

PRESS RELEASE

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Partnership considers best option for future accommodation

The Christchurch and East Dorset Partnership has been considering the best option to meet its accommodation needs in the future.

Having looked at four possible options, an Officer Working Group has identified that the best one would be to have the majority of staff located in the current Civic Offices in Christchurch with a smaller Civic Hub to be built in Wimborne, and to dispose of the existing offices at Furzehill.

The Civic Offices in Christchurch would continue to provide customer services and retain the Christchurch Council Chamber.

The Wimborne civic hub would also house customer services, as well as a council chamber for East Dorset, community meeting rooms and a number of workstations for staff to use when working in East Dorset. Customer access will be improved by locating council facilities close to public transport routes and car parks.

The Partnership Board, which oversees the development of joint working between the two Councils, has agreed that this is the best option and has asked officers to prepare a report to go to each Council's Resources Committee seeking approval to carry out further feasibility work on the preferred option.

Once detailed feasibility work has been completed, the proposal will be the subject of a further report with a view to its recommendations being implemented. No specific timetable has been drawn up as yet, but implementation could be around three years away.

David McIntosh, Chief Executive of the Christchurch and East Dorset Partnership, said: "The decision for Christchurch and East Dorset Councils to share services has proved to be a sound management decision. It has provided, and continues to provide, savings which have allowed both Councils to set balanced budgets.

"However, the pressure on future spending and the shift of financial risks from central to local government means that we need to look at further ways to reduce costs. We also need to make sure we develop efficient ways of working suitable for the 21st century.

"It makes sense for the majority of our staff to be located in one building, both economically and in terms of efficiency. The cost our two main buildings is increasing as they age and, having looked at the obvious options, the one we are suggesting is the most suitable.

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“Although we will be reducing our costs, there would be no intention of reducing services to the public in either Council area as part of any accommodation changes. Each of the two Councils would be maintaining its sovereignty and will continue to meet and make decisions which are in the best interests of their respective areas.

“As there has been a lot of speculation about our future plans we thought it best to make the announcement to our members and our staff now so that they know the possible outcome. We will keep our members, staff, residents and the general public fully aware of any plans as they develop.”