoch area).*

6.6.7 *The 3-9 years option was disregarded for the following reasons:*

- *It is not anticipated that adding one educational year would lead to a sufficient increase in the numbers. Consequently, the challenges facing the school would continue.*
- *The age range would not be consistent with the majority of the county's primary schools.*
- *It would not allow for the school to offer a comprehensive KS2 provision. The pupils would continue to transfer to Ysgol Sarn Bach to complete their primary education.*

- 6.6.8 *The Council believes that moving schools or bridging from one school to another at any time during an educational career, can lead to disruption to the progress of some children as they settle in a school and a new environment, and it could undermine the resilience of some pupils.*
- 6.6.9 *As the situation of Ysgol Abersoch is relatively unique in terms of when the children move, the evidence to prove or disprove this presumption for bridging at the end of year 3 is scarce. However, evidence can be received from other sources, where reference is made to normal primary / secondary bridging, such as the recent Estyn report (Learner resilience - building resilience in primary schools, secondary schools and pupil referral units), notes "Transitions, such as moving school, are periods where children can suffer emotional distress, or a decline in progress and commitment to learning, all of which can also undermine resilience."*
- 6.6.10 *By reducing the number of occasions that children transition, the Council believe that there is less opportunity for the children to suffer from emotional distress, reduced progress and commitment to learn.*
- 6.6.11 *Consistency and co-planning is key for effective bridging.*
- 6.6.12 *The Council believes that the only way to ensure a reduction in the potentially negative impacts of transfer is by reducing the periods when children have to transfer during their educational career in the first place.*
- 6.6.13 *In terms of federalisation, despite the advantages of the model, the authority is of the opinion that it is unlikely that the option would address the main challenges faced by the school, such as low numbers, small class sizes, and consequently, the school's financial challenges would continue.*
- 6.6.14 *The Council notes the reasons for not proceeding with Option 4 and 5 (Federalisation) in the Consultation Document. Federalisation with nearby schools would not be a solution to the challenges facing Ysgol Abersoch.*
- 6.6.15 *School federalisation does not lead to any significant changes for parents or children. Although schools would share a single governing body, they would continue as two separate schools and retain their current names, and would continue to be funded separately in accordance with Gwynedd Council's formula. The children would continue to receive their education in the same schools and from the same staff.*
- 6.6.16 *Officers from the Education Department met the headteacher and chair of governors of Ysgol Sarn Bach and Ysgol Llanbedrog in January 2020 to discuss the option of federalisation with Ysgol Abersoch. Because of the informal nature of these discussions, the meetings were not minuted. This meeting was also an opportunity to update headteachers and chairs regarding the options discussed at the local meetings, highlighting any potential impact that some of the options could have on their school. Neither of the two schools declared an interest in carrying out a further investigation to a federal model.*
- 6.6.17 *After weighing up the pros and cons of the model, it was concluded that federalisation would not be a sustainable solution for the school. There is no clear evidence that federalisation would lead to an increase in numbers. Consequently, should this option be realised, it is anticipated that the challenge of low numbers, small class sizes and the financial challenges faced by the school, would continue.*
- 6.6.18 *In order to get the best from a federal model, the schools usually, but not necessarily, share a Headteacher. As there is a Headteacher in post at both schools, the Council is of the opinion that the most effective federal model could lead to compulsory redundancies.*
- 6.6.19 *Therefore, it is considered that federalisation is not the best option for the school's situation*
- 6.6.20 **Two responses were received that recommended considering an option to establish a Multi-site School between Ysgol Abersoch, Ysgol Llanbedrog and Ysgol Sarn Bach.**

- 6.6.21 *In the case of the Multi-site Area School Model, the school would be one school and a single legal entity that serves a broad area. However, a multi-site area school provides an educational provision on a number of sites.*
- 6.6.22 *The benefit of this type of model is the ability to restructure the managerial arrangements, yet retaining the presence of education in more than one community. It is a model that can work well in very rural areas where there are long travelling distances before arriving at the alternative school. Also, it means that small school sites are not left in isolation, but rather as part of a larger education establishment. Therefore, better use can be made of resources, e.g. one headteacher for more than one site, sharing resources and staff between sites and bringing pupils from sites together to hold activities with a higher number of pupils.*
- 6.6.23 *However, some of the disadvantages of this model are the inability to ensure that class size and age-ranges at some education sites will change for the better. When considering the option against the factors of the Excellent Primary Education for the Children of Gwynedd strategy, it is concluded that the options would not manage to address or resolve the main challenges faced by the school, e.g. low pupil numbers, small class sizes, broad age-range within classes and high pupil costs.*
- 6.6.24 ***A number of responses recommend possible developments to the school, e.g. Ysgol Draeth, Cultural Centre, Complete Education and Adnabod Bro.***
- 6.6.25 *The Council notes the options for developing the school - a full appraisal of these options can be seen in **appendix A**.*
- 6.6.26 *Ysgol Abersoch has been prioritised for a review of the educational provision as a number of challenges is facing the school. Pupil numbers at the school have reduced consistently since 2016 and the figure has been fragile for some time. Consequently, it is likely that the school is facing increasing challenges.*
- 6.6.27 *It is acknowledged that these options can make better use of the school building. Nevertheless, when considering the options against the factors of the Excellent Primary Education for the Children of Gwynedd strategy, it is concluded that the options would not manage to address or resolve the main challenges faced by the school, e.g. low pupil numbers, small class sizes, broad age-range within classes and high pupil costs per head.*
- 6.6.28 ***Some comments were received that questioned why a catchment area review was not considered.***
- 6.6.29 *In response to these comments, it is noted that the Council Cabinet, at its meeting on 17 September 2019, permitted the Education Department to hold formal discussions with Ysgol Abersoch to enable a range of possible options relating to the future of the school, as a result of concerns regarding pupil numbers at the school and concerns regarding the projections that anticipated numbers remaining low.*
- 6.6.30 *The 'Excellent Primary Education for the Children of Gwynedd' Strategy notes:*
"Relevant professional information should also be considered so as to draw attention to urgent situations within the County that directly impact quality of pupils' education and experiences (e.g. very low pupil numbers within a school, very poor condition of a school building and difficulties in headteacher recruitment).
Situations of serious and immediate concern as evidenced by relevant professional specialist information and including specific requests from individual schools will be a key consideration when prioritizing catchment areas for review."
- 6.6.31 *It is emphasised that the review of the situation of Ysgol Abersoch is not a part of a broader strategy for education in the area, but rather, is a response to a crisis situation at an individual school.*

6.6.32 **Some noted that additional support should be given to the school and consider allowing more time to carry out further work to identify options for the school.**

6.6.33 *In response to the above comments, it is noted that Ysgol Abersoch already receives additional funding on top of the usual allocation through the minimum staffing policy (which guarantees at least a headteacher and a teacher at every school, and a headteacher and assistant at schools with fewer than 15 full-time pupils). The total additional funding for the 2020-21 financial year (based on the numbers in September 2019) is £52,582. The cost per pupil at Ysgol Abersoch is £17,404 (2020-21); the average cost in the county per pupil is £4,198.*

6.6.34 *This is not sustainable in the long-term because the projected numbers remain low and consequently, the financial challenges would continue.*

6.6.35 *As noted in section 6 of the consultation document, the Authority considered 10 different options following discussions with Ysgol Abersoch. It is not anticipated that allowing more time to do further work would offer any resolution to the challenges facing the school.*

6.7 Educational Matters

6.7.1 **Some responders were of the opinion that there was too much emphasis on numbers driving the proposal. It was also noted that the authority had not acknowledged the increase seen in the intake of pupils in September 2020 when 5 new pupils started at Ysgol Abersoch.**

6.7.2 *In response to the comment, it is noted that the Authority has prioritised Ysgol Abersoch for a review of the educational provision as a number of challenges is facing the school (as noted in section 4.1.2 above). The Education Department is of the opinion that continuing with the current education provision at Ysgol Abersoch would not be a viable option for the future. The Education Department is of the opinion that it is impractical to continue with the current situation, mainly because of:*

- *Very small classes*
- *A very broad age range within classes - The pupils are taught in one class with an age range of up to 5 years (3-8 years).*
- *Low numbers and a lack of daily opportunities for pupils to socialise and collaborate with peers*
- *Projections for the future shows that numbers will continue low over the coming five years.*

6.7.3 *As a result, it is anticipated that the situation of Ysgol Abersoch will remain fragile, with the same number of challenges facing it over the years to come.*

6.7.4 *In response to the lack of acknowledgement of the increase in numbers in September 2020, it is noted that the pupil numbers at Ysgol Abersoch has been expressed in full in section 7.5 of the consultation document. Although 2 nursery pupils and 3 Reception pupils had started in September 2020, unfortunately, this has not led to a substantial increase in the numbers. In September 2020, eight full-time pupils and two part-time pupils were registered at the school, compared with two part-time pupils and seven full-time pupils in September 2019.*

6.7.5 **A number of responses were received, questioning the accuracy and basis to the projections. Some expressed discontent that no consideration had been given to the Cylch Meithrin's positive impact on the projections.**

- 6.7.6 *The Council acknowledges that projecting future pupil numbers is difficult, particularly as there is no onus on the parents to send their children to the catchment area school.*
- 6.7.7 *In response to these observations, it is noted that the projected numbers in the future have been created by using information about past trends and on the basis of the numbers for September 2020. Three-year projections are provided by the headteachers of the individual schools and the year 4 and 5 projections are calculated by the authority.*
- 6.7.8 *It is acknowledged that calculating projections is not a science, and numbers may vary a little in reality. Nevertheless, the Education Department are of the opinion, based on the numbers in September 2020, and the average admission numbers of the previous 3 years, that the numbers will continue low at Ysgol Abersoch for the next five years.*

Table 1 - Number projections for Ysgol Abersoch

	M	D	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
September 2020	2	3	2	0	3	-	-	-	10
September 2021 Projection	3	2	3	2	0	-	-	-	10
September 2022 Projection	2	3	2	3	2	-	-	-	12
September 2023 Projection	2	2	3	2	3	-	-	-	12
September 2024 Projection	2	2	2	3	2	-	-	-	11
September 2025 Projection	2	2	2	2	3	-	-	-	11

- 6.7.9 *In September 2020, of the 26 pupils (3-8 years) who lived in the Ysgol Abersoch catchment area, five of those children attended Ysgol Abersoch, with 21 (81%) of them attending schools outside the catchment area. As a result, in response to comments noting that the numbers and population of children in the area will increase over the next 20-25 years, based on the figures for September 2020, it is concluded that it cannot be guaranteed that those children would choose to attend Ysgol Abersoch.*
- 6.7.10 **Some responses questioned the information in the consultation document about staffing levels and class sizes at Ysgol Sarn Bach. Concerns were noted that there were mixed class sizes at Ysgol Sarn Bach and nearby schools was already over 20, which is contrary to the Education Department's Strategy, and that implementing the proposal would worsen the situation. Concern was noted that the proposal would mean that pupils were educated in overfull classes.**
- 6.7.11 *In response to these comments and concerns, it is noted that Ysgol Sarn Bach has sufficient capacity for the current pupils of Ysgol Abersoch and Ysgol Sarn Bach, for the next five years (21 surplus places at the school (and 4 surplus spaces in the Nursery). Should the proposal be realised, it is anticipated that there would be 21 children in the Foundation Phase and 37 in KS2 at Ysgol Sarn Bach. It would be expected for the Headteacher and Governing Body of the alternative school to give appropriate attention to determine suitable class-sizes and school staff resources to respond to the latest numbers. The increase in their annual budget would facilitate options to consider an additional class(es) and staff.*
- 6.7.12 *It is emphasised that the proposal that is the subject of the statutory consultation is to close Ysgol Abersoch and offer a place for the pupils at Ysgol Sarn Bach. As noted in the consultation document "This consultation only relates to Ysgol Abersoch and Ysgol Sarn Bach; therefore, responses to this consultation should only refer to the proposal as described in paragraph 1.1 above." Therefore, it is not considered that the class-sizes of nearby schools (Ysgol Foel Gron and Ysgol Llanbedrog) are relevant to the proposal.*
- 6.7.13 **One comment was received, noting that the table in section 5.1 of the consultation document, which noted how many pupils attended out-of-catchment schools was misleading, and that it was unfair to**

compare the statistics of Ysgol Abersoch with nearby schools as it was a school for 3-8 year olds. To that end, a comment was received that a number of Ysgol Sarn Bach pupils also attended out-of-catchment schools and that a number of pupils from the Abersoch catchment area attended Ysgol Llanbedrog.

- 6.7.14 *In response to these comments, it is noted that the table in section 5.1 of the consultation document notes the location of the homes of Ysgol Abersoch pupils and nearby schools, including Ysgol Llanbedrog and Ysgol Sarn Bach.*
- 6.7.15 *In September 2020, 20 out of 48 pupils at Ysgol Sarn Bach lived outside the catchment area. In addition, six pupils at Ysgol Llanbedrog (102) lived in the catchment area of Ysgol Abersoch.*
- 6.7.16 *As highlighted in the consultation document, Ysgol Sarn Bach already admits pupils from the Abersoch area in the September following their eighth birthday. If the proposal is implemented, the catchment area of Ysgol Sarn Bach would be adapted to include the area of the existing school, as well as the existing catchment area of Ysgol Abersoch.*
- 6.7.17 *It is confirmed that 81% of children (3-8 years) from the Ysgol Abersoch catchment area, attend out-of-catchment school in September 2020. For clarity, the pupils in years 4, 5 and 6 who live in the Abersoch area have not been included in this figure as the Abersoch catchment area is considered as part of the Ysgol Sarn Bach catchment area for children in years 4, 5 and 6.*
- 6.7.18 **Some responses challenged the outcome of the assessment of the probable impact on the quality of education, and noted that the education at Ysgol Abersoch was outstanding. Others were of the opinion that the proposal would not strengthen the education, and believed that the documentation did not note the successes and strengths of the school.**
- 6.7.19 *In response to these comments, based on the outcome of the assessment of the Probable Impact on the Quality and Standards of Education, it is concluded that the quality of the education provided at Ysgol Sarn Bach is of the same level at the quality of education at Ysgol Abersoch. Consequently, it is not anticipated any negative impact would derive in terms of the quality and standards of education from the proposal to close Ysgol Abersoch and transfer the pupils to Ysgol Sarn Bach. The information in the assessment follows the latest Estyn inspections of the schools in question, noting that each of the schools have been placed in at least an equivalent category to Ysgol Abersoch, and each of the schools have been placed in the yellow or green in terms of Welsh Government's support category. It is anticipated that realising this option would give pupils an opportunity to be educated in peer groups with much less of an age range and an opportunity to improve the educational and social experience of the pupils, on a daily basis. The needs of any vulnerable groups, including children with additional learning needs, would be assessed and implemented in line with the authority's policy and procedures. Further details on the quality and standards of education are elaborated upon further in Section 7.2 of the consultation document and a full assessment of the probable impact on the quality and standards of education can be seen on the website www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/modernisingeducation.*

6.8 **Financial Matters**

- 6.8.1 **Many consultees felt that the proposal focussed excessively on financial criteria. In addition, some consultees were eager to know how the savings amount was calculated, and whether the redundancy costs had been factored into that estimate. Others were eager to know, should the proposal proceed, whether Ysgol Sarn Bach would require an additional resource, and whether the children would receive a school uniform grant?**

6.8.2 *As noted in the consultation document, as well as the financial challenges facing Ysgol Abersoch, there are a number of other matters relating to the school that are a cause for concern. Indeed, the financial matters derive from these challenges. The Education Department is of the opinion that it is impractical to continue with the current situation, mainly because of:*

- *Very small classes*
- *A very broad age range within classes - The pupils are taught in one class with an age range of up to 5 years (3-8 years).*
- *Low numbers and a lack of daily opportunities for pupils to socialise and collaborate with age-appropriate peers.*
- *Projections for the future shows that numbers will continue low over the coming five years.*

6.8.3 *As a result, it is anticipated that the situation at Ysgol Abersoch will remain fragile, with the same number of challenges facing it over the years to come.*

6.8.4 *In response to these comments about how the savings were calculated, it is noted that Ysgol Abersoch's allocation for 2020/21 was £137,140, and transferring the existing pupils at Ysgol Abersoch would lead to an additional allocation of £27,078 for Ysgol Sarn Bach. If a larger bus than the one that currently transports the children of Abersoch was needed, the potential additional transport costs would be £14,000. This leaves estimated savings of £96,062. It is confirmed that if there are any redundancy costs, then those costs would be funded from the savings.*

6.8.5 *Should the proposal proceed, based on the allocation for 2020/21, transferring the pupils of Ysgol Abersoch would lead to an additional allocation of £27,078 for Ysgol Sarn Bach. The governors of Ysgol Sarn Bach would decide how best to use this additional allocation.*

6.8.6 *In response to the enquiry regarding a school uniform grant, it is noted that Ysgol Sarn Bach has an official school uniform and the school encourages everyone to wear it. It is expected for the parents of Abersoch year 3 pupils to buy a school uniform when they transfer to Ysgol Sarn Bach in any case. The children who transfer from Ysgol Abersoch may continue to wear their school uniform (Ysgol Abersoch) up to the end of year 3, if their parents so wish.*

6.9 The Well-Being Act

6.9.1 **A comment was received noting that the seven aims of the Well-being Act had not been considered in full.**

6.9.2 *The Council has committed to the principles within the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015) in order to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of the communities of Gwynedd. The Council's vision is:*

"Our vision as a Council is to support all the people of Gwynedd to thrive and live full lives in our community, in a county which is one of the best counties to live in."

6.9.3 *It is noted in the statutory consultation document - following consideration and an assessment in line with the requirements of the Well-being Act, the conclusion was reached that the proposal did satisfy the seven well-being goals within the Act, and the Council's well-being objectives. The proposal will allow us to respond to and meet the children's needs today, and also strengthen their future well-being.*

6.10 After-use of the School Site

- 6.10.1 **A number of observations were asking what would happen to the school building/site should Ysgol Abersoch close.** *In response to the comments, it is noted that should the proposal be implemented, the Council has a school building after-use policy and this policy would be followed. The Council would need to discuss and consider any binding legal terms or restrictions that could come into force if any of the sites would cease to be a site for an educational provision.*

6.11 Matters relating to nearby schools

- 6.11.1 **A number of comments were received noting that Ysgol Llanbedrog was over capacity.** *In response to these comments, it is noted that Gwynedd Council operates in accordance with the County's Schools Admissions Policy. The admissions policy corresponds to the requirements of the Schools Admissions Policy, Welsh Government. The table below shows how many pupils attend catchment area and out-of-catchment schools in Ysgol Abersoch, Ysgol Sarn Bach and nearby schools (Section 5.1 in the consultation document).*
- 6.11.2 *The Authority is not of the opinion that the situation regarding numbers at Ysgol Llanbedrog is relevant to the consultation on the proposal to close Ysgol Abersoch and offer a place for the pupils at Ysgol Sarn Bach.*
- 6.11.3 *With 21 surplus places (and four surplus places for Nursery), Ysgol Sarn Bach has sufficient capacity for the number of pupils from Ysgol Abersoch and Ysgol Sarn Bach currently and for the next five years.*
- 6.11.4 **One or two referred to the impact of building an extension at Ysgol Llanbedrog on the pupils' education.** *In response to this, it was explained that there was no intention to build an extension to Ysgol Llanbedrog as a part of the proposal that was the subject of the consultation. For clarity, the proposal is to close Ysgol Abersoch, and offer a place for the pupils in Ysgol Sarn Bach.*

6.12 Travel and transport

- 6.12.1 **A number of comments were received relating to the potential impact on travel arrangements to the school. Some noted how convenient Ysgol Abersoch was at it was possible to walk to the school. Others noted that the proposal would have an impact on the environment as there would be a need to travel further to the school, and that this would lead to increased transport costs. Others noted discontent with the proposed travel arrangements, as the walking route from Ysgol Abersoch to Ysgol Sarn Bach was dangerous. In addition, one response was asking (i) for information on how the estimated transport costs were calculated, (ii) whether the authority had identified how many children would require transport to Ysgol Sarn Bach, (iii) for information on how many pupils were taking advantage of the surplus seats scheme, and whether those pupils were paying for the transport in accordance with the policy. In addition, some comments were received expressing discontent about the lack of offer of transport for nursery age pupils.**
- 6.12.2 *In response to these comments, it is noted that Gwynedd Council's Strategy for primary education is to aim to restrict travel from the home to the school to a one-way journey that does not exceed 30 minutes. Free transportation is available for primary school pupils who live 2 miles or more from the school in their catchment area.*
- 6.12.3 *Should the proposal be implemented, it is not anticipated that any pupil will need to travel an unreasonable distance to reach the education site, in line with the strategy. Ysgol Abersoch is located 1.4 miles from the*

current Ysgol Sarn Bach site and it is anticipated that the journey would take approximately 5 minutes each way in a car or bus.

- 6.12.4 *As the route from Abersoch to Ysgol Sarn Bach is considered unsuitable for children to walk along, the authority already provides free transportation for eligible pupils aged 8-11 years from Abersoch who attend Ysgol Sarn Bach. Consequently, a primary school bus is already operational between Abersoch and Ysgol Sarn Bach, and it is anticipated that there would be enough empty seats for the current pupils of Ysgol Abersoch - therefore, no additional transport costs are anticipated from implementing the proposal, nor a significant increase in CO2 emissions.*
- 6.12.5 *If transport would need to be provided for all pupils in the Ysgol Abersoch catchment area, then there would be a need to adapt the current transport arrangements at Ysgol Sarn Bach. This could mean that a purposeful bus (morning and afternoon) may be needed for the pupils of Ysgol Sarn Bach, at an additional cost of approximately £14,000 per annum.*
- 6.12.6 *The current cost of transporting pupils from Abersoch to Ysgol Sarn Bach is £16,500. If the current arrangements would need to be amended, it is estimated that a 49 seater bus would be needed, to provide transport for all pupils in Reception to Year 6 in the catchment area, at a cost of £30,500. Therefore, this would lead to a higher cost of £14,000 as noted in the consultation document.*
- 6.12.7 *Should the proposal be implemented, we will arrange a survey with the parents/guardians of children who wish to transfer to Ysgol Sarn Bach in order to ascertain how many pupils will require free transportation from Abersoch once a decision has been made. This will give the Authority definitive numbers to decide whether a larger bus would be needed.*
- 6.12.8 *As part of the Empty Seats Scheme, the Council is willing to consider applications from learners who attend the school (or school site), except the school (or school site) of the catchment area to take advantage of any empty seats on contracted vehicles by paying the current out-of-catchment fee. Taking advantage of the scheme is subject to:*
- *The availability of empty seats*
 - *The vehicle not having to divert from its usual route*
 - *No additional costs to the Council*
 - *Paying the current fee for empty seats.*
- 6.12.9 *All learners who applied for transportation would have paid for an empty seats scheme to travel on the designated school bus. Between 3 and 6 learners have taken advantage of this scheme since 2017.*
- 6.12.10 *In response to the concern that the authority will not offer transport for nursery age pupils, it is noted that it is the responsibility of parents to make transportation arrangements for nursery age pupils. The Authority does not provide transportation for nursery age pupils as it is not statutorily required to do so.*

6.13 The Community

- 6.13.1 **The main matters raised during the statutory consultation, which relate to the community, are listed below:**
- **The school supports village life/a key part of the village**
 - **Closing the school would have a negative impact on the village**
 - **More evidence is needed about the impact on the community**
 - **The impact of tourism on the area**

- **Lack of relationship with the community of Ysgol Sarn Bach**

6.13.2 *In response to these comments, it is noted in accordance with the County's Schools Admissions Policy, that a community impact assessment was held on the options on the short-list. The assessment noted that by closing Ysgol Abersoch, some elements of community events would be affected. Consequently, it will be required as part of the process to encourage discussions between the alternative school and the parents of Ysgol Abersoch pupils so that parents and pupils take advantage of their facilities and after-school activities, and to encourage the alternative school to also take advantage of the facilities of the community of Abersoch.*

6.13.3 *Furthermore, we note when acknowledging the negative impact that closing the school could have on the community of Abersoch, that nine (35%) of pupils (3-8) who live in the Abersoch catchment area already attend Ysgol Sarn Bach. Therefore, it is believed that a link already exists between the alternative school and the Abersoch community.*

6.13.4 *The Authority accepts that there will be a potential community impact of closing Ysgol Abersoch. To mitigate any potential negative impact on the community should the proposal be implemented, the Community Impact Assessment notes the importance of ensuring that the community of Abersoch is included in the activities of the alternative school, and to encourage community collaboration between the alternative school and the Abersoch community, where appropriate.*

6.14 Impact on learners

6.14.1 **Some of the objections referred to the negative impact on Ysgol Abersoch learners, including the impact on mental health should the proposal to close Ysgol Abersoch be realised.** *In response to these comments, the Council acknowledged that this period was one of uncertainty that could lead to stress and an impact on learners. However, the Authority would make every effort to assist the learners to settle at their new school.*

6.14.2 **A number of comments were received expressing concern about the higher number of learners in the classes at the alternative school, and a concern that implementing the proposal to close the school would deprive the children of Abersoch of their rights to receive an education in their own village, deprive them of their village's history and consequently, there would be a profound impact on the future of the children and the community.**

6.14.3 *In response to the comments, the Council noted that they were aware that the alternative school offered an education of equivalent standard, and offered more experiences for the pupils to collaborate and socialise with their peers, enabling the pupils to take advantage of a range of curricular and extra-curricular experiences.*

6.14.4 *Furthermore, the Council noted that it had been open about the challenges facing Ysgol Abersoch from the beginning of the process, thus being of the opinion that the option of closing Ysgol Abersoch and offering a place to the pupils at Ysgol Sarn Bach would lead to:*

- *Reduce the number of surplus places within the schools*
- *Offer experiences for pupils to socialise and collaborate with age-appropriate peers on a daily basis*

- Educate the children in more suitably-sized classes
- Reconcile the per head allowance cost for pupils in the County
- Ensure that the children transfer only once in their primary and secondary education, rather than twice

6.15 Impact on the Welsh language

- 6.15.1 **A number of comments were received referring to the school's influence on the language and culture of Abersoch and in losing the school, this would have a negative impact on the amount of Welsh being spoken in everyday circumstances in the village of Abersoch. Reference was also made to the success of Ysgol Abersoch to gain the gold Welsh Language Charter award for its efforts to promote social use of Welsh, thus realising one of the Council's main priorities, along with Welsh Government. As part of that, comments were received noting that the residents and businesses of Abersoch were aware of the existence of the Welsh language because of all the work done by the teachers and pupils to promote the language, with a number of shops displaying bilingual signage as a result.**
- 6.15.2 *In response to these comments, the Council acknowledged Ysgol Abersoch's efforts to develop the learners' bilingual skills as well as promote the importance of the Welsh language and culture more broadly in the community, and conveyed appreciation of the community's support to the school and to the Welsh language as a result. In response to the comments, it was noted that the Council also acknowledged the concerns regarding the possible impact on the Welsh language. Nevertheless, the Authority expects that all primary schools in the county support and improve the use of the Welsh language as a medium of education and as the social language of pupils, as the linguistic expectations are the same for all Gwynedd primary schools.*
- 6.15.3 **A number of the responders also refer specifically to the ambitious aspiration of the Welsh Government to promote Welsh-medium education and the use of Welsh in the workplace, in order to reach the aim of a million Welsh speakers by 2050, and that the proposal to close the school is contrary to this national goal. In response to the comments, it was noted that the Council, in the consultation document, had noted that any discussions relating to reorganisation needed to acknowledge Welsh Government's effort to reach the aim of a million Welsh speakers by 2050.**
- 6.15.4 *It was also noted that the Council acknowledged the concerns regarding the possible impact on the Welsh language and had completed an assessment of the proposal's linguistic impact from closing Ysgol Abersoch and educating the pupils at Ysgol Sarn Bach. In the assessment, it is concluded that no negative impact is anticipated on the Welsh language should the proposal be implemented, mainly as a result of the expectations of the Language Policy, so the provision would be the same for the pupils, regardless of what school they choose to attend. To this end, it appears that the linguistic situation of Ysgol Sarn Bach is strong, with 57% of the school's pupils come from Welsh homes, compared with 33% of Ysgol Abersoch pupils who come from Welsh homes.*
- 6.15.5 **Some responders felt strongly about the school being the most important resource of the village in terms of regeneration and the continuation of the community and the Welsh language. In**

response to the comments, the Council noted that to mitigate any potential negative impact on the community should the proposal be implemented, the assessment notes the importance of ensuring that the community of Abersoch is included in the activities of the alternative school, and to encourage community collaboration between the alternative school and the Abersoch community, where appropriate. In addition, the Council noted that the community impact assessment notes that it is anticipated that there would be some negative impact as a result of closing the school. However, it is noted that nine (35%) of Nursery - Yr. 3 who live in the Abersoch catchment area already attend Ysgol Sarn Bach; therefore, it is concluded that a link already exists between the school and the broader area.

6.15.6 **A number of comments were also received suspecting or challenging the reliability of the data included in the assessment of linguistic impact, and challenging the view on the likely positive impact of implementing the proposal.** *In response to these comments, the Council noted that it was proposing the Impact Assessment and ascertaining views on the proposed impact by means of the consultation.*

6.15.7 *In response to the comment regarding the size of the sample of children who completed the language web questionnaire, the Council confirmed that a sample of Foundation Phase children had been used in each of the schools used in the Linguistic Impact Assessment, in order to ensure a fair and meaningful comparison across the schools. As a result of the low numbers at Ysgol Abersoch, it is acknowledged that the sample size was small, however, the Council noted that the data was based on the information presented by the children themselves in the questionnaire, noting their practices in terms of using the Welsh language in different situations.*

6.15.8 *Furthermore, the Council noted, although pupils of the same age group had completed the questionnaire in each of the schools, it was not unexpected for the data of Ysgol Abersoch to show that the pupils were most confident to speak Welsh under the leadership of a teacher or assistant, as 67% of Ysgol Abersoch pupils came from non-Welsh speaking homes, and that the education system had not had sufficient opportunity to immerse them in Welsh to ensure that they had the confidence and the skills to use Welsh in various contexts.*

6.16 **Comments relating to the Cylch Ti a Fi and the Cylch Meithrin**

6.16.1 **Several of the responses received during the statutory consultation noted concerns regarding the future of the Cylch Meithrin and the Cylch Ti a Fi in Abersoch, should the proposal be implemented.**

6.16.2 **Specific comments were made on the impact of losing the Cylch Meithrin. Some of the consultees noted that there was a demand for this service in the Ysgol Abersoch catchment area.**

6.16.3 *In response to these comments, it was explained that if the proposal would go ahead, there would be a need to consider the school site's future-use, taking the activities currently held at the school into account.*

6.16.4 *However, in terms of the Cylch Meithrin provision, the Council is eager to discuss the possibilities with the relevant representatives - the possibilities could include staying at the current location, relocating to the alternative school, or moving to another site in the village of Abersoch. It is noted in the community impact assessment "A Cylch Meithrin and Cylch Ti a Fi is held in the school building. Should a decision be made to*

close the school, options for the after-use of the school would have to be considered, taking the taking the activities currently held at the school into account."

6.16.5 **One comment noted that there would be a consistent chance for more pupils in the future. In addition, it was suggested that allowing more time for the Cylch Meithrin and Cylch Ti a Fi would lead to an increase in numbers.** *Whilst acknowledging the potential positive impact that locating a Cylch Meithrin on the Ysgol Abersoch site could have on the numbers, this cannot be guaranteed, and it is anticipated that the challenges of reduced numbers, small class sizes and financial challenges would continue. In addition, it should be noted that the Cylch Meithrin and Cylch Ti a Fi are not a part of the proposal to close Ysgol Abersoch and offer a place for pupils at Ysgol Sarn Bach. If this proposal proceeds, the Council is eager to discuss the possibilities with relevant representatives - the possibilities could include remaining at the current location, or move to another site in the Abersoch area.*

6.17 Other/General

6.17.1 **A number of other comments were received, noting how good the education at Ysgol Abersoch has been historically, such as how good the location is, how supportive parents, staff and governors are, the importance of the school to maintain the Welsh language and the part the school has played in the local community.** *The Council notes the comments, nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that the school is facing increasing challenges as a result of the low numbers, as detailed in section 4.1.2 above.*

6.17.2 **Some comments were received that questioned the decisions of Gwynedd Council committees, and questioned whether a fair hearing would be held in the case of Ysgol Abersoch.**

6.17.3 *The Cabinet's decision on 15 September 2020 was called before the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee on 8 October 2020, where consideration was given to the Council Cabinet's decision to hold a statutory consultation on the proposal to close Ysgol Abersoch on 31 August 2021, and provide a place for pupils at Ysgol Sarn Bach on 1 September 2021. Following detailed consideration, the committee voted in favour of sending the matter back to the Cabinet for consideration.*

6.17.4 *On 3 November 2020, Gwynedd Council's Cabinet met to discuss the recommendation of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee regarding the Cabinet's decision of 15 September 2020.*

6.17.5 *Following detailed consideration and discussion, the Council's Cabinet decided that the Cabinet should not amend its original decision made on 15 September 2020 should not be revised, which was to conduct a statutory consultation in accordance with the requirements of section 48 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013, on the proposed motion to close Ysgol Abersoch on 31 August 2021 and to provide a place for the pupils at Ysgol Sarn Bach from 1 September 2021 onwards, and adopt this as its final decision.*

6.17.6 **A number of comments were received noting the second home problems in Abersoch and the impact that this had on the school. In addition, a number of comments were received noting that one of the reasons why the number of pupils had not increased over the past years was the lack of affordable housing.**

6.17.7 *The Council notes the comments, however, the Council wishes to note that it does not have control over the open housing market. In December 2020, Gwynedd Council adopted an Action Plan that will invest £77m in*

over 30 specific plans to tackle the increasing challenge of a lack of suitable housing for the County's residents, including increasing the number of affordable housing available for local people. The Plan will be implemented over the next 6 years, including projects such as increasing the number of social housing in Gwynedd; purchasing former social housing and private houses to let at an affordable rent to the residents of Gwynedd; develop our own houses to increase the opportunities for Gwynedd residents to compete; refuse applications to remove a local person condition on former "Council houses"; Homebuy Scheme and First Time Buyers' Grants to renovate empty houses. The exact locations of some of these schemes are to be confirmed following an exercise of consulting with communities in order to establish their housing needs.

6.17.8 *The Council is aware that a set of measures will be required, a number of them currently beyond the direct control of the Council, if we are to be able to achieve genuine fairness for local residents in the field of housing. The Housing Action Plan is one of these measures and it allows us to aim to maximize our direct capability in an attempt to rectify the current situation. We also acknowledge that we will continue to campaign for further national changes in order to strengthen our ability to work within Gwynedd and we will continue to do so at every possible opportunity in the field of housing, taxation, licensing and planning.*

6.17.9 **Some comments asked why a larger proportion of the Council tax being collected in the area could not be used towards the school's maintenance costs.** *The Council noted the comments and noted that the school receives an additional amount to the usual allocation via the minimum staffing protection policy (which ensures at least a headteacher and teacher at each school, and a headteacher and an assistant in schools with fewer than 15 pupils). The total additional funding for the 2020-21 financial year (based on the numbers in September 2019) is £52,582. The cost per pupil at Ysgol Abersoch is £17,404 (2020-21); the average cost in the county per pupil is £4,198. This is not sustainable in the long-term because the projected numbers remain low and consequently, the financial challenges would continue.*

6.17.10 **One comment was received, asking why Ysgol Abersoch was not referred to as a rural school.** *Ysgol Abersoch is not considered as a rural school in Welsh Government's School Organisation Code 011/2018*

6.17.11 **Some comments noted the possibility that more will choose to work from home because of COVID and choose to live in villages such as Abersoch, and that this would lead to an increase in the school's numbers. Others noted that there was potential for more houses and jobs to be created in the area that would, possibly, lead to an increase in pupil numbers. In addition, some comments were received noting that people saw Abersoch as a holiday village and not as a place to live and that closing the school would contribute to this.**

6.17.12 *In response to these comments, it is noted that there is no assurance that demographic changes in the future would increase pupil numbers at Ysgol Abersoch. The children and young people of the catchment area would be offered a high-quality education at Ysgol Sarn Bach, which is 1.4 miles away from the village of Abersoch.*

6.18 Responses to the consultation with children and young people

6.18.1 As noted in paragraph 5.6 above, virtual consultation sessions were held with a representation of primary school pupils who are the subject of this statutory consultation. Arrangements were made for an independent facilitator to conduct the virtual sessions with the schools to hold sessions with the pupils to ascertain their views. These were the main points raised during the consultation with children and young people:

Ysgol Abersoch	Ysgol Sarn Bach
All pupils objected to the proposed change.	None of the members of the school council objected to the proposal.
Objections were raised by the parents that holding a meeting via <i>Google Meet</i> on such a sensitive issue, was unfair on the children.	The pupils did not appear apprehensive about the possibility of welcoming 10 new pupils to the school in September.
The parents felt strongly that there was a need to consider recent changes at the school and the impact on the pandemic on the education and welfare of the children before proceeding with any decision to close the school. Some children asked to stay on at the school for another year.	The pupils were happy to make every effort to help new pupils to settle down. They were prepared to share ideas about how the school could adapt to make this happen by understanding what they enjoyed at Ysgol Abersoch and emulate this at Ysgol Sarn Bach.
All pupils expressed that closing Ysgol Abersoch, the school they held dear, and moving to Ysgol Sarn Bach, would be unfair on them and a frightening experience.	Moving to Ysgol Sarn Bach from Ysgol Abersoch at the end of Year 3 was a positive and worthwhile experience according to all members of the school council. They believed that this would also be the case if junior pupils had to do so next September.

6.18.2 In the report on the consultation with children and young people, the Facilitator concludes:

"What emerged from the consultation process was that pupils at Ysgol Abersoch were very unhappy with the proposal to close their school and found it very difficult to accept that they could be happy at Ysgol Sarn Bach. The comments of Ysgol Abersoch pupils made it clear that they refused the proposal to close their school and move their education to Ysgol Sarn Bach next September. One of the main messages was their concern of losing important experiences within the school's close environment, namely educational visits to the beach and the village where they learnt about their surroundings and community through direct experiences, which the children held dear.

It was clear that the pupils of Ysgol Sarn Bach sympathised with their situation, but were very eager to extend a warm welcome to the new pupils. The School Council showed good understanding of their role as peers to help the children of Abersoch to settle at their new school and make them feel happy there."

6.19 Estyn

6.19.1 The School Organisation Code 011/2018 requires proposers to send consultation documents to Estyn. As a consultation body, Estyn gives its views on the consultation.

6.19.2 Estyn noted in its summary:

"Estyn is of the opinion that the proposal is likely to at least maintain the primary education provision in the area."

6.19.3 In its response to the description and advantages of the proposal, it was noted:

"The proposal presents a comprehensive case for change, which considers the current challenges of Ysgol Abersoch. These include low pupil numbers, a high percentage of empty spaces, a broad age range within classes and additional financial resources. These challenges are considered in full..."

The proposal evaluates the options in full before highlighting the three options would be most viable, namely option 2 (change the age range to 3-11 years), Option 3 and Option 6. The impact of the three above options are assessed on the quality of the education, travel arrangements and the community. Following the assessment, the local authority chooses and proposes Option 6, close Ysgol Abersoch and educate the pupils in Ysgol Sarn Bach on 1 September 2021..."

6.19.4 When considering the impact of the proposal on the Welsh language, Estyn notes:

"It appears that the proposer has considered the impact of the proposal on the Welsh language appropriately. It is not anticipated that the proposal will affect the pupils' Welsh education as the council's language policy is as relevant at the alternative school and the Welsh-medium education would continue."

6.19.5 In its response to the consultation, Estyn noted:

"The standards at the two schools affected are very similar and during the most recent inspections, both schools were judged to be good in each key question or field of inspection."

The proposal includes the most recent outcomes of the Estyn inspections of both schools in question. Ysgol Abersoch was inspected in June 2017 and the three key questions were judged to be good. In October 2017, Ysgol Sarn Bach was inspected, and each field of inspection was judged to be good. The proposer assesses the proposal's probable impact on the fields of the inspection framework. All of this shows that there could be a positive impact on the welfare and learning experiences from closing Ysgol Abersoch and transferring the children to Ysgol Sarn Bach. This is as a result of what the local authority has noted about pupils benefiting from experiences to socialise and collaborate with peers.

Although the proposal does not compare the performance of both schools, they are confident that the quality of the provision at Ysgol Sarn Bach is equivalent to the foundation phase provision at Ysgol Abersoch. It can be seen that the proposer has considered continuity in the curricular provision appropriately and suggested that schools with a higher number of pupils able to offer a more robust structure when planning and providing the curriculum.

In their assessment of leadership and management, the proposal quotes from recent inspections which note that the quality of the leadership is good. Ysgol Abersoch currently operates under the leadership of a headteacher in charge while there is a permanent Head at Ysgol Sarn Bach. (This was noted as a result of the absence of a permanent Head at Ysgol Abersoch). Both schools have been noted as being in the yellow category in terms of support and the ability to improve by Welsh Government

The proposer's expectations in terms of impact on governance and staffing matters are noted clearly. It outlines the support that will be available for Ysgol Abersoch staff members specifically, who are mainly affected by the proposal.

The proposer has given due attention to the impact on vulnerable groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs. It gives assurance that Ysgol Sarn Bach has the facilities to offer an equivalent provision for pupils with additional learning needs.

They have planned suitably to consult with the pupils. The local authority has prepared suitable documentation to explain the consultation to pupils and ask for their views via a simple questionnaire. It is unclear to what extent they will consider the impact on the current pupils of Ysgol Sarn Bach."

6.19.6 *In response to the comment regarding the consultation with children, the Authority notes that they have drawn up a consultation document for primary children with associated questionnaires, and held a series of virtual consultation sessions with representation of primary pupils from Ysgol Abersoch and Ysgol Sarn Bach.*

Arrangements were made for an independent facilitator to hold virtual sessions with the pupils of both schools in order to ascertain their views. The main points of the consultation highlighted that the pupils of Ysgol Sarn Bach supported the proposal and were not concerned about the change, showing a desire to make every effort to help new pupils to settle down.

6.20 The alternative options suggested during the statutory consultation

6.20.1 In accordance with the requirements of the Schools Organisation Code 011/2018, consultees can suggest alternative options during the consultation.

6.20.2 5 other alternative options were suggested during the consultation. (A number of the responses suggested that further consideration should be given to the option to extend the school's age range to 3-9 also). These options were considered against the factors of the Excellent Primary Education for the Children of Gwynedd strategy and the Schools Organisation Code, and other relevant considerations. A copy of the full options appraisal has been included in **Appendix A**.

6.20.3 After appraising the alternative options that came to hand during the consultations, it was concluded that further consideration should be given to three options, namely:

- Multi-site School (Abersoch, Llanbedrog and Sarn Bach sites)
- Federation between Ysgol Abersoch, Ysgol Llanbedrog, Ysgol Sarn Bach and collaboration arrangement with Ysgol Foel Gron
- Enlli Federation (Abersoch, Llanbedrog, Sarn Bach, Pont y Gof, Crud y Werin, Botwnnog Secondary and collaboration arrangement with Ysgol Foel Gron)

6.20.4 The table below notes the options suggested by the consultees and summarises the reasons for not proceeding with those options.

Option	Description	Reasons for not proceeding with the options
Option 2(b)	Amend the age range of Ysgol Abersoch from 3-8 to 3-9 years	It is not anticipated that adding one educational year would lead to a sufficient increase in the numbers. Consequently, the challenges facing the school would continue. It would not allow for the school to offer a comprehensive Key Stage 2 provision. The pupils would continue to transfer to Ysgol Sarn Bach to complete their primary education.
Option 10	Cultural Centre at Ysgol Abersoch	It is anticipated that pupil numbers would remain low in the future, based on projected numbers, classes would remain small, and the broad age range within classes would continue. Whilst acknowledging the potential positive that initiatives such as a cultural Centre can have in terms of the community and the potential to attract an income to the school, it is not anticipated that the options to establish a Cultural Centre, Beach School, or Provide a Complete Education would lead to an increase in
Option 11	Provide a Complete Education and Adnabod Bro at Ysgol Abersoch	
Option 12	Beach School	

		the numbers, and it is anticipated that the challenges would continue.
Option 13	Multi-site School (Abersoch, Llanbedrog and Sarn Bach sites)	This option is considered further as it would lead to more non-contact time for the headteacher to lead, manage and operate strategically. As it would be one school, there would be more flexibility in the leadership and staffing arrangements. In addition, it would rationalise the expenditure per pupil in the area - therefore, a more efficient use of financial resources as it would be 1 school.
Option 14	Federation between Ysgol Abersoch, Ysgol Llanbedrog, Ysgol Sarn Bach and collaboration arrangement with Ysgol Foel Gron	This option is considered further as it could strengthen the school's situation by enabling the possibility of sharing staff, resources, IT, buildings and expertise.
Option 15	Enlli Federation (Abersoch, Llanbedrog, Sarn Bach, Pont y Gof, Crud y Werin, Botwnnog Secondary and collaboration arrangement with Ysgol Foel Gron)	This option is considered further as it could strengthen the school's situation by enabling the possibility of sharing staff, resources, IT, buildings and expertise.

6.21. Impact Assessments of the other reasonable options

- 6.21.1 Following the statutory consultation period, a further assessment of the proposal and other reasonable options was undertaken, taking into account any further information received that related to the responses during the consultation (Appendix D).
- 6.21.2 In terms of the community impact assessment, responses were received which noted that there were errors in the background information noted in the assessment. In addition, one responder suggested that the assessment of the impact of the federalisation model, in terms of facilities and other services, should be noted positively. The Council accepts these comments and the information and details have been included and addressed in the latest community impact assessment. In addition, the latest assessment notes that a vast number of responses to the consultation emphasised that the proposal to close the school would have a negative impact on the village and the local community. The assessment of other reasonable options suggested during the consultation has also been included in the latest assessment.
- 6.21.3 In terms of the assessment of the probable impact on the Quality and Standard of Education, and the Assessment of the probable impact on pupil travel arrangements, except for the need to consider other alternative options, no specific information was received that would have an impact on the conclusions of the impact assessments of the Quality of Education and travel arrangements from the proposal and the reasonable options proposed by the Council as part of the statutory consultation.

6.21.4 The assessment of other reasonable options has been summarised in the table below (See the full assessments in Appendix D):

Summary of the assessment of the impact on:			
	Quality and Standards of Education	The community	Travel arrangements for pupils
Amend the age range of Ysgol Abersoch from 3-8 to 3-11 years	The Assessment of the likely Impact on the Quality and Standards of Education shows that it is not anticipated that extending the school's age range would have a negative impact on the quality and standards of education provided at the school. Extending the age range would increase the KS2 provision at the school.	The assessment of the likely Impact on the Community shows that it is not anticipated that changing the age range of the school would affect the community, as the presence and activity of the school would continue in the community, as per the current situation.	The Assessment of the Probable Impact on Different Transport Arrangements shows that changing the age range of Ysgol Abersoch from 3-8 years to 3-11 years would not affect the school's transport arrangements, as the model would mean that the current pupils continue to be educated at Ysgol Abersoch.
Federalisation with a nearby school.	The Assessment of the likely Impact on the Quality and Standards of Education shows that it is anticipated that federalisation would have a positive impact on the teaching and learning experiences criterion, as well as on leadership and management. Subject to the exact federal model, implementing such a model could lead to saving the Headteacher's time by planning across the federation rather than for individual schools.	The assessment of the likely Impact on the Community shows that it is not anticipated that federalisation would affect the community, as the presence and activity of the school would continue in the community, as per the current situation.	The Assessment of the likely Impact on Different Transport Arrangements shows that federalisation with another school(s) would not have any impact on the school's transport arrangements, as the model would mean that the current pupils would continue to be educated at Ysgol Abersoch.
Close Ysgol Abersoch and offer a place for the pupils at Ysgol Sarn Bach	Based on the conclusions of the assessment of the likely Impact on the Quality and Standards of Education, it is concluded that the standard of education provided at Ysgol Sarn Bach is the same level as the quality of education	In brief, the assessment of the impact on the Community shows that there would be some negative impact on the community deriving from implementing the option of closing Ysgol Abersoch and the pupils being educated at Ysgol Sarn Bach.	The option to close the school would mean that pupils from Ysgol Abersoch would need to travel further to school every day. Ysgol Sarn Bach is located 1.4 miles from Ysgol Abersoch, and it is anticipated that the journey takes approximately 5

	<p>at Ysgol Abersoch. Consequently, it is not anticipated any negative impact would derive in terms of the quality and standards of education from the proposal to close Ysgol Abersoch and transfer the pupils to Ysgol Sarn Bach.</p>	<p>In addition, it is noted that a vast number of responses to the consultation emphasised that the proposal to close the school would have a negative impact on the village and the local community.</p> <p>Nevertheless, the Authority notes that 35% of pupils (N-Yr 3) who live in the Abersoch catchment area already attend Ysgol Sarn Bach; therefore, it is concluded that a connection already exists between the school and the broader area.</p> <p>To mitigate any potential negative impact on the community should the proposal be implemented, the assessment notes the importance of ensuring that the community of Abersoch is included in the activities of the alternative school, and to encourage community collaboration between the alternative school and the Abersoch community, where appropriate.</p>	<p>minutes each way in a car or on a bus, which is within the reasonable distance expected for primary children to travel to their school in accordance with the 'Primary Education of the Best Quality for the Children of Gwynedd Strategy' of 30 minutes each way. Transport to the alternative school would be offered in line with Gwynedd Council Transport Policy.</p>
<p>Multi-site School (Abersoch, Llanbedrog and Sarn Bach sites)</p>	<p>The Assessment of the likely Impact on the Quality and Standards of Education shows that it is anticipated that a Multi-site School would have a positive impact</p>	<p>The assessment of the likely Impact on the Community shows that it is not anticipated that federalisation would affect the community, as the presence and</p>	<p>The Assessment of the likely Impact on Different Transport Arrangements shows that establishing the Multi-site School would not probably affect</p>

	<p>on the teaching and learning experiences criterion, as well as on leadership and management. A Multi-site School model could lead to saving the Headteacher's time, by planning across the school sites, rather than for individual schools.</p>	<p>activity of the school would continue in the community, as per the current situation. Nevertheless, despite the presence of a site in each community, there would be no community identity to those sites.</p>	<p>Ysgol Abersoch's travel arrangements, as the model would mean that the current pupils continue to be educated on the existing Ysgol Abersoch site.</p>
<p>Federation between Ysgol Abersoch, Ysgol Llanbedrog, Ysgol Sarn Bach and collaboration arrangement with Ysgol Foel Gron</p>	<p>The Assessment of the likely Impact on the Quality and Standards of Education shows that it is anticipated that federalisation would have a positive impact on the teaching and learning experiences criterion, as well as on leadership and management. Subject to the exact federal model, implementing such a model could lead to saving the Headteacher's time by planning across the federation rather than for individual schools.</p>	<p>The assessment of the likely Impact on the Community shows that it is not anticipated that federalisation would affect the community, as the presence and activity of the school would continue in the community, as per the current situation.</p>	<p>The Assessment of the likely Impact on Different Transport Arrangements shows that federalisation with another school(s) would not have any impact on the school's transport arrangements, as the model would mean that the current pupils would continue to be educated at Ysgol Abersoch.</p>
<p>Enlli Federation (Abersoch, Llanbedrog, Sarn Bach, Pont y Gof, Crud y Werin, Botwnnog Secondary and collaboration arrangement with Ysgol Foel Gron)</p>	<p>The Assessment of the likely Impact on the Quality and Standards of Education shows that it is anticipated that federalisation would have a positive impact on the teaching and learning experiences criterion, as well as on leadership and management. Subject to the exact federal model, implementing such a model could lead to saving the Headteacher's time by planning across the federation rather than for individual schools.</p>	<p>The assessment of the likely Impact on the Community shows that it is not anticipated that federalisation would affect the community, as the presence and activity of the school would continue in the community, as per the current situation.</p>	<p>The Assessment of the likely Impact on Different Transport Arrangements shows that federalisation with another school(s) would not have any impact on the school's transport arrangements, as the model would mean that the current pupils would continue to be educated at Ysgol Abersoch.</p>

6.22 An appraisal of the reasonable alternative options suggested during the statutory consultation

6.22.1 Federalisation

A discussion was held and consideration was given to the three different versions of the federalisation option as part of the statutory consultation. In addition, it was suggested during the consultation that consideration should be given to 2 further versions of the option, namely:

- (i) Federation between Ysgol Abersoch, Ysgol Llanbedrog, Ysgol Sarn Bach and collaboration arrangement with Ysgol Foel Gron
- (ii) Enlli Federation (Abersoch, Llanbedrog, Sarn Bach, Pont y Gof, Crud y Werin, Botwnnog Secondary and collaboration arrangement with Ysgol Foel Gron)

6.22.2 The above options would ensure the continued presence of the school in the village of Abersoch by means of a collaboration agreement with a nearby school under the leadership of a headteacher or headteachers and one Governing body.

6.22.3 The Governing Bodies of the individual schools would be revoked and a federal governing body (new) would be formed. The identity of the school in question (including name, ethos, and uniform) could be retained or changed to reflect the identity of the new federation. Such a model would also enable the possibility to share staff, resources, IT, buildings and expertise.

6.22.4 However, it is unlikely that one of the two options noted above would address the main challenges faced by the school, such as low numbers, small class sizes, and consequently, the school's financial challenges would continue.

6.22.5 After weighing up the pros and cons of the model, it was concluded that federalisation would not be a sustainable solution for the school. There is no clear evidence that federalisation would lead to an increase in numbers. Consequently, should this option be realised, it is anticipated that the challenge of low numbers, small class sizes and the financial challenges faced by the school, would continue. Therefore, it is considered that federalisation is not the best option for the school's situation.

6.22.6 Multi-site School

6.22.7 What is meant by a Multi-site School is where one school will be established, but on two or three sites. Statutorily, the school will have a single legal entity, and the school will have one Headteacher, with a manager(s) on different sites. The school will have one budget and a single governing body, and all sites will receive Estyn inspections at the same time - as a single school.

6.22.8 Should this option be implemented, then the catchment areas of the current schools would be modified. The Authority's Transport Policy and Admissions Policy will be implemented as usual. Therefore, any admission request to the Multi-site School would be considered as a request to the whole school. Control in terms of access to the different sites would become a part of the school's policies.

6.22.9 After weighing up the pros and cons of the model, it was concluded that a Multi-site School would not be a sustainable solution for the school. There is no clear evidence that it would lead to an increase in numbers. Consequently, should this option be realised, it is anticipated that the challenge of low numbers, small class sizes and the financial challenges faced by the school, would continue. Therefore, it is considered that a Multi-site School is not the best option for the school's situation.

6.22.10 Based on the conclusions of the assessments and the appraisal noted above, the Authority is of the opinion that implementing the proposal is the most appropriate response to the reasons noted in favour of the proposal. More details on this are included in the report (Section 9).

7. The Well-being of Future Generations Act.

7.1 A Well-being assessment was held on the options, considering the well-being objectives of Gwynedd Council and the assessment was updated after the consultation period ended.

7.2 The Education Department has a role in promoting the well-being objectives of the Act amongst pupils in the county through its activities and projects. The Act places a duty on public bodies in Wales to improve economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being. As part of the duty, the Council has published well-being objectives that outline the way it will improve well-being in the "2018-2023 Gwynedd Plan".

7.3 Following consideration and an assessment in line with the requirements of the Well-being Act, the conclusion was reached that the proposal did satisfy the 7 well-being objectives within the Act, and the Council's well-being objectives. This proposal will allow us to respond to and address the children's needs today, and strengthen their future well-being. The proposed proposal will ensure that the children of the area are educated on a site that is suitable and in a naturally Welsh-speaking society, thus increasing the opportunities to socialise and collaborate with others, and to give them a fair opportunity to thrive among their peers (a copy of the assessment is included in **Appendix D**).

8. Equality

8.1 Policies and procedures are in place to ensure that the proposal considers and complies with equal rights.

8.2 An equality assessment was held on the options, which focuses on different elements of equality such as race, gender, disability, language, religion or belief, and age. An amended version of the assessment is included in **Appendix D**.

8.3 The equality assessment stated the importance of positively promoting equal opportunities in light of the proposal, and that measures should be in place to ensure unlawful discrimination and harassment does not occur. Arrangements are also in place to monitor and review the situation.

9. Conclusion

9.1 Therefore, it is recommended to issue a statutory notice on the proposal to close Ysgol Abersoch on 31 December 2021, and offer a place for the pupils in Ysgol Sarn Bach from 1 January 2022 onwards.

Despite the consultation being held on the proposal to close Ysgol Abersoch on 31 August 2021 and provide a place for pupils in Ysgol Sarn Bach from 1 September 2021, we now recommend adapting the implementation date of the proposal to close Ysgol Abersoch to 31 December 2021 and provide a place for pupils in Ysgol Sarn Bach from 1 January 2022. After considering some of the comments received in the consultation, it is considered that deferring implementation until 31 December 2021 would allow more time for the Education Department to put arrangements in place in order to ensure a swift transition for pupils from Ysgol Abersoch to Ysgol Sarn Bach.

9.2 It is concluded that this proposal is the most appropriate response to the main challenges faced by the school and for the reasons noted in Sections 4.1 a 4.7 of this report.

9.3 Having considered a range of options that were fully evaluated by comparing the main advantages and disadvantages against specific factors, it is recommended to approve the proposal. The ambition of the

'Excellent Primary Education for the Children of Gwynedd' Strategy, factors in the Organisation Code, and other relevant factors were used.

The factors included:

- Class sizes
- Population and Pupil Numbers
- Leadership
- The probable impact on the Community
- Financial Resources
- The Welsh Language
- Geographical Factors and the probable impact on different transport arrangements
- Quality and Standards of Education
- Equality Impact
- Impact on the Well-being of Future Generations
- The critical situation facing the school.
- Responses to the Statutory Consultation

9.4 The full options appraisal has already been submitted to the Cabinet for consideration on 15 September 2020 and an amended version including the alternative options suggested by the consultees can be seen in **Appendix A**.

9.5 The impact assessments in **Appendix D**, and all background documentation on the proposal are available on the Council website: www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/modernisingeducation.

9.6 Following consideration of all the responses received during the statutory consultation period, it is considered that the proposal which was consulted upon remains as the best option for the future of education in the Abersoch catchment area. Analysis of the comments received is examined in Section 6 and **Appendix B**, and the responses are available in full in **Appendix Ch** and on the Council's website www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/modernisingeducation

10. Next Steps

10.1 If the Cabinet resolves to support the recommendations submitted in this report - a statutory notice will need to be issued in accordance with the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and the guidance given in the School Organisation Code (011/2018).

10.2 Statutory notices would be issued on a school day and there will be a 28-day objection period from the date of issuing the notices. Any one may object to the proposal.

10.3 Following the objection period if objections have been received the authority must publish a report containing a summary of all objections and their response to them. The objection report will be submitted to Cabinet for a final decision (if no objections have been received, or if all have been withdrawn, the Cabinet Member may make the decision). It must be remembered that there are some situations where the Council's final decision may be referred to the Welsh Government Education Minister for consideration, in accordance with the 2013 Act, and the Minister may decide whether to approve or reject the proposal, or approve it with modifications.

10.4 Subject to the decisions of the Cabinet, these are the next steps of the process with an outline timetable:

June 2021	Issue Statutory Notice: if the Council decides to proceed with the proposal, a statutory notice will be issued and an objection period will be held. Any objection must be submitted within the 28 day objection period.
September 2021	Final Decision on the Proposal: Following the objection period, if objections are received, Cabinet will consider the objections report and decide whether or not to approve the proposal. If there are no

	objections, or all have been withdrawn, the Cabinet Member may make the decision.
October 2021	Referring the decision to the Welsh Ministers: In accordance with section 54 of the 2013 Act, within 28 days of the Cabinet decision, if objections have been received during the objection period, the following bodies may refer the proposal to the Welsh Ministers for consideration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Another Local Authority affected by the proposals; ii. The appropriate religious body for any school affected; iii. The governing body of a voluntary or foundation school subject to proposals; iv. A trust holding property on behalf of a voluntary or established school subject to proposals; v. A further education establishment affected by the proposals.
December 2021	Implement the proposal: Ysgol Abersoch officially closes, subject to the Cabinet's decisions.

11. VIEWS OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS

The Monitoring Officer:

“The report and process has been the subject of advice by the Legal Service. It can be appreciated that the COVID crisis has imposed additional challenges on undertaking the consultation process. However, the report provides an appropriate basis for the Cabinet to come to a decision on the recommendation.”

Head of Finance:

“I confirm that the financial figures contained in section 4.1.2 v and vi, 4.7.2 Financial Resources, and 6.8.4 of the report are either true accurate costs, or fair estimates (where appropriate) having considered the cost of transport. There are clear reasons to support the proposal to close Ysgol Abersoch at 31 December 2021, including financial reasons such as an annual saving of £ 96,062 in revenue costs, and Ysgol Abersoch's current cost of £ 17,404 per pupil, compared with the county average of £ 4,198. Therefore, I support the recommendation. ”

Appendices:

Appendix A: Comparison of the characteristics of the models against the strategy factors.

Appendix B: Analysis of Consultation responses

Appendix C: Consultation with children and young people

Appendix Ch: Responses

Appendix D: Impact Assessments:

- Assessment of the Likely Impact on the Quality and Standards of Education
- Assessment of the Likely Impact on travel arrangements
- Assessment of the Likely Impact on the Community
- Language Impact Assessment
- Well-being Assessment
- Equality Assessment

Appendix Dd: Local Member's Comments