

Summary: Intervention & Options

Department /Agency: Ministry of Justice	Title: Impact Assessment of the closure of Sherborne Magistrates' Court	
Stage: Final Proposal	Version: 1.0	Date: 15 October
Related Publications:	Proposed closure of Sherborne Magistrates' Court	

Available to view or download at:

<http://www.justice.gov.uk>

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What is the problem under consideration? Why is government intervention necessary?

Maintaining a Court at Sherborne has become operationally unviable and is no longer cost effective. Further, Sherborne Magistrates' Court no longer provides service levels that fully meet the expectations of court users. The Court is housed in a building which is no longer suitable for the provision of Court services. Further, Sherborne Magistrates' Court is considered to be under-utilised and generates insufficient workload.

What are the policy objectives and the intended effects?

The objective is to improve service provision for the West Dorset area by transferring jurisdictional responsibility for the Sherborne area to the nearby Weymouth and Blandford Magistrates' Court. Closure of Sherborne Magistrates' Court would generate savings for HMCS.

What policy options have been considered? Please justify any preferred option.

Excluding the do nothing base case, the only option considered is the closure of Sherborne Magistrates' Court and the transfer of its current work to the nearby Weymouth and Blandford Magistrates' Court.

When will the policy be reviewed to establish the actual costs and benefits and the achievement of the desired effects?

If implemented, the policy will be reviewed within three years.

Ministerial Sign-off For final stage Impact Assessments:

I have read the Impact Assessment and I am satisfied that, given the available evidence, it represents a reasonable view of the likely costs, benefits and impact of the leading options.

Signed by the responsible Minister:

..... Date:

Summary: Analysis & Evidence

Policy Option: 1

Description: Closure of Sherborne Magistrates' Court and transfer of work to Weymouth and Blandford Magistrates' Court.

COSTS	ANNUAL COSTS		Description and scale of key monetised costs by 'main affected groups' It is anticipated that there will be additional travel costs for users of Sherborne Magistrates' Court who under Option 1 will have to travel to Weymouth and Blandford Magistrates' Court.
	One-off (Transition)	Yrs	
	£		
	Average Annual Cost (excluding one-off)		
	£		Total Cost (PV) £
Other key non-monetised costs by 'main affected groups'			

BENEFITS	ANNUAL BENEFITS		Description and scale of key monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Closure of Sherborne Magistrates' Court would generate savings for HMCS.
	One-off	Yrs	
	£		
	Average Annual Benefit (excluding one-off)		
	£		Total Benefit (PV) £
Other key non-monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' The transfer of services to Weymouth and Blandford Magistrates' Court would realise benefits for court users given the standard of court facilities at Weymouth and Blandford is superior to Sherborne.			

Key Assumptions/Sensitivities/Risks

Price Base Year	Time Period Years	Net Benefit Range (NPV) £	NET BENEFIT (NPV Best estimate)
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What is the geographic coverage of the policy/option?		West Dorset	
On what date will the policy be implemented?			
Which organisation(s) will enforce the policy?		Ministry of Justice	
What is the total annual cost of enforcement for these organisations?		£	
Does enforcement comply with Hampton principles?		Yes	
Will implementation go beyond minimum EU requirements?		No	
What is the value of the proposed offsetting measure per year?		£	
What is the value of changes in greenhouse gas emissions?		£	
Will the proposal have a significant impact on competition?		No	
Annual cost (£-£) per organisation (excluding one-off)	Micro	Small	Medium Large
Are any of these organisations exempt?	N/A	N/A	N/A N/A

Impact on Admin Burdens Baseline (2005 Prices)		(Increase - Decrease)	
Increase of £	Decrease of £	Net Impact	£

Key: Annual costs and benefits: Constant Prices (Net) Present Value

Evidence Base (for summary sheets)

We have conducted a public consultation into this proposal and asked stakeholders and interested parties for comments. A draft Impact Assessment was published alongside the consultation paper. The consultation received no comments on the detail set out in the draft Impact Assessment and therefore our assumptions remain the same.

1. Introduction

Scope of the proposals

This Impact Assessment assesses the costs and benefits of closing Sherborne Magistrates' Court, and transferring the work to Weymouth and Blandford Magistrates' Court.

Organisations in the scope of the legislation

The proposed policy would have an impact on HM Courts Service, and specifically on Sherborne and Weymouth and Blandford Magistrates' Courts.

2. Rationale for Proposals

Use of Sherborne Magistrates' Court has declined in recent years, to the extent that the court is now operating at a level of efficiency considered unsustainable. The accommodation at Sherborne Magistrates' Court is not considered adequate for the delivery of modern, customer focussed services. The cost of maintaining a presence in what is considered an unsuitable building is difficult to justify, particularly given the low number of Sherborne Magistrates' Court users.

The close proximity of Weymouth and Blandford Magistrates' Court and the availability and quality of transport links means there should be no significant additional difficulties in travelling to Weymouth and Blandford from any part of West Dorset. Weymouth and Blandford Magistrates' Court benefits from a wider range of facilities, and is able to offer a full range of services to the court user. Further, it is anticipated that the transfer of cases from Sherborne to Weymouth and Blandford could be handled by Weymouth and Blandford Magistrates' Court.

Economic Rationale

The conventional economic approach to Government intervention is based on efficiency or equity arguments. Government intervenes if there is a perceived failure in the way a market operates ("market failures") or if it would like to correct existing institutional distortions ("government failures"). Government also intervenes for equity (fairness) reasons. Intervention in this case would be made to correct an existing institutional distortion: Sherborne Magistrates' Court is no longer being fully utilised, meaning closure is justified on efficiency grounds.

3. Cost Benefit Analysis

The Impact Assessment and requires that all options are assessed relative to a common 'base case' over the appropriate appraisal period of the relevant 'do-something' options.

A full assessment of the anticipated costs and benefits of the policy will be developed over the consultation period. This initial impact assessment describes the costs and benefits that the policy is expected to impose, and briefly describes the methods which will be used to identify

these costs and benefits in a full cost benefit analysis. Comments relating to both the scope of costs and benefits presented, and the proposed analytical methods are welcomed.

Option 0: do nothing

Description

Under the do nothing base case, Sherborne Magistrates' Court would continue to operate as currently. As this is the base case against which Option 1 is assessed, there are no costs or benefits associated with this option.

Option 1: Closure of Sherborne Magistrates' Court

Description

Under this option, Sherborne Magistrates' Court would be closed, and the work of the court transferred to nearby Weymouth and Blandford Magistrates' Court.

Costs

Travel costs

The transfer of services to Weymouth and Blandford may impose increased travel costs for those attending court. The drivers of overall travel costs will include (a) the distance between Sherborne and Weymouth and Blandford Magistrates' Courts; (b) the quality of transport links between Sherborne and Weymouth and Blandford Magistrates' Courts; (c) the cost of transport in the West Dorset region; and (d) the number of users of Sherborne Magistrates' Court.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) analysis will be used to calculate the distance between Sherborne and Blandford Magistrates' Courts. Local information will also be used in conjunction with HMCS data to produce an overall estimate of the costs imposed by the closure of Sherborne Magistrates' Court.

Benefits

Releasing value

In line with Green Book guidance closure of Sherborne court will generate savings for HMCS. These savings will be quantified based on the annual running costs of Sherborne and on a judgement on the extent to which Weymouth and Blandford running costs would increase, resulting from its additional workload.

Court users' court experience

The standard of accommodation at Sherborne Magistrates' Court falls short of the minimum requirement for the provision of services. Weymouth and Blandford Magistrates' Court does not suffer from these problems. The proposal to transfer cases from Sherborne to Weymouth and Blandford should therefore improve the experience of all court users once at the court.

Waiting times

Transfer of work from Sherborne Magistrates' Court to Weymouth and Blandford Magistrates' Court may reduce waiting times in the West Dorset area, via the reallocation of District Judge time. It would also allow increased flexibility in listing practices by increasing the use of "back to back lists."

Net Impact

To be determined in the final Impact Assessment based upon the results of the cost benefit analysis.

4. Impact Tests

Equality Impact

A draft Equality Impact Assessment Screening has been completed. The initial screening shows no expected negative impact on the various groups. This will be reviewed following the response to the consultation.

Rural Impact

Rural impacts will depend on the extent to which Sherborne Magistrates' Court users live in rural communities, and on the quality of transport links in the West Dorset region. These factors will be considered when assessing whether the closure of Sherborne Magistrates' Court will have a disproportionate travelling burden on rural communities.

Environmental Impacts

The additional environmental costs resulting from any additional travel by court users may be offset by reduced transport costs from court staff. The net environmental impact from changes to travel resulting from the closure of Sherborne Magistrates' Court will be assessed as part of the final Impact Assessment.

There may be some savings to the MoJ carbon budget upon closure of Sherborne Magistrates' Court. However, these are not considered significant.

Legal Aid

As the proposed policy only relates the location of court activity, there are no anticipated impacts relating to legal aid.

Other Impact Tests

The proposed policy is not expected to have a disproportionate impact on small firms, nor have a negative effect on competition. There are no expected health or human rights implications.

Specific Impact Tests: Checklist

Use the table below to demonstrate how broadly you have considered the potential impacts of your policy options.

Ensure that the results of any tests that impact on the cost-benefit analysis are contained within the main evidence base; other results may be annexed.

Type of testing undertaken	<i>Results in Evidence Base?</i>	<i>Results annexed?</i>
Competition Assessment	Yes	No
Small Firms Impact Test	Yes	No
Legal Aid	Yes	No
Sustainable Development	Yes	No
Carbon Assessment	Yes	No
Other Environment	Yes	No
Health Impact Assessment	Yes	No
Race Equality	No	Yes
Disability Equality	No	Yes
Gender Equality	No	Yes
Human Rights	Yes	No
Rural Proofing	Yes	No

Annexes

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