

Waimakariri District Council

Agenda

Wednesday 5 August 2026

4:30pm

Council Chamber
215 High Street
Rangiora

Members:

Mayor Dan Gordon

Deputy Mayor Philip Redmond

Cr Tim Bartle

Cr Brent Cairns

Cr Wendy Doody

Cr Tim Fulton

Cr Jason Goldsworthy

Cr Niki Mealings

Cr Bruce McLaren

Cr Shona Powell

Cr Joan Ward



WAIMAKARIRI
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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The Mayor and Councillors

WAIMAKARIRI DISTRICT COUNCIL

AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE WAIMAKARIRI DISTRICT COUNCIL WILL BE HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS, RANGIORA SERVICE CENTRE, 215 HIGH STREET, RANGIORA, ON WEDNESDAY 5 AUGUST 2026 COMMENCING AT 4:30PM

Sarah Nichols
GOVERNANCE MANAGER

**Recommendations in reports are not to be construed as
Council policy until adopted by the Council**

BUSINESS

Page No

1. APOLOGIES

Separately

2. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Conflicts of interest (if any) to be reported for minuting.

3. REPORT

- 3.1. **Adoption and Submission of North Canterbury Council Head Start Proposal** –
Jeff Millward (Chief Executive) and Simon Hart (General Manager Strategy, Engagement
and Economic Development)

5 – 117

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Council:

- (a) **Receives** Report No. 260803222879.
- (b) **Adopts** the draft North Canterbury Council Head Start Outline Proposal (Attachment 1 – Trim: 260803222870) developed in collaboration with the Hurunui District Council.
- (c) **Delegates** authority to the Mayor and Chief Executive to approve final edits to the North Canterbury Council Head Start Outline Proposal prior to submission.
- (d) **Approves** the Chief Executive to submit the North Canterbury Council Head Start Outline Proposal to the Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regional and Transport (MCERT) before the closing date of 9 August 2026, subject to the Hurunui District Council also resolving to support the proposal's submission.
- (e) **Notes** that the North Canterbury Council Head Start Outline Proposal has been developed collaboratively with the Hurunui District Council, and with support from Ernst and Young (EY).
- (f) **Notes** that the Canterbury Mayors and Chair will be meeting on Saturday 8 August 2026 to determine whether respective Canterbury Head Start proposals are complimentary in nature and are able to be endorsed by the Canterbury Mayoral Forum. Should this be the case, a reciprocal endorsement may be included within the North Canterbury Council Outline Proposal as one of the final edits.

- (g) **Notes** that Head Start Outline Proposals are not required to provide detail financial analysis or design information, but should provide a high-level strategic proposal that clearly makes the case for change using existing evidence, explains how each criterion is met, outlines the benefits, trade-offs, risks and outstanding work, and identifies priorities for detailed design to support progression to the next detailed phase.
- (h) **Notes** that the Government Cabinet will make decisions on which Head Start Outline Proposal will progress to the detailed design phase in September 2026, and that the detailed design phase is proposed to occur between October 2026 and March 2027.
- (i) **Circulates** this report to the Community Boards for their information.

4. **NEXT MEETING**

The next ordinary meeting of the Council is scheduled for Tuesday 1 September 2026, commencing at 9am to be held in the Council Chamber, Rangiora Service Centre, 215 High Street, Rangiora.

WAIMAKARIRI DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT FOR DECISION

FILE NO and TRIM NO: EXC-52-05 / 260803222879

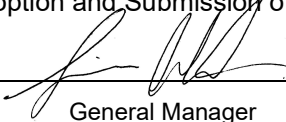
REPORT TO: COUNCIL

DATE OF MEETING: 5 August 2026

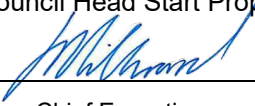
AUTHOR(S): Jeff Millward, Chief Executive
Simon Hart, General Manager Strategy, Engagement and Economic Development

SUBJECT: Adoption and Submission of North Canterbury Council Head Start Proposal

ENDORSED BY:
(for Reports to Council, Committees or Boards)



 General Manager



 Chief Executive

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report proposes that Council adopts the attached North Canterbury Council Head Start Proposal and approves the Chief Executive to submit this proposal to the Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regional and Transport (MCERT) before the submissions closing date of Sunday 9 August.
- 1.2. The North Canterbury Council Head Start Outline Proposal has been collaboratively developed by the Hurunui District Council and Waimakariri District Council and follows public consultation processes undertaken by both Councils through which communities across the two districts highlighted a strong preference to form a North Canterbury Council in response to the Governments Simplifying Local Government Head Start programme.
- 1.3. The Government officially announced the Head Start pathway for Simplifying Local Government on the 5 May 2026. The Head Start pathway was announced by Local Government Minister Simon Watts and RMA Reform and Infrastructure Minister Chris Bishop as a revised approach on the Government's earlier Simplifying Local Government proposal.
- 1.4. The Head Start pathway provided a three-month window between 5 May and 9 August 2026 for Councils to develop and progress reorganisation proposals themselves, ahead of proposed 'back stop' legislation that would be introduced in 2028, and which would require Councils to progress through compulsory government led reform.
- 1.5. The Government's Head Start Pathway Guidance released on 5 June 2026, highlighted that proposals must provide for the amalgamation of at least two territorial authorities or unitary authorities into a new unitary authority. Proposals must represent a majority of either the directly affected territorial authorities; or population across directly affected areas.
- 1.6. Following the Government's Head Start pathway announcements, Council requested staff begin to prepare public consultation information to seek direction from the community, and to enable Council to respond to the Government's reform programme in the best interests of Waimakariri residents. The attached North Canterbury Council Head Start Proposal aims to provide an opportunity for the Hurunui and Waimakariri District Council's to shape how reform will occur in North Canterbury on behalf of their respective communities, noting that final decisions on which proposals will be advanced to a detailed design phase will be made by Cabinet in September 2026.
- 1.7. It is anticipated that the Hurunui District Council will consider adoption and submission of the North Canterbury Council Head Start Outline Proposal on Thursday 6 August.

Attachments:

- i. North Canterbury Council Head Start Outline Proposal (Trim 260803222870)
- ii. DIA Guidance for Head Start Outline Proposals (Trim 260731219911)
- iii. Summary of Head Start Public Consultation Results (Trim 260724181089)

2. RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Council:

- (a) **Receives** Report No. 260803222879.
- (b) **Adopts** the draft North Canterbury Council Head Start Outline Proposal (Attachment 1 – Trim: 260803222870) developed in collaboration with the Hurunui District Council.
- (c) **Delegates** authority to the Mayor and Chief Executive to approve final edits to the North Canterbury Council Head Start Outline Proposal prior to submission.
- (d) **Approves** the Chief Executive to submit the North Canterbury Council Head Start Outline Proposal to the Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regional and Transport (MCERT) before the closing date of 9 August 2026, subject to the Hurunui District Council also resolving to support the proposal's submission.
- (e) **Notes** that the North Canterbury Council Head Start Outline Proposal has been developed collaboratively with the Hurunui District Council, and with support from Ernst and Young (EY).
- (f) **Notes** that the Canterbury Mayors and Chair will be meeting on Saturday 8 August 2026 to determine whether respective Canterbury Head Start proposals are complimentary in nature and are able to be endorsed by the Canterbury Mayoral Forum. Should this be the case, a reciprocal endorsement may be included within the North Canterbury Council Outline Proposal as one of the final edits.
- (g) **Notes** that Head Start Outline Proposals are not required to provide detail financial analysis or design information, but should provide a high-level strategic proposal that clearly makes the case for change using existing evidence, explains how each criterion is met, outlines the benefits, trade-offs, risks and outstanding work, and identifies priorities for detailed design to support progression to the next detailed phase.
- (h) **Notes** that the Government Cabinet will make decisions on which Head Start Outline Proposal will progress to the detailed design phase in September 2026, and that the detailed design phase is proposed to occur between October 2026 and March 2027.
- (i) **Circulates** this report to the Community Boards for their information.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. In May 2026, the Government announced the Head Start pathway as part of its Simplifying Local Government reform programme. The pathway was developed in response to feedback received through consultation on the Government's earlier proposal to reform regional governance arrangements. The consultation attracted more than 1,150 submissions, including contributions from councils, local government sector organisations and iwi/Māori organisations.
- 3.2. While there was broad recognition of the need for local government reform, submitters expressed concerns regarding the timing of reforms, council capacity to manage multiple change programmes simultaneously, and the need to retain local democratic representation and existing relationships with iwi and Treaty settlement entities.
- 3.3. The Government subsequently refined its approach and introduced the Head Start pathway as a voluntary and locally led option for councils wishing to progress governance reform ahead of the broader compulsory reform process. The pathway is intended to allow councils to shape their own future governance arrangements while continuing implementation of the Government's new planning system reforms. The Government has stated that Head Start provides councils with greater flexibility to develop solutions that reflect local circumstances, rather than waiting for nationally determined arrangements to apply.

- 3.4. Under the Head Start pathway, from 5 May 2026, two or more territorial authorities or unitary authorities may submit an outline proposal for the establishment of a new unitary authority covering part or all of a region. Proposals must represent a majority of either the directly affected territorial authorities or the population across the directly affected area and are required to be submitted by 9 August 2026.
- 3.5. The Government has identified a preference for governance arrangements that simplify local government structures and improve regional coordination. While a single regional unitary authority is considered the most straightforward model, the Government has advised it will also consider sub-regional and cross-boundary proposals where they can demonstrate improved outcomes, clearer accountability, efficient delivery of key regional functions and reduced overall governance complexity.
- 3.6. From 1 July 2026, the Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport (MCERT) is responsible for assessing outline proposals against five criteria established by Government:
- Supports the new planning system;
 - Simplifies local governance;
 - Economies of scale;
 - Maintains local voice; and
 - Deliverability.
- 3.7. Government guidance emphasises that outline proposals are intended to be strategic and high-level rather than fully developed business cases. Councils are expected to identify the case for change, explain how proposals meet the assessment criteria, outline key trade-offs and risks, and identify matters that would require further investigation during a detailed design phase that would take place between October 2026 and March 2027.
- 3.8. Following submission of outline proposals, MCERT officials will assess proposals and provide advice to Ministers. Cabinet is scheduled to consider proposals in September 2026 and determine which proposals are accepted into a detailed design phase. Detailed proposals are expected to be developed between October 2026 and March 2027, with final Cabinet decisions anticipated in May 2027.
- 3.9. Any approved proposals would be implemented through bespoke legislation, with legislation proposed to be enacted during 2028 ahead of the 2028 local elections. Councils that do not participate in, or are not successful through, the Head Start pathway will be subject to a compulsory “backstop” reform process after the 2028 local elections. Figure 1. shows the timeline included within the Government’s guidance and highlights the key milestones associated with the Head Start Pathway.

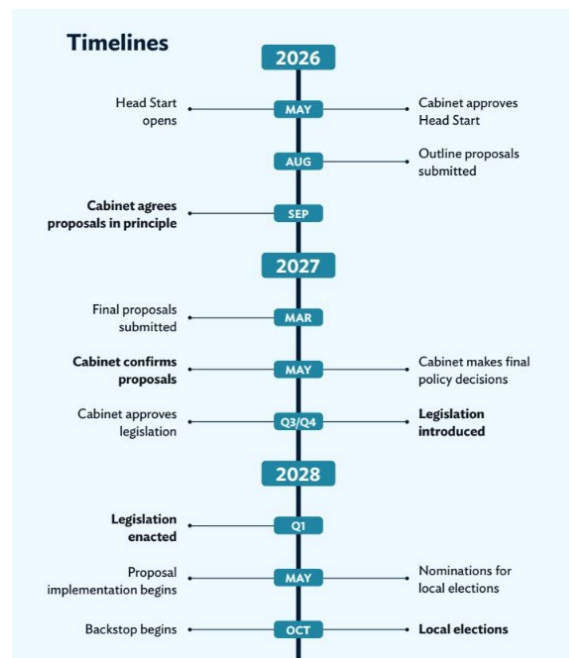


Figure 1

4. **KEY ISSUES**

- 4.1. The Government's Head Start pathway provides a voluntary opportunity for councils to propose alternative local government arrangements ahead of the broader compulsory reform process proposed for implementation after the 2028 local elections. Councils wishing to participate are required to submit outline proposals by 9 August 2026, with Cabinet expected to determine in September 2026 which proposals will proceed to detailed design.
- 4.2. The proposal represents a locally led response to Government reform and seeks to establish a North Canterbury Unitary Authority comprising the Hurunui and Waimakariri districts. The proposal is intended to enable North Canterbury communities to influence their future governance arrangements rather than having future structures determined through subsequent Government-led processes.

Case for Change

- 4.3. The North Canterbury Council Outline Proposal identifies several long-term drivers supporting a collaborative North Canterbury approach, including:
 - Population growth and increasing infrastructure investment requirements.
 - Planning system reform and the need for stronger alignment between land use, infrastructure and environmental planning.
 - Affordability pressures and increasing service expectations.
 - Increasing demand for specialist capability and workforce capacity.
 - Natural hazard, climate resilience and catchment management challenges that extend across current council boundaries.

Community Feedback and Preferences

- 4.4. Consultation undertaken by both councils indicates strong support for retaining local representation and local decision-making. Waimakariri engagement identified a clear preference for a North Canterbury approach with 91.2% of the 1,992 respondents identifying themselves as part of North Canterbury and 8.8% of people identifying as part of Greater Christchurch. Of the three options provided during consultation, 54.2% selected a North Canterbury Unitary model as their preference, 36% preferred a Waimakariri standalone option, and under 10% opted for a Greater Christchurch option as their preference.

- 4.5. It is worth noting that the consultation information noted that a standalone option was not compliant with the Head Start pathway criteria, but Council believed it was important to enable people to provide views that were not constrained by the Government's guidance, even if this meant a potential to be placed into the compulsory Back Stop process. It is also worth noting that of the three options provided, more than 90% selected a preference that was north of the Waimakariri River or North Canterbury in nature. Community feedback consistently emphasised:

- Retaining local voice and identity.
- Protecting rural and provincial interests.
- Affordability and prudent financial management.
- Local accountability and access to decision-makers

Alignment with Head Start Assessment Criteria

- 4.6. The North Canterbury Unitary Authority proposal has been structured around the Government's five Head Start assessment criteria and seeks to demonstrate that a North Canterbury model provides a stronger balance of scale, capability, local voice and deliverability than either the status quo or alternative metropolitan governance arrangements.

- 4.6.1. ***Supports the New Planning System*** - The proposal argues that a North Canterbury Unitary Authority would simplify implementation of the Government's new planning framework by bringing together land use planning, growth management, consenting, compliance, infrastructure planning and environmental management within a single North Canterbury Council. This would create a single planning platform, a shared evidence base, one infrastructure planning interface and a coordinated approach to future land-use planning.

The proposal also highlights opportunities to better integrate planning with infrastructure investment, growth management, natural hazard resilience and environmental management, while acknowledging that the future treatment of some key regional functions may benefit from further assessment alongside iwi Māori and central government where scale provide great efficiency and effectiveness.

- 4.6.2. ***Simplifies Local Governance*** - The proposal responds to the Government's objective of reducing governance complexity by replacing the existing structure of two territorial authorities and Environment Canterbury regional functions within a single North Canterbury governance entity.

The proposal argues that this would create clearer accountability for planning, infrastructure, service delivery and investment decisions while reducing duplication and providing a simpler governance structure for residents, stakeholders, iwi and government agencies. Bringing local and regional functions together would enable North Canterbury to speak with one voice on matters of regional and national significance, strengthening advocacy for the area's communities, economy and future growth.

- 4.6.3. ***Economies of Scale*** - The proposal identifies economies of scale primarily through increased organisational capability, resilience and efficiency rather than relying on significant short-term cost savings. It argues that a combined North Canterbury authority would create a larger organisation serving approximately 89,000 residents with a broader rating base, larger workforce and stronger financial platform.

The proposal also notes that Waimakariri and Hurunui already share several systems and service arrangements, including common Datascope platforms, technical support functions and economic development activities, which are likely to reduce transition complexity. However, the proposal also acknowledges that transition costs will be incurred and that benefits will need to be tested and quantified through detailed design.

- 4.6.4. **Maintains Local Voice** - Maintaining local representation is presented as one of the central design principles of the proposal. Community feedback undertaken by both councils consistently identified the importance of retaining local voice, protecting community identity and ensuring decisions remain close to affected communities.

The proposal argues that North Canterbury represents a "right-sized" model that provides the benefits of a larger organisation while avoiding the loss of local influence that may occur within a larger metropolitan or Canterbury-wide structure. It also notes the importance of working with mana whenua, iwi and communities during detailed design to develop appropriate future representation and participation arrangements.

- 4.6.5. **Deliverability** - The proposal contends that it is achievable within the Government's Head Start timeframe because it builds upon long-standing collaboration between Hurunui and Waimakariri rather than creating entirely new governance arrangements. Existing cooperation through Enterprise North Canterbury, emergency management, technical services, shared software platforms and regional planning initiatives is cited as evidence that the councils already operate successfully at a North Canterbury scale.

The proposal identifies the key milestones and timeframes as part of a phased implementation process, and notes that while there are a number of important workstreams requiring further development and investigation through the detailed design phase, the North Canterbury model is realistic, manageable and capable of being delivered given the right support.

Treatment of Regional Functions

- 4.7. The new North Canterbury Council intends to deliver all regional functions currently delivered by Environment Canterbury. The timeframe has not allowed a full investigation of functions, however Regionally significant functions such as those related to river catchments, foreshore management and biosecurity hold importance, not just at a local level, but also to mana whenua and central government and there is the opportunity to extend certain functions through shared services or various governance structure to incorporate all interests over a takiwā or the wider South Island.
- 4.8. The detailed design process offers an opportunity where mana whenua, central government and local authorities engage in consultation, cooperation and responsible delivery of regionally impactful functions. Collaborative management of functions such as river management, civil defence and the foreshore, could also be delivered in partnership between levels of government and mana whenua. It would also be appropriate to look at the funding mechanisms, where a mix of ratepayer or taxpayer funding e.g. much the same as the ACC levies system, that would fund and protect our future generations. Given the importance and long-term timeframes involved, it is crucial that all opportunities are explored further.

Detailed Design Phase

- 4.9. Should Cabinet approve the proposal for progression, a detailed design phase is expected between October 2026 and March 2027. This phase would address governance arrangements, regional functions, financial integration, representation, ongoing partnerships with mana whenua, workforce arrangements, implementation planning and legislative requirements before a final proposal is considered by Cabinet in May 2027.

High Level Assessment Against Head Start Criteria

- 4.10. Each criterion within the proposal is structured to answer the key guidance questions, identify the strongest evidence and explain what would improve compared with the current state. The proposal highlights that the North Canterbury Council provides a strong balance of scale, local identity, deliverability and alignment with the Government's desire to simplify local government. The following image from the proposal provides a high-level assessment against the government criteria.



Central Government Elections

- 4.11. The Central Government elections are to be held on 7 November 2026. Should there be a change in Government, it is likely that the programme in its current form would continue. However, there is the possibility that a new government may want to undertake its own reviews. This may result in a revision of some or all of the current programme and timeframes.

5. OPTIONS

- 5.1. **Option 1 (Recommended):** Council adopts and submits the North Canterbury Council Head Start Outline Proposal. Should the Council support this option the Council would formally adopt the North Canterbury Council Head Start Outline Proposal, delegate authority to the Mayor and Chief Executive to approve any final amendments required prior to submission, and Authorises submission of the proposal to the Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport (MCERT) by the closing date of 9 August 2026.

Option One Benefits

- 5.1.1. Provides North Canterbury with a locally led opportunity to shape its future governance arrangements, rather than having future arrangements determined through the Government's compulsory backstop process after the 2028 local elections.
- 5.1.2. Responds directly to strong community feedback received through consultation, which identified a clear preference for a North Canterbury-focused governance model and a desire to retain local decision-making and representation.
- 5.1.3. Positions North Canterbury to influence the detailed design phase if Cabinet approves the proposal in September 2026, enabling further assessment of governance arrangements, financial impacts, representation models, regional functions and iwi engagement before any final decisions are made.
- 5.1.4. Creates an opportunity to simplify governance arrangements by replacing multiple local government entities and overlapping responsibilities with a single North Canterbury unitary authority responsible for integrated planning, infrastructure investment and service delivery.
- 5.1.5. Provides a platform for greater organisational capability and resilience, supporting future infrastructure investment, growth management, natural hazard resilience and specialist capability requirements.
- 5.1.6. Maintains the ability to design local voice and representation arrangements that reflect North Canterbury communities and communities of interest. The proposal expressly retains community boards and local decision-making mechanisms as core design principles.

- 5.1.7. Allows Council, mana whenua, communities and central government to test key assumptions through detailed design before any final commitments are made.

Option One Drawbacks

- 5.1.8. Progression to detailed design will require significant staff, elected member and stakeholder involvement during 2026–2027. This period will also coincide with a significant amount of work required to develop the 2027 -2037 Long-Term Plan.
- 5.1.9. The detailed design phase will likely incur transition planning costs as part of the examination of rates, debt, assets, workforce implications and organisational design, and there is uncertainty of what level of government support may be available.
- 5.1.10. There remains no guarantee that Cabinet will approve the proposal for detailed design or ultimately support implementation.

- 5.2. ***Option 2 (Not Recommended):*** Council does not adopt or submit the North Canterbury Council Head Start Outline Proposal. Should Council support this option, Council would continue operating under existing arrangements and accepts that future governance reform would occur through the Government's compulsory backstop process currently proposed to commence following the 2028 local elections.

Option Two Benefits

- 5.2.1. Avoids immediate costs and resource commitments associated with detailed design, transition planning and proposal development.
- 5.2.2. Allows Council to remain focused on existing priorities, including implementation of Long-Term Plan commitments, infrastructure delivery, water services reform and planning system reform.
- 5.2.3. Defers decisions on governance reform until future Government policy and reform pathways become clearer.
- 5.2.4. Maintains existing council structures and governance arrangements in the short term.

Option Two Drawbacks

- 5.2.5. Council would forgo the opportunity to lead and shape future local government reform through the Head Start pathway.
- 5.2.6. Future local government arrangements for North Canterbury may be determined through the Government's compulsory backstop process rather than through a locally designed proposal.
- 5.2.7. The North Canterbury community's expressed preference for a North Canterbury-focused model would not be advanced for Government consideration.
- 5.2.8. Council would lose the opportunity to influence detailed design discussions regarding governance structure, local representation, regional functions, transport, catchment management and iwi/manua whenua partnership arrangements.
- 5.2.9. Alternative future local government models may emerge without North Canterbury's preferred arrangements being fully evaluated by Government.
- 5.3. ***Document Edits*** - Given the timeframes and noting that edits are expected to the proposal, delegation to the Mayor and Chief Executive is provided for in the recommendations of this report to make appropriate edits. At the time of forming the report several other councils are still developing their proposals. MCERT have indicated that they would be interested in endorsement within proposals, of other proposals in the regional. The recommendation provides for the delegation to include endorsements.
- 5.4. The Management Team has reviewed this report and supports the recommendations.

6. STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT AND COMMUNITY VIEWS

Mana Whenua Engagement

- 6.1. The subject matter and/or recommendations contained within this report are of interest to mana whenua. As such, Council staff and elected members have engaged with mana whenua at various forums. Mana whenua have provided views and information for consideration during the development of the North Canterbury Council Outline Proposal.
- 6.2. Government Head Start Pathway guidance highlights that existing Treaty settlement arrangements and relationships with Post-Settlement Governance Entities (PSGEs) must be preserved with equivalent effect under any future governance arrangements. Councils preparing proposals are expected to engage with relevant iwi and PSGEs and identify how current settlement arrangements could be transferred or maintained through any future reorganisation.
- 6.3. Ngai Tahu have provided advice to Council that highlights Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu (TRoNT) and Papatipu Rūnanga have given considerable thought to these reforms. Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu note the reforms present a once-in-a-generation opportunity to modernise our 1989 local government system and design governance and service delivery arrangements that are genuinely fit for the future of South Island communities. Ngāi Tahu strongly supports all regions within our takiwā submitting a compliant Head Start proposal by 9 August.
- 6.4. Specifically, Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu has identified four principles they believe should be considered within the Head Start proposal, these are:
 - Local government boundaries should align with the Ngāi Tahu takiwā boundary.
 - River catchments should be the primary determinant of unitary council boundaries within the Ngāi Tahu takiwā.
 - A joint Takiwā/ South Island “Centre of Expertise” entity should be established to provide shared back-office and specialist functions on behalf of new unitary councils.
 - Future arrangements should incorporate genuine cooperation between councils and Papatipu Rūnanga.

Groups, Organisations and the Wider Community

- 6.5. There are groups, organisations, or members of the wider community likely to be affected by, or to have an interest in, the subject matter of this report.
- 6.6. Reorganisation of local government is likely to require careful consideration of how the views of local businesses, groups and organisations, and communities across North Canterbury are considered and included through potential detail design and implementation phases.
- 6.7. Furthermore, maintaining the range of important partnerships with the wide range of businesses, community groups and organisations, and maintaining levels of service to the wider community throughout the governments local government reform will be an important consideration.

Implications for Community Wellbeing

- 6.8. There are implications on community wellbeing by the issues and options that are the subject matter of this report. The Government's Head Start pathway is intended to create more capable, resilient and sustainable local government arrangements that can better support community wellbeing into the future.
- 6.9. The North Canterbury Council Outline Proposal argues that a North Canterbury Unitary Authority would strengthen the long-term ability to deliver infrastructure, community facilities, environmental stewardship, economic development, emergency resilience and local services while retaining strong local representation and community identity. At the same time, the proposal recognises that protecting local voice, maintaining service continuity, ensuring affordability and upholding iwi and Treaty settlement relationships will be critical matters requiring further consideration through the detailed design process.

Community Outcomes and Strategic Priorities

- 6.10. Due to the nature of the proposed Simplifying Local Government Head Start Pathway reforms, all of the Council's community outcomes are relevant to the actions arising from recommendations in this report. Should Council reorganisation occur in any form, any detailed design and implementation phases will need to consider how community outcomes will continue to be progressed. A future sub-regional unitary authority will need to consider appropriate community outcomes as part of any new Long Term Planning process.
- 6.11. The Council's Strategic Priorities are also relevant to the actions arising from recommendations in this report. As above Council reorganisation will need to consider current and future Council and community strategic priorities through detailed design, implementation and future state phases.

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS AND RISK MANAGEMENT

Financial Implications

- 7.1. There are no financial implications for the decisions sought by this report. However, should the Cabinet progress the North Canterbury Council Outline Proposal to detail design phase there would likely be a number of financial implications for Council.
- 7.2. Progression of the North Canterbury Council Outline Proposal into the Government's detailed design phase would have financial implications associated with programme management, governance design, financial modelling, iwi engagement, legal analysis, community engagement and specialist technical advice. The full extent of these costs is currently unknown and would be determined through detailed design, as would establishing any central government contribution to these costs and processes.
- 7.3. The Proposal also identifies potential longer-term benefits through increased organisational scale, improved capability, greater financial resilience and reduced duplication, although these benefits would require further analysis and validation during the detailed design phase. Government support for some transition-related costs may also be required.

Community Resilience and Sustainability

- 7.4. The recommendations in this report do not have sustainability and/or climate change impacts. However future sustainability and climate change impacts of potential local government reorganisation, including the integration of regional government functions would need to be further investigated through detailed design should the North Canterbury Council Outline Proposal progress through to this stage.
- 7.5. Other community resilience considerations relating to the recommendations and issues within this report are consider within the North Canterbury Council Outline Proposal (attachment 1) itself.

Risk Management

- 7.6. There are risks arising from the adoption/implementation of the recommendations in this report.
- 7.7. The principal risks associated with supporting the recommendations relate to financial costs of detailed design, uncertainty regarding future governance arrangements, community and stakeholder perceptions, the treatment of regional functions, workforce impacts and the need to maintain mana whenua relationships.
- 7.8. These risks are partially mitigated by the fact that adoption of the recommendations does not commit Council to implementation of a North Canterbury Unitary Authority, but rather enables Government consideration of the proposal and, if approved, further investigation of these matters through a structured detailed design process.

- 7.9. Council had a number of discussions with our neighbouring councils and across the region in determining this proposal. Initially this proposal had included Kaikoura, who has opted to join a proposal with Marlborough. The North Canterbury proposal still provides the opportunity for Kaikoura to join with North Canterbury should that proposal not eventuate, or should the Government decide otherwise. As one example, the Government may decide to reorganise the unitary councils in the South Island, which could lead to boundary adjustments of Kaikoura to the South, and that may also align with takiwā boundaries.

Health and Safety

- 7.10. There are no health and safety risks arising from the adoption/ implementation of the recommendations in this report.

8. CONTEXT

Consistency with Policy

- 8.1. This matter is not a matter of significance in terms of the Council's Significance and Engagement Policy. However, should this Cabinet progress the North Canterbury Council Outline Proposal to the detailed design phase, further consideration of the Significance and Engagement Policy, along with associated community engagement activities will need to be considered.

Authorising Legislation

- 8.2. The North Canterbury Council Outline Proposal has been developed in accordance with the Local Government Act 2002 and the Local Government Commission's Reorganisation Guidelines. The proposal has been informed by the statutory objectives for local government reorganisation set out in Schedule 3 of the Act. The proposal seeks to support:

- Effective and efficient local government.
- Improved governance and accountability.
- Long-term financial sustainability.
- Economic development and growth.
- Community wellbeing.
- Appropriate Treaty settlement and iwi relationships

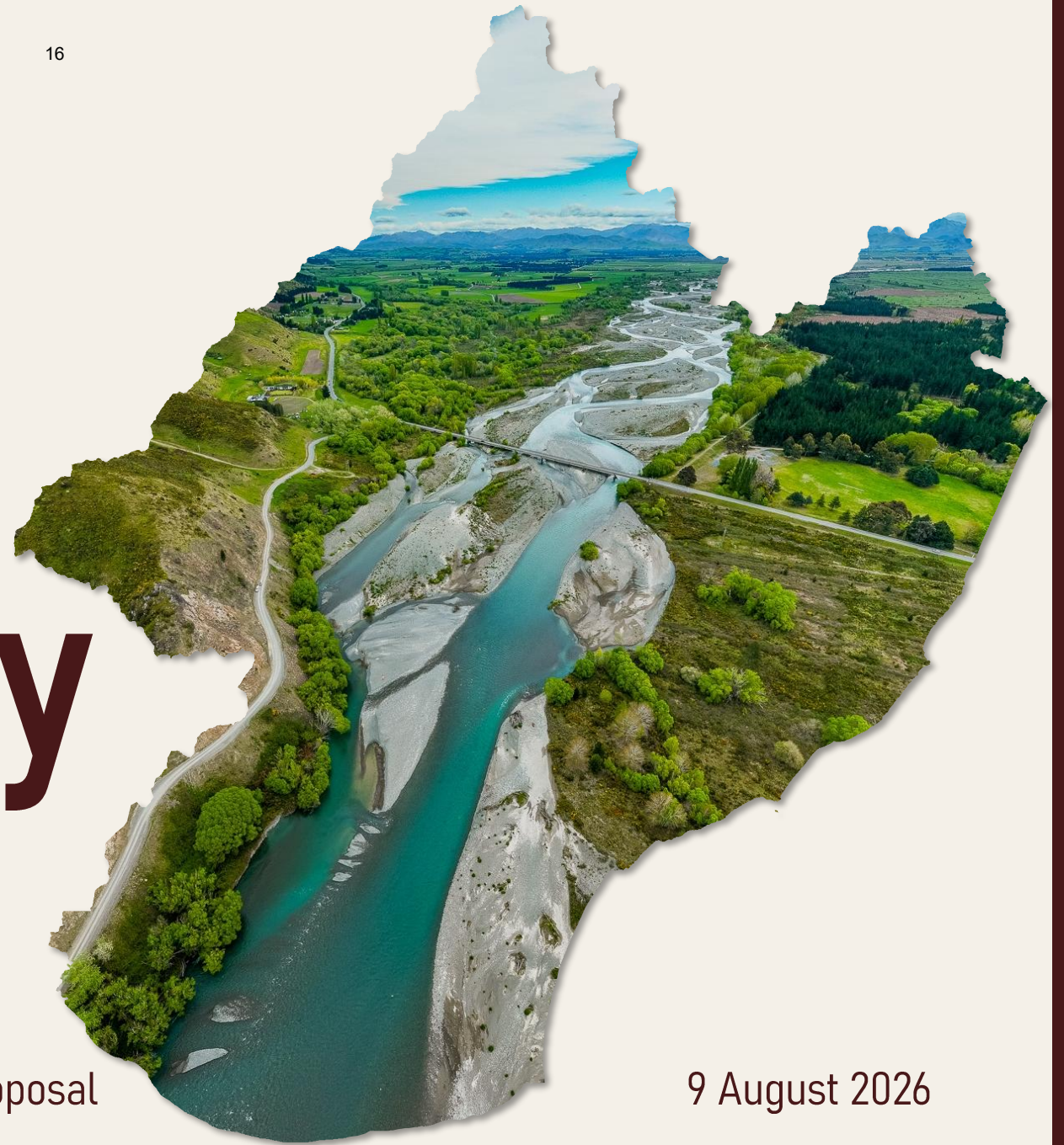
Authorising Delegations

- 8.3. The Council has delegated authority to adopt proposals and approve submissions to central government on the community's behalf. The North Canterbury Council Outline Proposal is a joint proposal with the Hurunui District Council, who will be considering this matter on Thursday 6th August. Submission of the proposal is subject to Hurunui District Council also endorsing the proposal.

North Canterbury Council

Simplifying Local Government | Head Start outline proposal

9 August 2026



Submitted by: Hurunui and Waimakariri District Councils

Submitted to: Ministry of Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport (MCERT)

Date: 9 August 2026

Lead contacts: Marie Black (Mayor) and Hamish Dobbie (Chief Executive), Hurunui District Council
Dan Gordon (Mayor) and Jeff Millward (Chief Executive), Waimakariri District Council

Submitting councils	Role	Status
Hurunui District Council	Co-submitter	Supporting: Council resolution dated XX August 2026
Waimakariri District Council	Co-submitter	Supporting: Council resolution dated XX August 2026
Kaikōura District Council	Interested stakeholder and participant in regional discussions	We understand that Kaikōura District Council has resolved to pursue discussions with Marlborough District Council regarding a potential future arrangement. While Kaikōura is not a submitting council for this proposal, the proposed new North Canterbury Council has been designed with the flexibility to include Kaikōura in the future, should local circumstances and community preferences support this.

Eligibility threshold

Hurunui and Waimakariri District Councils jointly submit this proposal to establish a new unitary Authority: the **North Canterbury Council**.

This proposal satisfies the Head Start eligibility requirements as follows:

- The submitting councils represent all territorial authorities that are directly affected and represents 100% of the resident population across the affected areas.
- The proposal provides for the disestablishment of at least two territorial authorities (Hurunui and Waimakariri District Councils) and the formation of a new unitary authority^[1].

A new North Canterbury Council

North Canterbury already functions as a connected community. Our residents work together, support one another through challenges, share services and infrastructure, and increasingly see themselves as part of a wider North Canterbury story.

This proposal is not about creating a larger council for its own sake.

It is about creating a stronger platform for the future while keeping decision-making close to the people it serves.

We believe local government works best when communities have a genuine voice, services remain accessible, and elected representatives remain connected to the places they represent.

By combining the strengths of Hurunui and Waimakariri, we can create a council with the capability to deliver major infrastructure, manage environmental responsibilities, support economic growth and prepare for future challenges, while preserving the character and identity of our towns, rural communities and districts.

Most importantly, this proposal has been developed from the ground up.

It reflects the aspirations expressed by our communities and provides a practical, locally led pathway that keeps North Canterbury's future in North Canterbury hands.

We are excited about the opportunities this creates for future generations and look forward to working with our communities, mana whenua, central government and regional partners to further develop this vision.

We are particularly attracted to this model as it allows environmental stewardship, catchment management and community aspirations to be shaped locally by those who know North Canterbury best.

Kia pai tō rā



Mayor Marie Black
Hurunui District Council

¹⁸ A joint proposal

Head Start has provided a unique opportunity to shape a local government to better reflect our communities, our aspirations, and our desired future.

This proposal has been directed by our communities and represents the next step in a conversation about how we create a new entity to govern and grow North Canterbury.

The proposal is founded on a simple principle: decisions affecting North Canterbury should be made as close as possible to the communities they serve. This reflects the strong and consistent message we have received from our communities stating their preferences for future governance.

The people who live, work and invest across our districts already experience North Canterbury as a single community. Our people are proud of and value the qualities that make this place unique; its semi-rural lifestyle, authentic townships, productive landscapes, rugged coastlines, alpine environments and the accessibility that comes from living between the mountains and the sea.

To continue supporting our thriving communities, we are proposing a governance arrangement that is capable, resilient and able to plan effectively for the future.

Importantly, right-sizing the North Canterbury sub-region provides clarity and opportunities for wider Canterbury.

We are seeking to have the North Canterbury proposal proceed to the detailed design phase of the Head Start pathway. This will allow councils, iwi, central government, and community partners to test the model, examine opportunities and challenges in greater detail, and work together to land on a final proposal for implementation.

Together, we can create a governance model that builds on the strengths of our communities, strengthens local democracy, and provides a lasting platform for planning, infrastructure, resilience and service delivery for generations to come.

Ngā mihi



Mayor Dan Gordon
Waimakariri District Council

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A vertical photograph on the left side of the page showing a calm lake in the foreground, surrounded by green trees and a grassy area. In the background, there are large, rugged mountains under a cloudy sky.

Executive summary

Hurunui District Council and Waimakariri District Council are pleased to submit a locally led proposal to establish a new North Canterbury Council.

Our proposal brings together two connected districts with a shared identity, economy and communities of interest as a single unitary authority responsible for both territorial and regional council functions within North Canterbury.

While North Canterbury has been recognised as a Canterbury sub-region since the 1989 local government reforms, collaboration among local government organisations, community boards, businesses and communities has been evident across generations.

We are focused on improving outcomes for North Cantabrians. Our proposal builds on our history of successful collaboration to create a stronger platform for future planning, infrastructure, resilience and service delivery while retaining strong local representation and community accountability.

All territorial authority and regional council responsibilities for North Canterbury would transfer to North Canterbury Council from establishment.

Some functions may be delivered through joint, shared or contracted arrangements with other Canterbury authorities where wider coordination, specialist capability or system integrity makes this more effective. The new North Canterbury Council will retain responsibility and accountability for functions within its area.

Why North Canterbury?

As North Cantabrians we are proud of our districts' semi-rural character, coastlines, authentic towns, alpine landscapes, growing economies, and productive rural communities.

At the proposed establishment of North Canterbury Council in 2028, the combined population is projected to be approximately

89,000 and is expected to approach 120,000 by 2053. This population, together with North Canterbury's economic base, infrastructure portfolio, land area and rating base, would provide the scale required to support a capable and financially sustainable Council over the long term.

Importantly, this proposal is demonstrably supported by both of our communities. Community engagement undertaken by both councils demonstrates strong support for maintaining local identity while exploring opportunities for greater collaboration.

Locals want to be close to their decision makers. Feedback from our residents and communities consistently highlights the importance of our shared North Canterbury identity, the desire to retain local voice, affordability of services, resilience, and effective service delivery.

Like many council areas, North Canterbury faces shared challenges that would be better managed as a single region. These include infrastructure investment, natural hazards, planning reform, workforce constraints and rates affordability.

Our proposal builds on a long history of North Canterbury coordination. Shared services and collaboration have been evolving across the sub-region for decades, including economic development, tourism, sport and recreation, community wellbeing, rural support, technical services, emergency management and infrastructure partnerships.

Growth has expanded our population (and in turn, our rating base), supported local employment and strengthened the case for infrastructure investment. Our proposal provides an opportunity to continue that momentum by providing clearer and better aligned governance, and a larger and more resilient platform from which to manage these pressures and opportunities together.

A new North Canterbury Council represents a logical progression, converting established collaboration into a single platform for shared planning, funding, service delivery and local voice.

The right scale

Our proposed North Canterbury Council is large enough to build capability and resilience while remaining closely connected to the communities it serves.

With 89,000 residents at the time of establishment paired with a diverse and growing economy, substantial infrastructure and community assets, and a geographic area approaching 12,000 square kilometres, North Canterbury would immediately operate at a scale comparable with many existing New Zealand authorities and larger than all existing unitary authorities in New Zealand (with the exception of Auckland Council).

Our proposal also recognises that local government reform is not simply about creating larger organisations. Our model brings together the advantages of a larger authority, including greater capability, investment capacity and operational resilience, with the benefits of locally grounded decision making. It delivers the scale needed for long-term success while maintaining a strong connection between communities and their elected representatives.

North Canterbury is more than a collection of administrative boundaries. It is a self-sustaining sub-region with strong communities of interest, a growing economic base, shared infrastructure networks and established patterns of collaboration.

Having considered a range of alternatives, including the status quo, smaller unitary arrangements, and larger metropolitan or Canterbury-wide models, our investigation has concluded that a North Canterbury Council provides the strongest overall balance across scale, capability, efficiency, financial sustainability and local accountability. It is the most appropriately scaled option.

How our proposal helps simplify local government

Our proposal supports the new planning system by creating a single North Canterbury Council able to prepare and implement land use and natural environment planning functions, while continuing to participate in Canterbury-wide spatial planning.

It simplifies local governance by replacing two territorial authorities and the functions of Environment Canterbury, with one Council, one Long Term Plan and one organisational platform.

It improves economies of scale by creating a larger organisation, broader rating base and a stronger capability platform without a loss of local voice and representation. The most immediate benefits are expected to arise through stronger specialist capability, integrated asset management, common IT and back-end systems, scaled procurement and improved programme delivery.

Financial efficiencies, such as those through debt consolidation and lower interest rates on borrowing, should emerge during delivery, with further financial efficiencies emerging over time.

The proposed structure maintains local voice through a deliberately designed representation model that balances population with distinct communities of interest such as rural, coastal and smaller communities.

The current working model comprises one Mayor elected across North Canterbury, nine councillors representing Waimakariri and five representing Hurunui, supported by seven Wards and related Community Boards. Final arrangements would be confirmed through detailed design and the statutory representation process.

All the above will provide savings, efficiencies and ultimately better value for ratepayers.

Proposed delivery is aligned with the 2028 local elections, supported by formal transition governance, protection of business-as-usual services, and regional responsibilities.

Kaikōura remains welcome

Kaikōura is a natural fit for North Canterbury, and should they not be able to progress a unitary authority with Marlborough, our proposal would only be made more compelling with their inclusion.

At present, Kaikōura District Council is not a submitting council for this proposal. However, the model has been deliberately designed with the flexibility to include Kaikōura in the future should local circumstances, community preferences, mana whenua support and detailed design considerations support this outcome.

While we recognise that involving Kaikōura in the future will require us to consider takiwā boundaries, governance interfaces and the northern extent of the proposed authority, we see significant value in expanding our current proposal to include Kaikōura based on our tourism synergies, water services collaboration, and key service partnerships that already work across our three districts.

Statement of support for Selwyn District Council

This proposal supports Selwyn District Council's Head Start submission.

Any enduring reform or amalgamation needs to have community support, and Selwyn District Council has a clear direction as shown through engagement with their community. They have the growth, capacity, and capability to become a functional standalone unitary council, and a proven track history of working across boundaries with partners. We support Selwyn District Council's submission as it represents their communities' wishes for future governance as part of their Head Start proposal for the consideration of Government.

Our proposal is also compatible with what we understand will be put forward by other Canterbury councils as part of wider reform across Canterbury.

A future structure comprising a smaller number of balanced and sustainable authorities could substantially reduce the current 11-council system while maintaining strong local representation. A North Canterbury Council is capable of operating successfully in its own right and will provide a coherent building block within any wider Canterbury end-state.

A financially sustainable platform

The expected revenue for a new North Canterbury Council in FY2026/27 would be around \$321 million, consisting of total revenue from the two territorial authorities and rates revenue from Environment Canterbury for our region. Rates represent around 56 percent of this total revenue. Total expenditure would be \$286 million, leaving a combined operating surplus of \$35 million. Combined net debt would be approximately \$355 million, or 111 percent of total revenue. We also expect material growth in population over the coming decades, which will broaden our rating base and support continued economic activity, infrastructure investment and organisational capability.

A new North Canterbury Council would commence operations with sufficient financial scale to support long-term infrastructure investment, resilience, specialist capability and service delivery. Spreading financial risk and increasing the scale of the rating base will help North Canterbury manage long-term affordability.

Affordability, investment, rating transition, service levels and the financial treatment of regional council functions will need to be actively managed through detailed design.

Detailed design will need to establish fair and transparent arrangements for rates, debt, reserves, assets, service levels, transition costs and the funding of transferred regional functions.

Regional functions at the right scale

Our proposal starts from the expectation that all Environment Canterbury functions transfer to the new North Canterbury Council together with the people, systems, data and capability needed to deliver them.

Detailed design will confirm the allocation, sequencing, funding and governance of each function. Success will be measured by better outcomes, clear accountability and continuity of service.

Partnering with mana whenua to shape the future

We recognise that several matters require an intentional approach and further detailed design. Importantly, Te Ngāi Tūāhuriri Rūnanga supports a new North Canterbury Council in principle.

Existing engagement has provided a strong foundation for the work ahead and reflects a shared interest in ensuring we consider local voice, mana whenua participation and Treaty settlement arrangements.

Further work will be required on matters important to preserving the Crown-Māori relationship, including Treaty settlement arrangements, relationships with Ngāi Tahu, the papatipu rūnanga of Ngāi Tahu Whānui, respective takiwā boundaries and mana whenua participation in future governance arrangements.

Detailed design will ensure these continue with the same or equivalent effect under a new North Canterbury Council.

The proposal seeks agreement for North Canterbury Council to proceed to detailed design through the Head Start pathway. Detailed design would confirm representation, transition, assets, liabilities, workforce, systems, funding and delivery arrangements, including where particular functions would benefit from joint or shared delivery.

The core proposition is clear: **one new North Canterbury Council, established as a unitary authority and accountable for all local and regional council responsibilities within North Canterbury.**

North Canterbury at a glance

One Council. Full accountability. Strong local voice.

Hurunui and Waimakariri District Councils would be replaced by the new North Canterbury Council, a new unitary authority responsible for all local and regional council functions within North Canterbury.



Stronger communities

Better local outcomes through more integrated planning, investment and service delivery.



Right scale

Greater organisational capability to plan for growth, invest in infrastructure and maintain specialist expertise.



Strong local voice

Geographic representation, community boards and accessible services keep decision-making connected to local communities.



A more resilient North Canterbury

Better-integrated planning and investment for infrastructure, natural hazards and long-term resilience.



Value and affordability

A stronger platform to coordinate investment, build capability and pursue service efficiencies.

Territorial authority functions

Land use planning

Local roads

Community facilities and services

Local infrastructure and asset management

Economic and community development



Regional functions

Regional environmental planning

Freshwater, air and coastal management

Flood protection and river management

Public and regional transport planning

Regional science, monitoring and data



Full Council responsibility
All territorial and regional responsibilities transfer to North Canterbury Council.



Flexible delivery
Joint committees, shared services, CCOs or contracted delivery where collaboration adds value.



Regional coordination
Continued collaboration on cross-boundary systems and shared priorities.



Mana whenua partnership
Partnership embedded in governance, planning, stewardship and detailed design.



Future flexibility
Able to accommodate future participation of Kaikōura if community preferences support it.

Community voice

Hurunui

Hurunui's public engagement demonstrates strong community support for the creation of a new North Canterbury Council.

Council sought the views of the community through early engagement via a series of drop-in meetings and a public survey mailed to ratepayers between 1 July and 22 July 2026.

Nearly 1,200 residents made submissions, one of the largest ever responses to a Hurunui engagement. Considering the district has 10,271 rateable properties, this shows a significant level of public engagement.

A strong turnout has created a statistically robust sample with a 95% confidence level, giving a high degree of confidence to the overall themes in the results.

The survey asked residents:

- Whether they wanted the Council to submit on Head Start
- If so, what their preference was across the following options: North Canterbury, North / Central Canterbury, Rural Canterbury, North-East South Island, or West-Central South Island.

Of the respondents, 97.7% supported Hurunui submitting a Head Start proposal. This demonstrates that Hurunui has an engaged community who wish to have a say and direct their own restructure and the shape and form of future local governance arrangements.

A clear community preference

The engagement results shown in Figure 1 provide compelling evidence that a new North Canterbury Council is supported by the Hurunui community – especially over wider rural authorities.

Of the “first preference” responses, there was a significant 84.4% who supported North Canterbury over the other models.

Importantly, only 2.4% of respondents ranked North Canterbury as their least preferred option.

Residents expressed a strong sense of place and identity centred on North Canterbury, and do not support being included in wider rural community proposals.

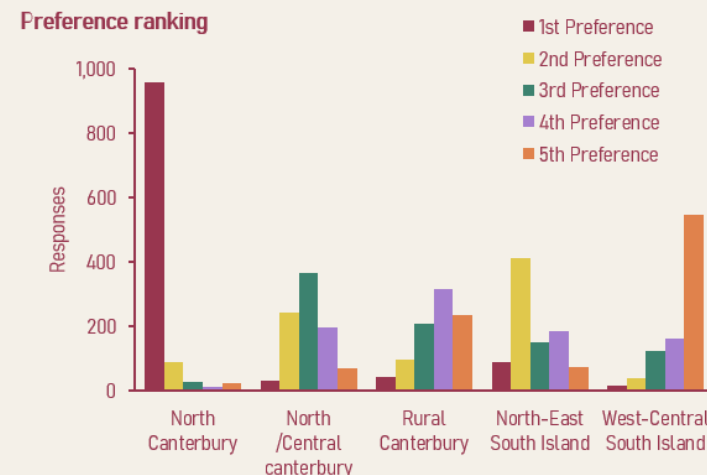


Figure 1: Hurunui community engagement preference results

Waimakariri

Waimakariri's Head Start Pathway engagement also demonstrated a clear and consistent preference for a new North Canterbury Council.

Council sought the views of the community through a survey that was emailed and delivered through the post to all ratepayers from 3 June. Public submissions were accepted until 22 July.

Just shy of 2,000 residents responded to the survey.

Based on the district's approximate 27,000 households, this provides a statistically robust sample with a 95% confidence level, giving a high degree of confidence in the overall results.

The engagement results provide compelling evidence that a new North Canterbury Council is supported by the community.

Residents consistently identified local representation, a shared North Canterbury identity, rural advocacy, financial prudence, and local decision-making as priorities for any future governance arrangement. A strong theme from the Waimakariri community was feedback about a shared North Canterbury identity and a desire not to be included with proposals for a Greater Christchurch.

A clear community preference

Community feedback from Waimakariri highlighted the following key findings, summarised in Figures 2 and 3:

- Waimakariri wrote to all ratepayers seeking their views on the Head Start proposal. 7,700 visited the project page to learn more and Council received submissions from just shy of 2,000 residents.
- Residents highly value local representation.

When asked about the identity of the District:

- 91.3% of respondents identified Waimakariri as part of the wider North Canterbury community
- Only 8.7% of respondents were aligned with Greater Christchurch.

Regional association

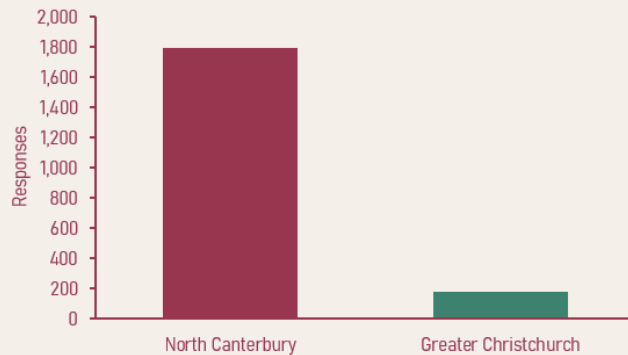


Figure 2: Waimakariri community engagement regional association results

When asked about preferred models for Head Start:

- 54% of respondents selected a North Canterbury Council as their first preference.
- 36% wished to remain a unitary authority of only Waimakariri.
- Only 10% selected a Greater Christchurch model as their first preference.

Residents expressed a strong sense of place and identity centred on North Canterbury and do not support being amalgamated with Greater Christchurch.

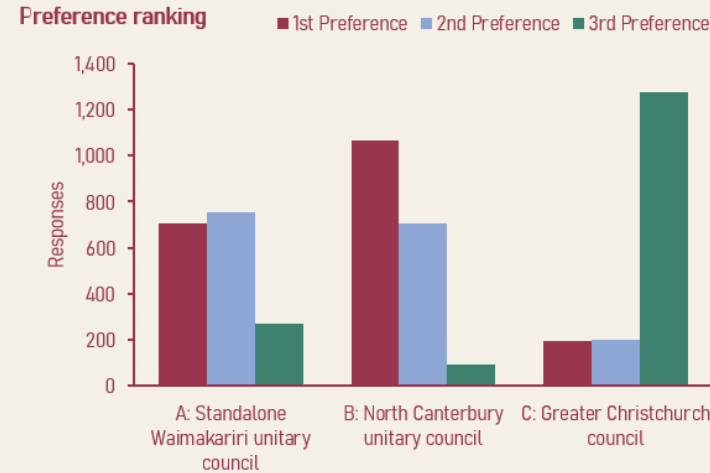


Figure 3: Waimakariri community engagement preference results

The North Canterbury identity is already established

Written submissions repeatedly emphasised that residents view themselves as part of North Canterbury, including that:

- **Decision-making should be kept local:** Respondents overwhelmingly value local representation, accountability, and decision-making. Many feel that governance should remain close to the communities affected by decisions.
- **There is strong opposition to a Greater Christchurch council:** Many respondents feared North Canterbury would lose its voice within a large metropolitan council. Concerns included loss of identity, reduced influence, and urban priorities outweighing rural needs.
- **There is a preferred model:** If change is required, most respondents favour a North Canterbury Council, citing shared values, existing relationships, common interests and community infrastructure.
- **Rates, debt and financial management matter:** Many responses praised Waimakariri's financial management.

- **Our rural identity and community character must be protected.** Respondents emphasised the importance of preserving North Canterbury's rural character, primary production, allied industry, small-town feel, farming communities, and locally-focused infrastructure investment.

Strong support from both communities

Across surveys and written feedback, respondents consistently identified representation as one of the most important outcomes sought from local government reform.

A North Canterbury Council was viewed positively because it:

- Acknowledges the already existing North Cantabrian identity
- Retains decision-making within North Canterbury
- Gives semi-rural/rural and provincial communities a stronger collective voice
- Avoids the risk of smaller communities becoming overshadowed within a large metropolitan authority
- Enables councillors to represent communities with similar interests and priorities.

Written comments frequently referred to concerns that a Greater Christchurch or wider rural-only model would prioritise metropolitan or rural issues over the needs of wider North Canterbury and not provide the connection to community that residents expect.

Existing collaboration provides a strong foundation

A significant advantage of a North Canterbury Council is that it builds on relationships, partnerships and social infrastructure that already exists. This includes economic development organisations, community partnerships and existing organisations, and regional advocacy and shared initiatives.

Rather than creating entirely new relationships, a North Canterbury Council would formalise and strengthen existing partnerships that have already demonstrated value.

Part 1: Context²⁶

Why change, why now?

North Canterbury is entering a consequential period of change. National reforms to local government, planning and infrastructure are reshaping the responsibilities, capability and coordination expected of councils. At the same time, population growth, infrastructure investment, natural hazards, environmental pressures, workforce constraints and affordability are increasing the need for more integrated and resilient local governance.

The Government's Head Start^[2] pathway provides North Canterbury with an opportunity to shape future arrangements locally. Rather than having a model imposed through wider reform, our two councils can put forward a locally led proposal that reflects North Canterbury's geography, communities, economy and established patterns of collaboration.

Hurunui and Waimakariri enter this process from a position of strength, with strong local government performance, trusted relationships, significant infrastructure responsibilities, effective local representation and a proven record of practical collaboration.

This provides a strong foundation from which to shape future arrangements that improve local outcomes, strengthen resilience and keep communities at the centre of decision-making.

While our individual councils are well-run with strong local identities, New Zealand's local government landscape is changing rapidly. Planning reform^[3], infrastructure investment requirements, affordability pressures, natural hazards, workforce constraints and increasing community expectations are changing the scale, capability and coordination required to deliver effective local government over the long term.

Both councils have progressively built practical connections across their districts and already work together where shared delivery creates better outcomes. The proposal would go beyond existing collaboration. Hurunui and Waimakariri District Councils would be replaced by the new North Canterbury Council, a new unitary authority responsible for all territorial authority and regional council functions within North Canterbury. This would provide one accountable platform for planning, infrastructure, resilience, environmental management, service delivery and local representation.

The case for change is therefore straightforward: build on strong existing performance, trusted relationships and established collaboration to create one integrated and resilient Council, capable of delivering the full range of local and regional responsibilities while responding to future challenges and opportunities.

New Zealand's local government landscape is undergoing fundamental reform

National reforms to planning, water services and local government are reshaping the responsibilities, capability and governance arrangements required of councils across New Zealand. Through the Head Start pathway, the Government has created a voluntary opportunity for councils to lead reform and design local solutions ahead of wider local government change.

At the same time, the proposed planning system emphasises integrated spatial planning, infrastructure planning, environmental management and long-term implementation. Future councils will require sufficient scale, capability and coordination to plan effectively for growth, manage infrastructure networks and respond to issues extending beyond existing council boundaries.

For North Canterbury, the focus is on shaping a future-ready model that reflects its communities, geography and aspirations. Any future arrangement must support implementation of the new planning system without weakening local representation, service access or community accountability. North Canterbury Council would respond by bringing territorial and regional planning responsibilities together within one accountable organisation while continuing to collaborate on Canterbury-wide and cross-boundary matters.

Figure 4 on the following page illustrates the interaction of national reform, Canterbury-wide system requirements, North Canterbury's established connections and the need to protect local identity, community voice and mana whenua partnerships.

Informed by the Local Government Act 2002^[4] and the Local Government Commission's Reorganisation Guidelines^[5,6], the proposed North Canterbury Council would strengthen governance, capability and long-term financial and operational sustainability while maintaining local representation and strong relationships with mana whenua.

Recent historical context and local government arrangements

North Canterbury's current territorial boundaries are largely the result of the 1989 local government reorganisation, but they reflect much older patterns of settlement, infrastructure, river catchments and rural administration. The present Hurunui-Waimakariri boundary operates as an administrative division within a wider North Canterbury community of interest, rather than a hard economic, social or cultural boundary^[7,8].

Before the 1989 reforms, local administration was organised through road boards and counties whose boundaries broadly followed river valleys, access routes, rural settlements and rating areas. The former Kowai County, for example, extended across communities now divided between the two districts, while the wider Ashley County historically included areas now administered by both Hurunui and Waimakariri. This shared history illustrates

that connections across North Canterbury pre-date the current district boundaries. Collaboration among local authorities, community organisations, businesses and communities has developed over generations, reflecting common settlement patterns, economic relationships and practical service needs across the region^[9].

The 1989 reforms consolidated a large number of local authorities into larger territorial authorities and regional councils. Between 1977 and 1989 Hurunui District formed from the amalgamation of Kowai, Ashley, Waipara, Amuri and Cheviot Counties.

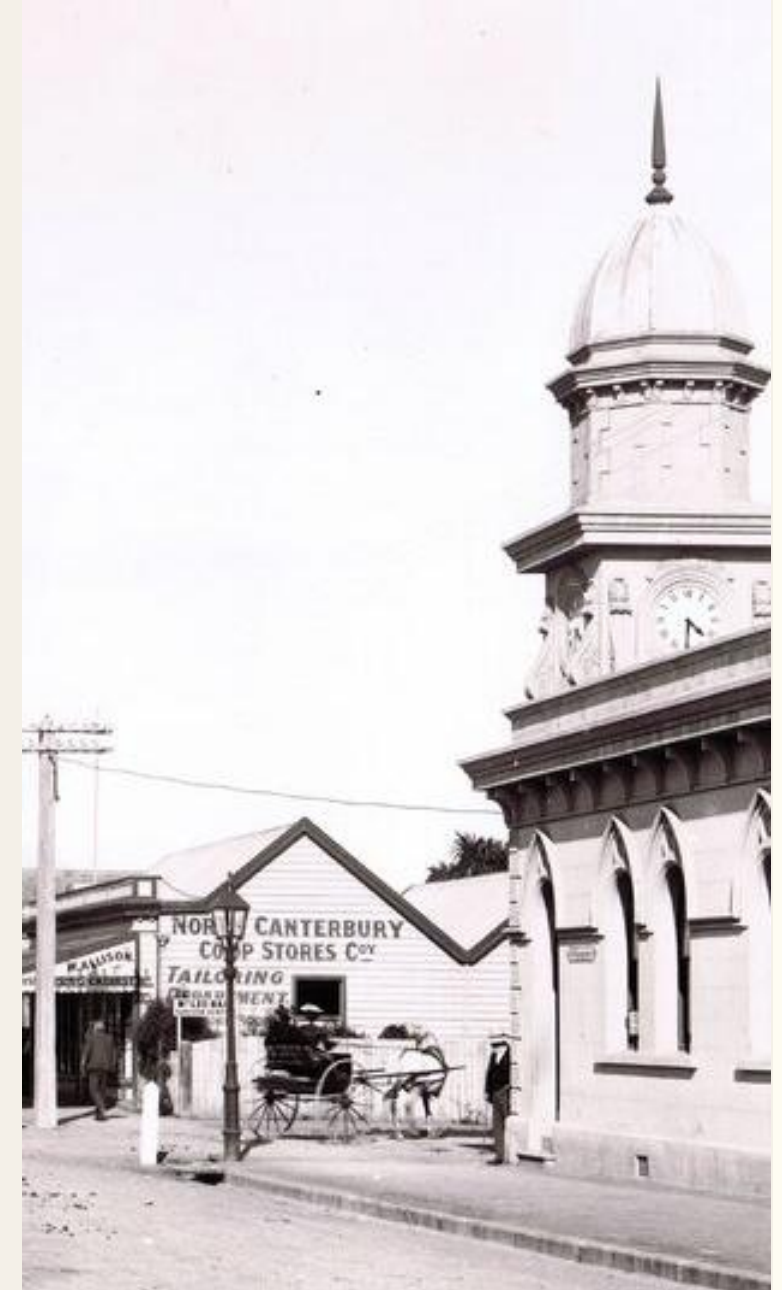
Waimakariri District was established in April 1989, with the northern portion of the former Kowai County, including Amberley, Leithfield and Balcairn, was allocated to Hurunui, while the southern part, including Sefton, was allocated to Waimakariri. The former Ashley County area also became part of Waimakariri District^[9].

Today, Hurunui encompasses a large rural, high-country, coastal and farming district extending from the east coast toward the Main Divide, with historic connections northward to Kaikōura and Marlborough.

Waimakariri has a more urbanising and metropolitan-facing character, with Kaiapoi, Rangiora and surrounding settlements connected to Christchurch through housing, labour-market and transport relationships.

These differences nevertheless sit within a single functional North Canterbury sub-regional setting, particularly along the State Highway 1 corridor and coastal settlements between the Waimakariri and Hurunui rivers^[7,8].

North Canterbury's external boundaries are strongly influenced by major rivers, catchments, transport connections, the coast, foothills and the Main Divide. These features reinforce the logic of considering governance through geographic and functional relationships rather than administrative boundaries alone^[8,9,10,11].



High Street, Rangiora looking east c. 1908.

Shows the Post Office, North Canterbury Co-op Stores Coy – Tailoring Department, W Allison – Chemist, Stable. P18.111.1 ^[12].

A connected North Canterbury

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National reform context

Canterbury regional context
Some functions could benefit from Canterbury-wide coordination through shared capability or joint delivery where this supports system integrity.

North Canterbury context
North Canterbury already functions as a connected sub-region through shared economic relationships, networks, catchments and communities.

Government reform
Head Start creates a time-limited opportunity for councils to lead reform and shape future governance locally.

Planning reform
The new planning system requires stronger alignment between spatial planning, land use, infrastructure and environmental outcomes.

Community identity and local voice
Distinct communities need a strong local voice in decisions that shape their places and futures.

Treaty, iwi and mana whenua
Partnership with iwi and mana whenua is central to governance, planning, stewardship and local outcomes.

Local government sustainability
Rising costs, infrastructure investment and capability pressures require a stronger, more resilient platform.

Infrastructure, assets and resilience
Infrastructure networks, asset management and natural hazards require coordinated planning, investment and long-term management.

Protecting what matters

Future pressures and opportunities

Figure 4: Reform, regional interdependencies and local priorities shaping the case for a connected North Canterbury

Current territorial boundaries also intersect with wider mana whenua takiwā. The takiwā of Te Ngāi Tūāhuriri extends from the Hurunui River in the north to the Hakatere/Ashburton River in the south and inland to the Main Divide. The Hurunui River is an area of shared interest with Te Rūnanga o Kaikōura^[13]. This reinforces the importance of planning and partnering at a scale wider than individual council boundaries, particularly for river systems, coastal environments, mahinga kai, transport connections and long-term infrastructure resilience^[7]. The Mahaanui Iwi Management Plan 2013 provides an established mana whenua framework that should inform the future design of North Canterbury Council's planning and environmental functions^[13].

A connected and productive economy

North Canterbury is more than a geography. It is a connected economic and community area that plays an important role in the Canterbury and New Zealand economies. Its productive industries, growing population and strategic infrastructure networks support employment, investment and community prosperity while contributing to regional and national growth.

A new North Canterbury Council will ensure that there is a governance platform to support long-term economic prosperity, infrastructure investment and community wellbeing.

North Canterbury is growing at pace

North Canterbury is a productive and growing part of the Canterbury and New Zealand economy. Based on estimates for the year to March 2026, Hurunui and Waimakariri together generated approximately \$4 billion in GDP, supported by a diverse economic base spanning agriculture, manufacturing, construction, logistics, tourism, retail and services^[14,15].

Waimakariri remains one of Canterbury's fastest-growing district economies, generating approximately \$3.19 billion in GDP in the year to March 2026, with annual GDP growth of 1.3% outpacing national growth of 0.4%. Business numbers increased by 3.0% over the same period, while resident population growth remained strong at approximately 2.0%. Complementing this, Hurunui

contributes a productive rural economy, nationally significant visitor destinations including Hanmer Springs and Waipara, and a strong agricultural, tourism and food production base. Together, these strengths create a highly complementary North Canterbury economy with strong long-term growth prospects^[15].

Agriculture and primary production

Agriculture is central to North Canterbury's economy, representing our region's highly productive agricultural land supporting dairy, sheep and beef farming, arable production, viticulture, forestry and associated processing industries. In the 2024–2025 year alone, Hurunui and Waimakariri collectively produced over 700,000 kilograms of milk solids^[16].

The sector plays an important role in regional GDP, export earnings and employment, with Infometrics identifying agriculture as a leading contributor to economic performance in Waimakariri, with Hurunui's economy heavily influenced by primary production and rural land use. North Canterbury's rural economy is significant not only locally, but also as a contributor to Canterbury and New Zealand's wider export economy^[17].

Freight, logistics and strategic transport connections

North Canterbury's strategically important position in the South Island transport network means our region is critical to supporting agricultural exports, manufacturing supply chains, tourism activity and national freight movement across the South Island. We are located on New Zealand's primary north-south transport corridor, and our region contains critical freight routes connecting Canterbury with Marlborough, Nelson, the West Coast and the wider South Island economy (Figure 5).

Key economic infrastructure includes State Highway 1, inland freight routes, connections to Christchurch International Airport, access to Lyttelton Port, rural freight and supply chains, and strategic tourism routes. Freight and transport connectivity have been identified as a strategic priority through Waimakariri's Integrated Transport Strategy 2035+.

The strategy recognises that efficient movement of freight is essential to the economic success of farmers, businesses, industrial areas and town centres. It also highlights the importance of supporting freight efficiency, network resilience and reliable journey times while accommodating continued population and employment growth^[18].

A new North Canterbury Council would perform all planning and maintenance functions for a network of roading as a single connected system. We have an opportunity to align transport planning and investment more closely with the communities and economies that rely on these connections every day.

The strategy also recognises our role within the wider Canterbury and South Island transport system through collaboration with the Greater Christchurch Partnership, Environment Canterbury, NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi and neighbouring councils on transport planning, freight movements, growth management and strategic transport investment.

Transport and employment analysis demonstrates that North Canterbury is functioning as an economic area in its own right^[18]. While connections with Christchurch remain important, employment growth in Waimakariri supports a significant increase in local journeys to work, reducing dependence on Christchurch-based employment and reinforcing the region's growing economic self-sufficiency.

Traffic-flow data continues to show increasing movement through the district, reflecting the importance of the transport network for freight, commuting and tourism activity^[15].

North Canterbury also hosts nationally significant transport corridors connecting Canterbury with Marlborough, Nelson and the wider upper South Island. This means investment in flood resilience and transport network reliability delivers benefits that extend well beyond North Canterbury itself and supports the case for continued Crown and regional participation in major flood resilience programmes.

Tourism and visitor economy

North Canterbury has a growing visitor economy that generates more than \$250 million in annual visitor spending and supports employment, business activity and investment across the accommodation, hospitality, recreation, retail, transport and tourism sectors^[19].

Hurunui is the major contributor, generating around \$177 million in visitor spending in the year ending February 2026, including \$158.8 million from domestic visitors and \$18.5 million from international visitors.

The area's appeal is underpinned by our nationally significant attractions including Hanmer Springs, the Waipara wine region, our alpine environment, coastline and outdoor recreation opportunities. Together, these assets attract visitors from across New Zealand and overseas^[19].

Tourism is an important component of North Canterbury's economic profile, contributing to regional growth, business diversity and community prosperity. The scale and distribution of visitor activity across the area highlights the benefits of a coordinated approach to destination management, infrastructure investment and economic development^[15].



Manufacturing and industrial activity

Manufacturing is one of North Canterbury's largest economic drivers, contributing to economic diversification, export earnings, and significant employment opportunities.

Waimakariri's economy contains significant manufacturing activity concentrated around Rangiora, Kaiapoi, Woodend, Pegasus and emerging industrial growth areas on the northern edge of Christchurch, reflecting the district's strategic location and access to labour, freight networks and markets^[15].

Construction and infrastructure investment

Significant long-term infrastructure investment is planned across North Canterbury. Together, Hurunui and Waimakariri have identified more than \$1 billion in capital investment over the next decade, reflecting the scale of infrastructure needed to support our growing communities, maintain service levels, strengthen resilience and meet evolving regulatory requirements.

Waimakariri's strong population growth continues to support sustained investment in housing, transport and community infrastructure, with residential consenting activity increasing and remaining above long-term averages^[15,21].

Similarly, Hurunui's programme^[22] reflects the scale of investment required to support growth, improve resilience, meet evolving regulatory standards and maintain levels of service across a geographically large district.

Already a well-connected economic and geographic area

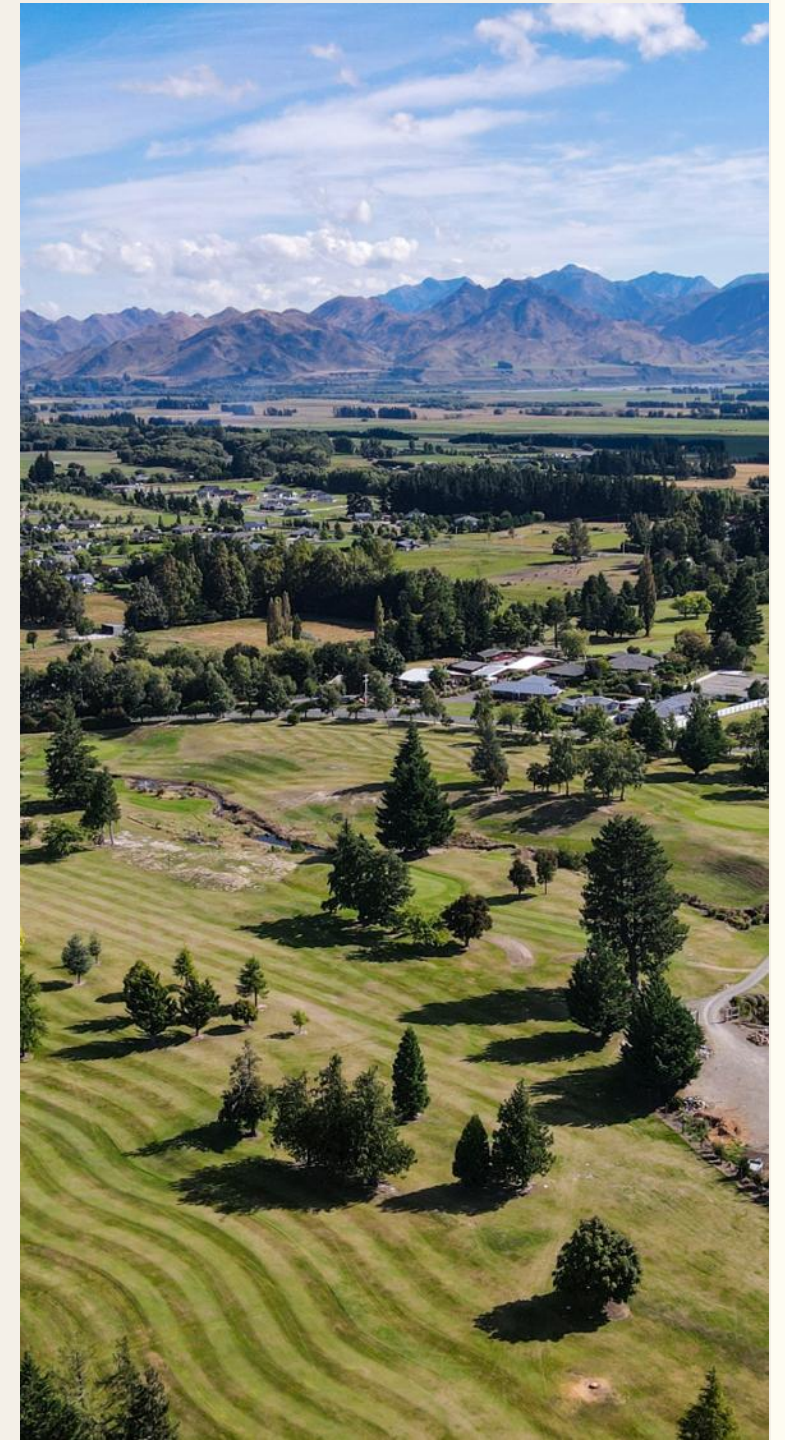
North Canterbury's present-day connections build on generations of shared economic, community and local-government relationships. Communities across Hurunui and Waimakariri share transport corridors, economic relationships, environmental systems, infrastructure networks and community connections. People travel into and between our districts for employment,

education, recreation and services. Businesses operate across the sub-region, while catchments, natural hazards and infrastructure networks frequently extend beyond council boundaries.

This connectivity is supported by established arrangements that already operate across district boundaries. Councils collaborate through Enterprise North Canterbury, North Canterbury Sport and Recreation Trust, ongoing hydraulic modelling and technical support provided by Waimakariri District Council to Hurunui District Council, and joint planning initiatives through the Greater Christchurch Partnership. Regional leadership and coordination also occur through the Canterbury Mayoral Forum, Canterbury Chief Executives Forum and other cross-council governance arrangements. Our councils have a proven history of working together during emergency response and recovery activities, including support provided following the Canterbury and Kaikōura earthquakes.

Together, these relationships demonstrate that North Canterbury is not simply neighbouring districts. We already operate as a connected sub-region with established patterns of cooperation, shared interests and collective problem-solving, with the potential to strengthen this connection even further in the event that Kaikōura joins us in the future.

The North Canterbury proposition is further strengthened by the fact that key infrastructure systems already operate largely independently of Christchurch. The Waimakariri River forms a significant geographic and infrastructure boundary. Drinking water systems are independently sourced, wastewater systems are independently operated, stormwater catchments are separate and infrastructure interdependencies across the river are limited. While strategic transport connections remain important, North Canterbury's essential infrastructure systems are already planned, funded and operated at a North Canterbury scale.





Future challenges and opportunities

Like many local government areas across New Zealand, North Canterbury is faced with some significant long-term challenges. Population growth, infrastructure renewal, transport investment, water services reform, climate adaptation and increasing regulatory requirements are placing pressure on councils to do more while maintaining affordability and high levels of service.

How we understand and respond to these issues is particularly important. Some challenges are not confined to a single district, while others (for example, population growth) should be viewed as an opportunity rather than as a challenge. Growth expands the rating base, supports local employment, improves investment attraction and helps spread infrastructure costs across more households and businesses.

Infrastructure and asset management are central to this challenge. Across Hurunui and Waimakariri there are significant investments required in transport networks, water infrastructure, community facilities, flood resilience, environmental management and growth-related infrastructure. At the same time, councils are competing for specialist staff and technical expertise in increasingly constrained labour markets.

These challenges raise a critical question about how councils strike the right balance between building the scale and capability needed to serve our communities while retaining a strong local voice. A stronger North Canterbury platform would preserve our region's unique local priorities and service levels, while providing greater specialist capability, more integrated planning, stronger asset management and an improved ability to respond to future challenges.

Protecting what matters

North Canterbury's distinctive identity is one of our greatest strengths. Our residents and communities identify strongly with Hurunui and Waimakariri's unique communities, histories,

landscapes and aspirations. Protecting that identity and ensuring meaningful local representation is therefore a central design principle of any future model.

We know that local government in North Canterbury is also about far more than infrastructure and regulation. Our councils support libraries, recreation facilities, parks, reserves, community halls, events, volunteer organisations, economic development initiatives and community wellbeing programmes that contribute directly to people's quality of life across North Canterbury. Any future arrangement must strengthen both the physical infrastructure and the social infrastructure that help our communities thrive.

Partnership with iwi and mana whenua will continue to be fundamental to the stewardship of North Canterbury's environment, resources and communities. Together, we are committed to maintaining Hurunui and Waimakariri's existing relationships, settlement arrangements, statutory responsibilities and participation mechanisms with the same or equivalent effect. Future governance arrangements should not diminish these relationships, but provide opportunities to strengthen meaningful involvement in planning, environmental management and local decision-making.

Waimakariri District Council and Te Ngāi Tūāhuriri, through Whitiōra, have developed a mature partnership model supported by formal agreements, regular governance engagement and collaborative planning processes. These arrangements provide a strong foundation for future North Canterbury governance and demonstrate the ability of councils and mana whenua to work together on infrastructure, environmental stewardship and community outcomes.

Ultimately, reform will only be successful if North Canterbury's communities continue to see themselves reflected in the future model. Scale, capability and efficiency are important, but they must be balanced with the local voice, community identity and enduring partnerships that are so special for our region.

North Canterbury Council

Part 2: Introducing the new North Canterbury Council



A new North Canterbury Council

Our proposal to establish a new North Canterbury Council sets out a clear pathway forward to simplify governance, improve service delivery through economies of scale, and maintain a strong community voice for North Cantabrians. The proposed arrangements strike the optimal balance between urban and rural representation, supporting financial sustainability across Hurunui and Waimakariri's large geographic area and recognising the North Canterbury region's unique natural environment.

We are pleased to submit this proposal to establish a new North Canterbury Council as part of the Government's Head Start process.

A new North Canterbury Council will bring together the territorial authority functions currently delivered by Hurunui District Council and Waimakariri District Council and will take on all regional council functions for the North Canterbury area. This will create one accountable North Canterbury Council for local and regional government decisions across our region, building on a foundation of existing collaboration and shared service delivery to create a stronger platform for planning, infrastructure, asset management, local services, resilience, environmental management and community outcomes.

Canterbury has a long history of being organised around the distinct sub-regions of North, Mid and South Canterbury. Together, they comprise New Zealand's largest region by land area, reflecting the scale and diversity of the communities, landscapes and economies that exist across Canterbury. The region covers a geographic footprint approximately twice the size of the Waikato region and around nine times larger than Auckland.

Our proposal shows that regional functions closely connected to local planning, infrastructure, resilience, regulatory delivery and community outcomes would

transfer easily into a new North Canterbury unitary authority from establishment.

These are expected to include many functions where local accountability and integration with council services improve outcomes. A smaller number of functions, such as regional civil defence and major flood protection schemes, can be delivered by the new Council although these may also continue through regional or joint governance arrangements where the benefits of wider integration are evidenced.

The objective is to ensure every function is delivered at the most efficient and effective scale.

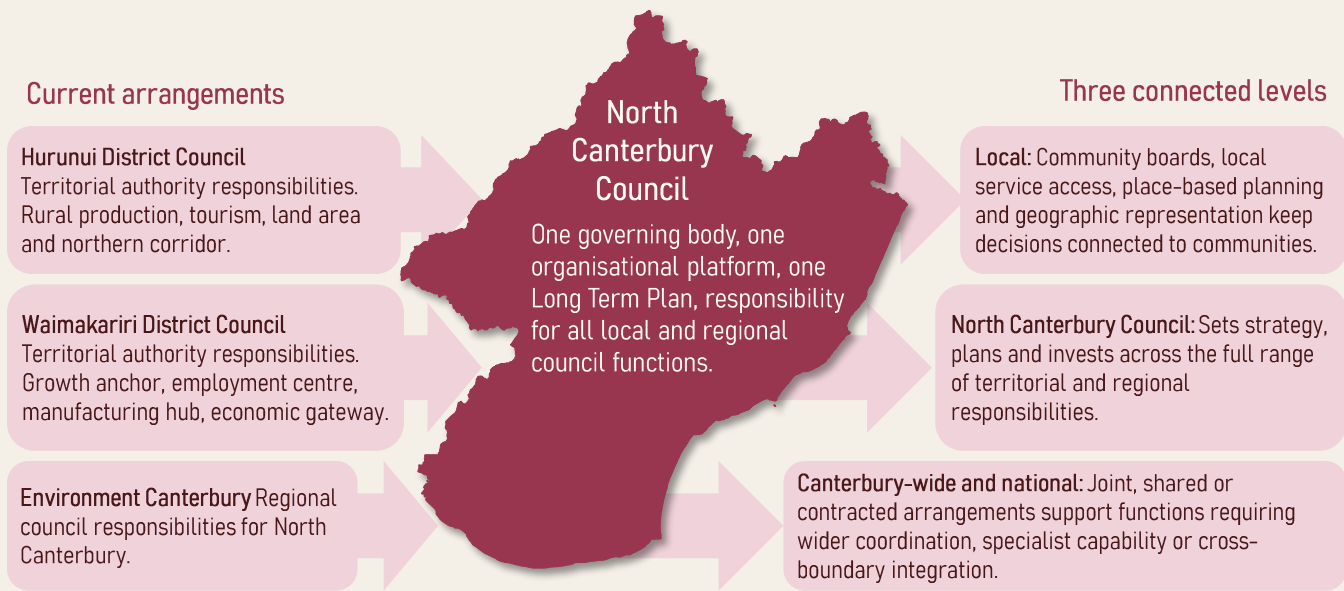
A commitment to maintaining a strong local voice and appropriate representation for North Cantabrians is central to how we have developed our proposal. The new unitary authority would preserve all existing Hurunui and Waimakariri community boards, and is sized in a way that better protects the close links between council and our communities compared to a more urban-centric model.

North Canterbury is characterised by a network of distinct towns and settlements that anchor wider rural communities. Rangiora, Kaiapoi, Oxford, Amberley, Culverden and Hanmer Springs each perform important service, employment, recreational and community functions for surrounding rural areas.

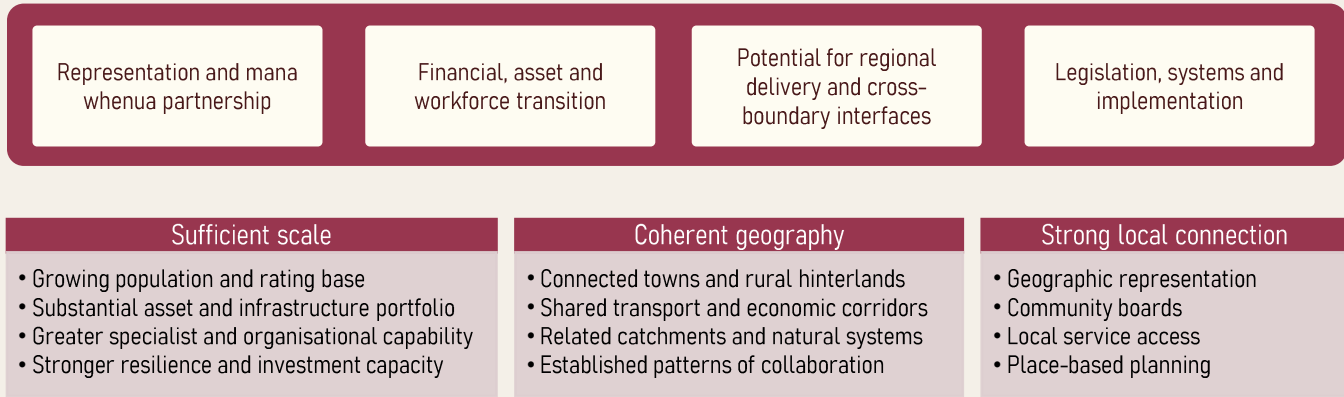
Key features:

- **One new Council** replacing two territorial authorities and the existing regional governance arrangements for North Canterbury
- **Full unitary authority responsibility** for all territorial and regional council functions within North Canterbury
- **Strong local representation** through geographic wards, community boards and accessible local services
- **The scale and capability** to plan, invest and deliver for a growing population and substantial geographic area
- **Continued regional collaboration** where cross-boundary coordination or shared capability adds value
- **Flexibility for future participation by Kaikōura**, should local circumstances, community preferences, mana whenua support and detailed design support that outcome.

How a new North Canterbury Council would work



Key dependencies



The North Canterbury Council has been designed to preserve and strengthen these community connections, rather than dilute them within a larger metropolitan entity.

Our Councils have worked closely together to ensure the unique needs of our residents and communities are properly represented in a new North Canterbury unitary authority. The details of our proposed arrangements have been shared with each council and its elected officials, with both Hurunui District Council and Waimakariri District Council passing resolutions in support of the new North Canterbury Council.

We are proud to have engaged with Te Ngāi Tūāhuriri Rūnanga, Te Rūnanga o Kaikōura and mana whenua representatives who are supportive of continued conversations that enable mana whenua aspirations to be realised through any future local government arrangements. A deep connection to mana whenua in our region is critical to ensuring we maintain a strong local voice. We look forward to further aligning ourselves with our iwi partners during the detailed design phase, including to consider the advantages of aligning our boundaries with existing Ngāi Tahu takiwā boundaries.

A North Canterbury Council integrates seamlessly with wider local government reform underway across the Canterbury region.

How North Canterbury Council will operate

The proposed North Canterbury Council will operate across three connected levels:

- Local:** Communities will continue to influence decisions affecting their places through representation arrangements, community boards, local area planning and local service access mechanisms.
- North Canterbury:** The new North Canterbury Council would be responsible for council-wide strategy, planning, infrastructure investment, service delivery, funding, asset management and functions transferred through detailed design.
- Regional and national:** Functions requiring wider geographic coordination could continue through regional partnerships, shared arrangements or direct relationships with central government agencies.

Why North Canterbury?

We are proud of our existing collaboration across the Hurunui and Waimakariri districts. This collaboration stems from shared interests, established relationships and practical opportunities to work together.

North Canterbury combines a substantial and growing population, a diverse and productive economy, shared catchment basins, strategic transport connections, major environmental resources and strong long-term growth prospects. Together, these characteristics provide the capability, resilience and financial base required to support specialist expertise, infrastructure investment, long-term planning and effective service delivery.

We already share capability and resources where collective outcomes matter. Our Councils share an economic development CCO through Enterprise North Canterbury, and we collectively support our communities' health and wellbeing through the North Canterbury Sport and Recreation Trust and the Community Wellbeing North Canterbury Trust. In times of natural disasters, we have provided civil defence support through sharing of suitably qualified staff. Where expertise is key, we share hydraulic modelling resource. We also share an interest in MainPower providing electricity to our communities.

North Canterbury already operates as a connected economic and community area. Enterprise North Canterbury has provided a shared economic development platform since 2002 and supports business development, investment attraction, tourism promotion and economic growth across the sub-region^[15].

The right geography and right scale

Our proposal is based on identifying the scale at which local government can be delivered most effectively, balancing organisational capability, financial sustainability and efficient service delivery with strong local representation and community accountability.

The new North Canterbury Council would operate at a scale large enough to successfully undertake the full range of local government responsibilities while remaining closely connected to the communities it serves. Our authority is expected to serve nearly 89,000 residents and cover almost 12,000 square kilometres. This would make North Canterbury the second largest unitary authority in the country – after Auckland – if it were founded today^[17].

Scale matters, but there is a point at which scale results in unnecessary complexity. Very small councils find it hard to attract and maintain specialist capability, and face challenges maintaining a revenue base sufficient to operate sustainably, fund asset renewals and upgrades, and respond to increasing regulatory expectations. Large councils introduce additional layers of governance and administration – like local boards – and increase the distance between communities and decision-makers, making it more difficult to respond to the distinct needs of individual communities.

Our identity is reinforced by North Canterbury's strong and coherent economy. Increasingly, our region is developing an economic identity that operates as a node connected to the wider region, but somewhat independently of the larger urban centres to our South. Manufacturing, construction, agriculture, tourism, professional services, logistics and supporting industries all contribute to a diverse economic base across our two districts. Recent transport and employment data lends further credence to our self-reliance, with a growing proportion of residents living and working within North Canterbury^[23].

Alternative models that aim to create an urban conurbation, focussed on Christchurch, miss the critical importance that community identity plays in retaining social cohesion and democratic accountability. Proposals that focus on only capturing the urban and peri-urban areas fail to consider the sustainability and function of what remains: rural areas, essential to the prosperity of Canterbury without the scale or rating base needed

to remain viable.

Scale benefits are not distributed equally across all potential reform options. For North Canterbury, combining Hurunui and Waimakariri creates a materially larger and more capable organisation. By contrast, incorporating parts of Waimakariri and/or Selwyn into a much larger metropolitan authority would have comparatively little impact on the overall scale of that organisation, while significantly reducing the viability and financial sustainability of those provincial and rural areas left behind.

North Canterbury's communities share common interests that extend beyond administrative boundaries. Our towns support extensive rural hinterlands, our infrastructure networks operate largely at a North Canterbury scale, and our residents consistently identify with North Canterbury communities and places. Community feedback to date indicates strong support for North Canterbury-focused governance arrangements and highlights the importance of retaining local voice, preserving community identity and ensuring decision-making remains closely connected to local priorities.

Our approach supports continued collaboration on spatial planning, economic development, transport planning, emergency management and growth management. Existing arrangements already demonstrate that councils can successfully work together where wider coordination adds value, while retaining local accountability for matters that directly affect communities^[24].

Viewed in this context, a new North Canterbury Council would form part of a broader and more coherent future governance landscape for Canterbury. It would support governance arrangements across Canterbury that provide sufficient scale, clear accountability and strong local representation, while preserving the ability to collaborate on matters of regional significance.

A future Canterbury landscape comprising a small number of balanced and sustainable authorities would significantly reduce the current fragmentation of local government while maintaining strong democratic representation and local accountability. North Canterbury is well positioned to play this role because it already possesses the population, economic base, growth trajectory, infrastructure portfolio and organisational capability required to operate successfully as a unitary authority.

In developing this proposal, Hurunui and Waimakariri considered several alternative models.

- Retaining the status quo would preserve existing structures but would do little to address the capability, scale and efficiency challenges that have driven local government reform.
- Smaller standalone unitary options provide less opportunity to realise economies of scale across North Canterbury and leave unresolved questions regarding neighbouring districts.
- Larger metropolitan-focused arrangements may achieve additional organisational scale but risk reducing North Canterbury's influence over decisions affecting its communities, infrastructure priorities and service delivery outcomes.
- Canterbury-wide arrangements maximise scale but introduce significant implementation complexity, increased governance distance and a greater risk that local priorities become diluted within a much larger organisation.

In contrast, our proposal clearly demonstrates that a new North Canterbury Council provides the strongest overall

balance of scale, capability, efficiency, financial sustainability, community identity and local accountability. It is sufficiently large to deliver the efficiencies, resilience and specialist expertise expected of modern local government, while remaining well connected to the communities it serves. In that respect, North Canterbury represents not the largest possible option, but the most appropriately scaled option for delivering enduring local government outcomes for its residents, businesses and communities.

A growing population provides scale and increases demand

Based on the Statistics New Zealand 2025 estimates as shown in Figure 6, amalgamating our Hurunui and Waimakariri districts into a new North Canterbury Council would create a region representing approximately 85,000 residents today^[1]. This puts us at a similar scale to other large New Zealand councils including New Plymouth (90,100 people) and Palmerston North (90,500 people), reflecting that our proposal will give North Canterbury sufficient scale to succeed^[1].

And we are growing, fast. Statistics New Zealand's 2025 estimates do not reflect recent growth in our region, with current population estimates considered to be materially higher and comfortably exceeding 70,000 residents in Waimakariri and 15,000 in Hurunui. This strong growth is expected to continue across our districts over the foreseeable future, which will support a larger rating base, continued economic activity and increased demand for infrastructure investment. At the time of implementation in 2028, our population is expected to be approaching 89,000 people. Longer term population growth estimates put the North Canterbury region at around 119,000 people by 2053^[1].

A balanced Canterbury future

The new North Canterbury Council is compatible with a range of future governance arrangements elsewhere in Canterbury. The proposal supports governance structures that provide sufficient scale, strong local accountability and effective delivery of regional functions, while recognising that metropolitan Christchurch and North Canterbury have distinct communities, growth challenges and service delivery requirements.

Population projections for North Canterbury

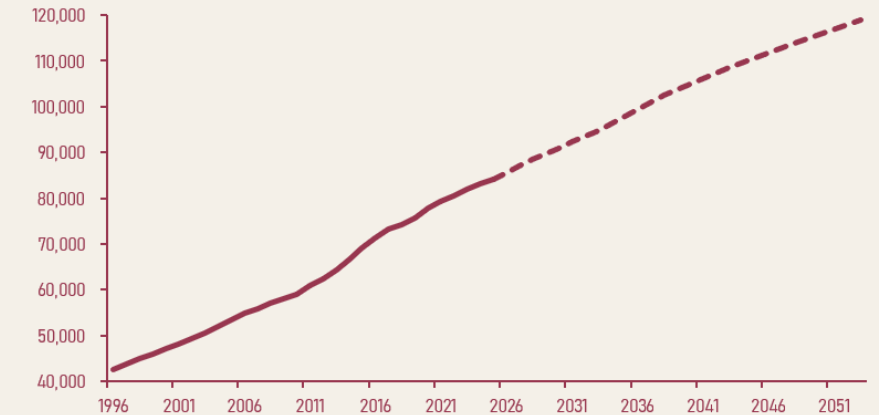
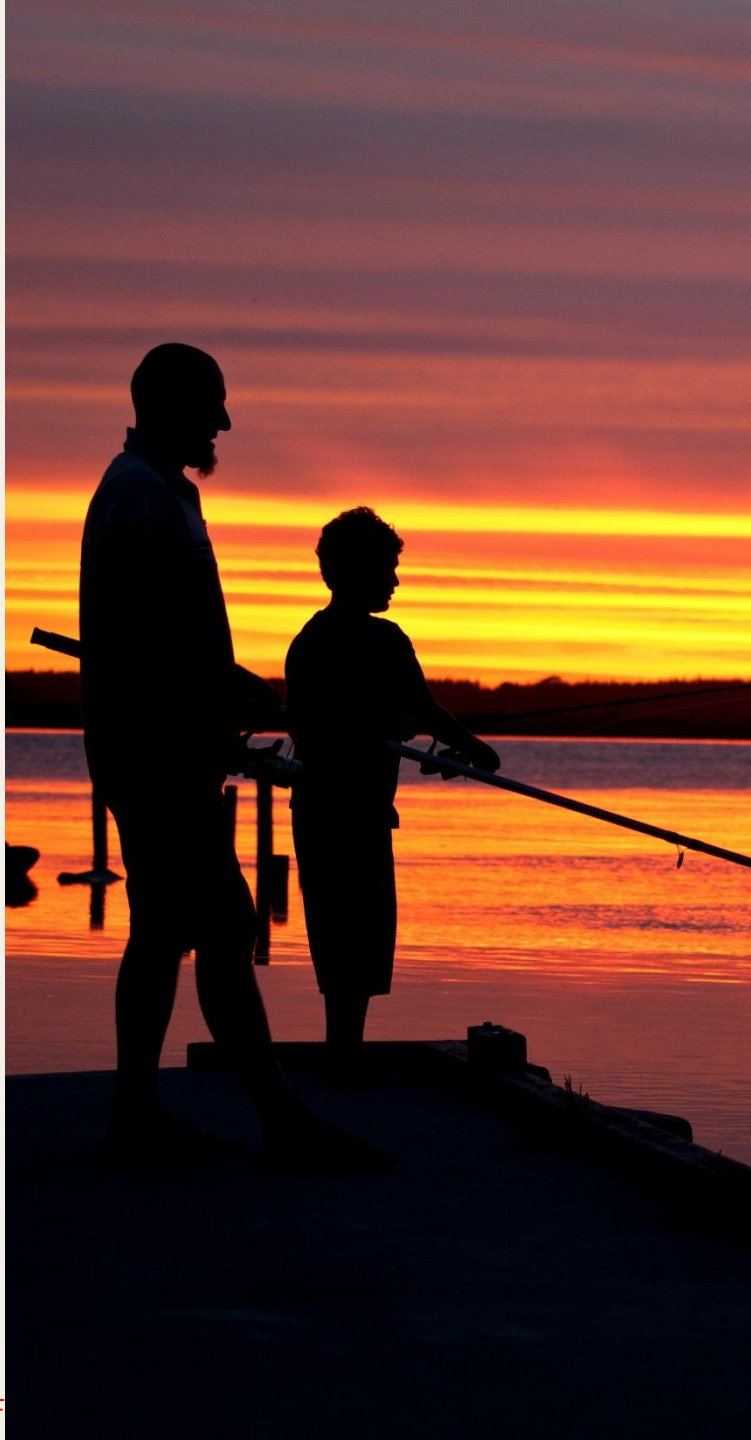


Figure 6: Statistics New Zealand population projection for North Canterbury^[1]



Growth is being supported by local employment

Population growth in North Canterbury has not occurred solely as commuter growth. Evidence shows that employment growth within Waimakariri has broadly kept pace with workforce growth, increasing the number of residents able to work locally.

Between 2013 and 2018, approximately 6,000 additional journey-to-work trips originated and terminated within Waimakariri District itself. During the same period, the number of residents commuting to Christchurch remained largely unchanged despite substantial population growth^[1].

This trend has strengthened North Canterbury's economic resilience and supports the proposition that future governance arrangements should reflect the area's increasingly self-contained social and economic characteristics.

Community-led design

We firmly believe that the benefits of increased scale of a new North Canterbury Council must not come at the expense of local voice. Hurunui and Waimakariri each have distinct communities, identities and priorities, as well as together representing a unified North Canterbury region. These unique identities include Hurunui's rural communities, productive agricultural land, tourism destinations and strategic roading network, plus Waimakariri's population growth engine and an important but distinct interface with the urban-centric councils to the south.

The new North Canterbury Council is therefore built on a core principle that we will maintain a strong local voice and ensure proper representation for all North Cantabrians. This means striking a careful balance between a simplified structure for elected officials and governance, and ensuring that our region's diverse urban and rural communities are fairly represented and have meaningful influence over decisions that affect them.

Under a new North Canterbury Council we are proposing a 15-member Council comprising nine councillors representing the

Waimakariri district, five councillors representing the Hurunui district, and a Mayor elected at-large from the whole North Canterbury region.

We are also committed to ensuring North Canterbury's communities remain properly represented. In practice, this means that we will expand existing community board structures in place in Waimakariri (currently four community boards) and Hurunui (currently two community boards) to a new combined total of seven proposed Wards and Community Boards. We look forward to exploring the opportunity to add additional community boards during the detailed design phase.

Regional functions

The future treatment of regional functions is one of the most important matters for the new North Canterbury Council. Our proposal assumes that all Environment Canterbury functions will automatically transfer to Canterbury unitary authorities. We see the objective as ensuring that each regional function is delivered at the most appropriate scale and that service delivery is not interrupted.

Consistent with the independent review commissioned by Regional and Unitary Councils Aotearoa^[24], where there are regional functions with significant cross-boundary spillovers, strong national direction requirements or substantial regional-scale benefits could continue to be delivered through regional arrangements where this remains the most effective level. Collaboration between the future Canterbury unitary authorities may present benefits in the future and we remain open to the possibility of shared services agreements.

The scale of North Canterbury's contribution to regional activities is already significant. Based on Environment Canterbury's 2024/25 revenue requirement of approximately \$195 million, ratepayers in Hurunui and Waimakariri collectively contribute approximately 10.9% of regional revenue through a combination of general rates, uniform annual general charges and targeted rates.

We have designed the proposed North Canterbury Council around a clear local voice principle:

**We will create scale where scale improves capability,
but we will protect local voice where proximity to communities matters most.**

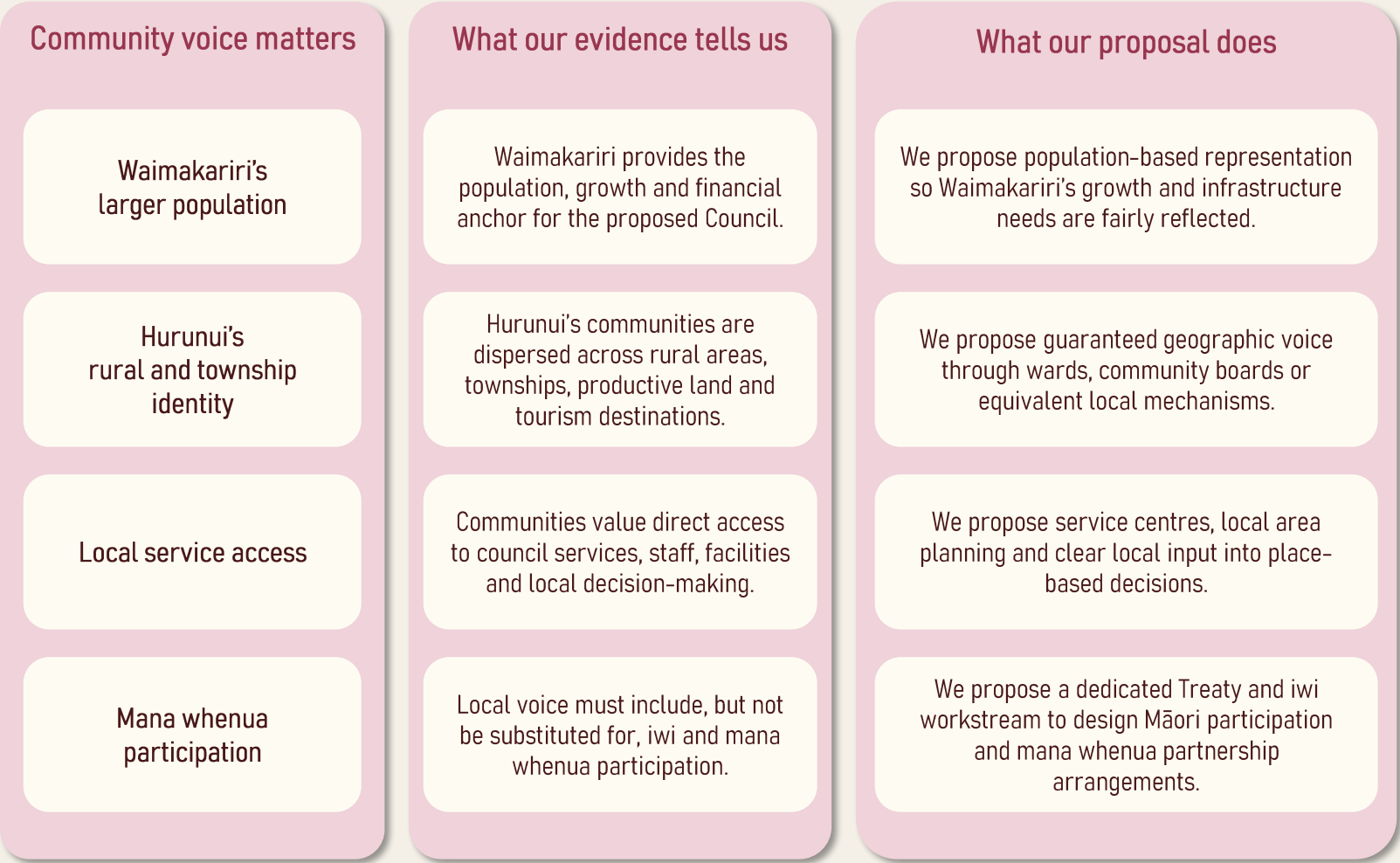
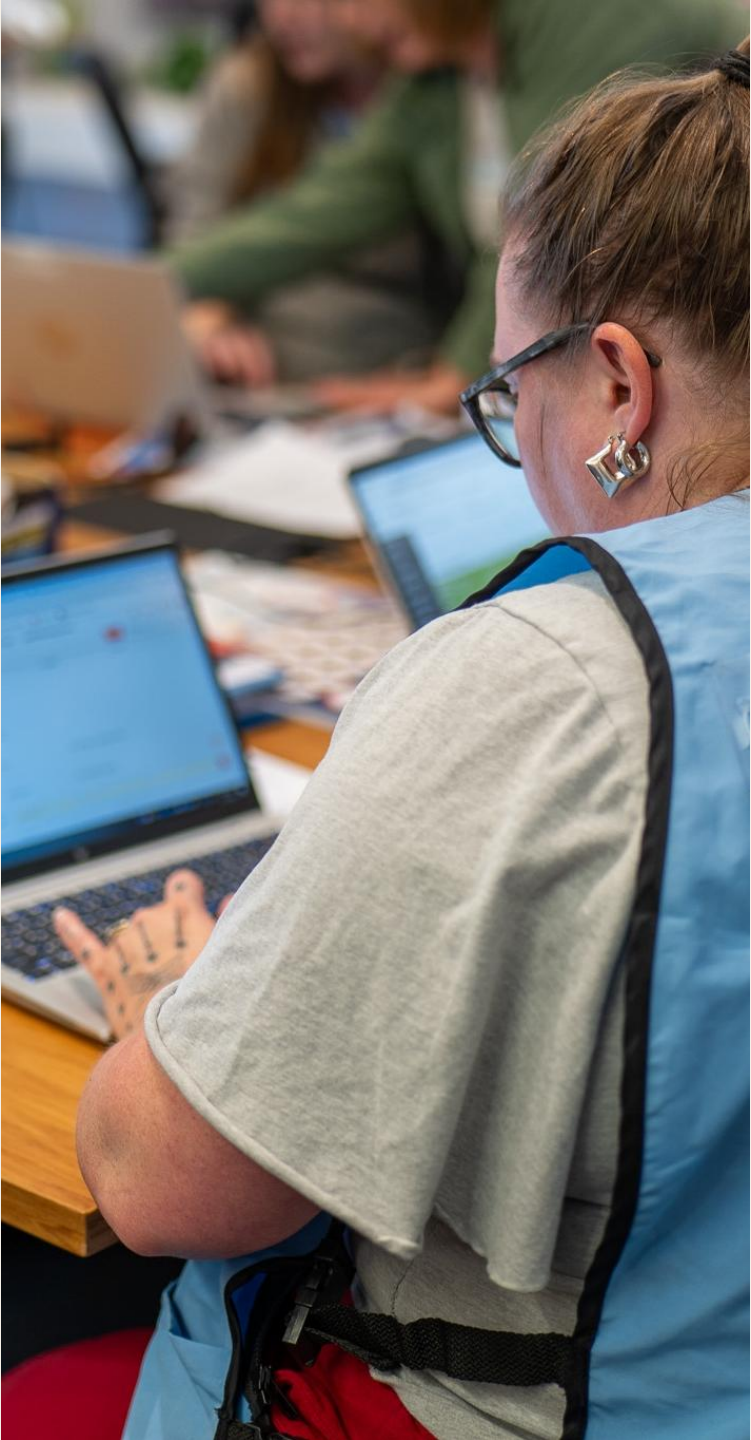
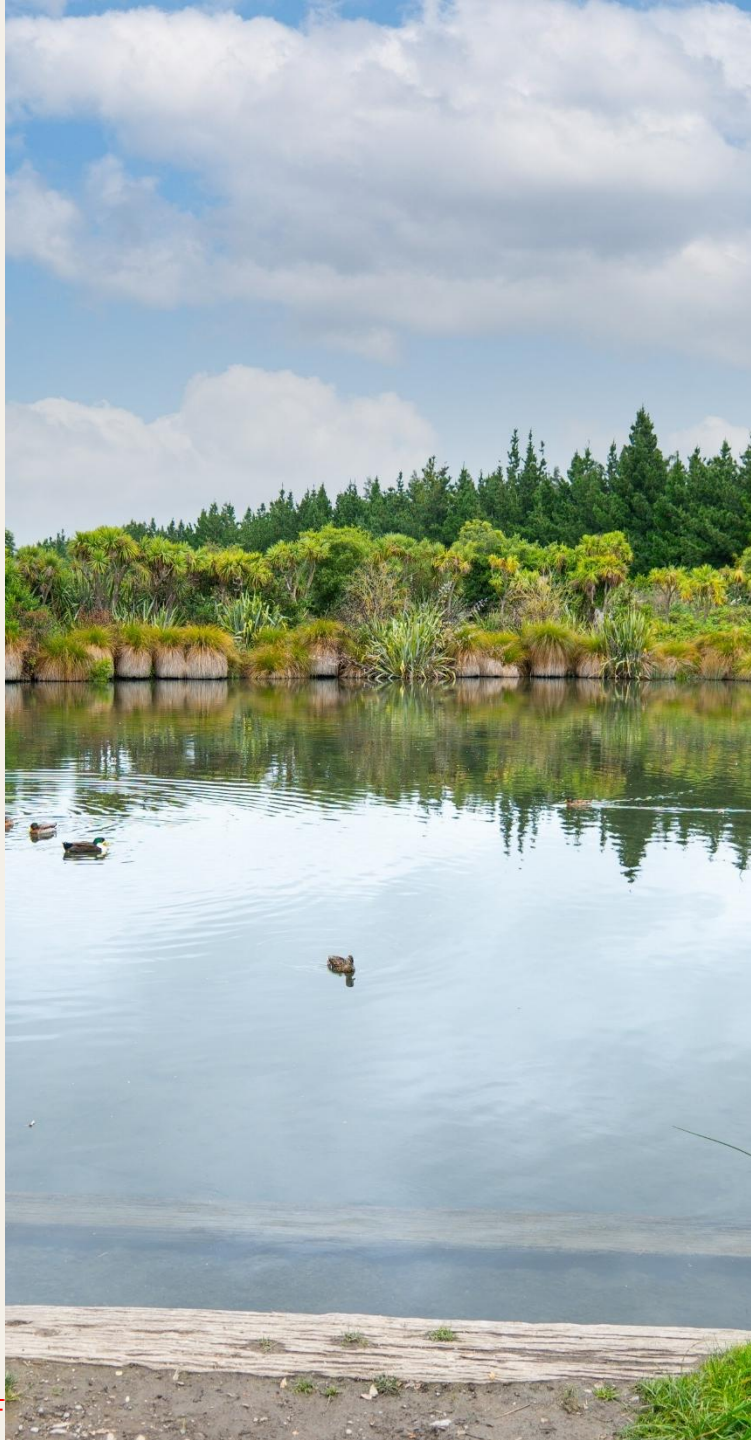


Figure 7: North Canterbury Council governing principles





This contribution supports the case that North Canterbury has sufficient population, economic scale and revenue base to assume responsibility for all regional functions providing greater local accountability and ensuring integration would improve outcomes.

Some functions are closely linked to local accountability and integrated service delivery and may transfer relatively quickly.

Planning and service delivery

Transport and roading

Transport is central to the North Canterbury case because local roads, strategic corridors, public transport, land use planning and regional transport planning are all interdependent. We distinguish between functions that are best managed locally, functions that require regional coordination and functions that require national partnership.

Our assessment is that local roads, road safety and local transport planning are directly connected to local land use, growth, rural access, visitor movement and community service levels. These functions should therefore sit within a new North Canterbury Council.

This approach strengthens local accountability without weakening Canterbury-wide integration. It also gives North Canterbury a clearer voice in transport decisions while preserving the regional and national partnerships needed for effective transport planning and investment.

Our assessment is that a new North Canterbury Council would strengthen infrastructure and asset management by providing deeper technical capability, better asset data consistency, stronger procurement, more resilient project delivery and a more integrated view of renewals, growth, affordability and resilience. We do not present this as a promise of immediate savings. The stronger proposition is that a combined authority would provide a better long-term platform for infrastructure stewardship.

The implication is that local roading, local transport planning and land use integration support a new North Canterbury Council.

We already maintain extensive transport networks and participate in national transport performance benchmarking through Transport Insights and the Road Efficiency Group (Te Ringa Maimoa)^[22]. Both our Councils are responsible for the safe maintenance and operation of large local road networks serving residents, freight movements, primary industries and tourism activity.

Hurunui currently maintains approximately 616 kilometres of sealed roads, 844 kilometres of unsealed roads and 282 bridges, demonstrating our substantial infrastructure stewardship capability despite a relatively small population base.

North Canterbury maintains regionally important infrastructure, including the state highway network, rail corridor and public transport services. However, transport evidence demonstrates that population growth has not translated into a proportional increase in commuter dependence on Christchurch.

Analysis commissioned by Waimakariri District Council^[21] found that while traffic volumes across the Waimakariri River have increased over time, much of this growth reflects broader regional growth rather than increasing commuter dependency. Concurrently, employment growth within Waimakariri has supported a substantial increase in local journey-to-work trips and a declining proportion of residents travelling to Christchurch for employment.

These trends suggest that North Canterbury's transport network supports both regional connectivity and an increasingly self-sustaining local economy.

Public transport

Public transport provides one of the clearest examples of a function that may continue to benefit from regional delivery. Most public transport patronage occurs within metropolitan Christchurch and successful operation relies on integrated planning, funding and network management. Our proposal therefore assumes that public transport could be delivered by a new North Canterbury Council, but could also continue through a regional delivery arrangement, shared service model or dedicated entity.

North Canterbury transport system

Under our proposal, local transport functions transfer to the North Canterbury Council, reorganising how public transport, regional land transport planning and strategic corridors are coordinated.

Local transport functions

Local roads: Transfer to North Canterbury unitary authority. Includes local road ownership, maintenance, renewals and investment planning.

Road safety and local transport plan: Transfer to the North Canterbury Council. Includes local network planning, road safety programmes, growth-related transport planning and local mode planning.

Regional transport

Public transport: Detailed design required to determine model: transfer, joint committee, regional CCO or shared services.

Regional land transport planning Joint arrangement likely required to preserve Canterbury-wide transport integration.

National transport partnerships

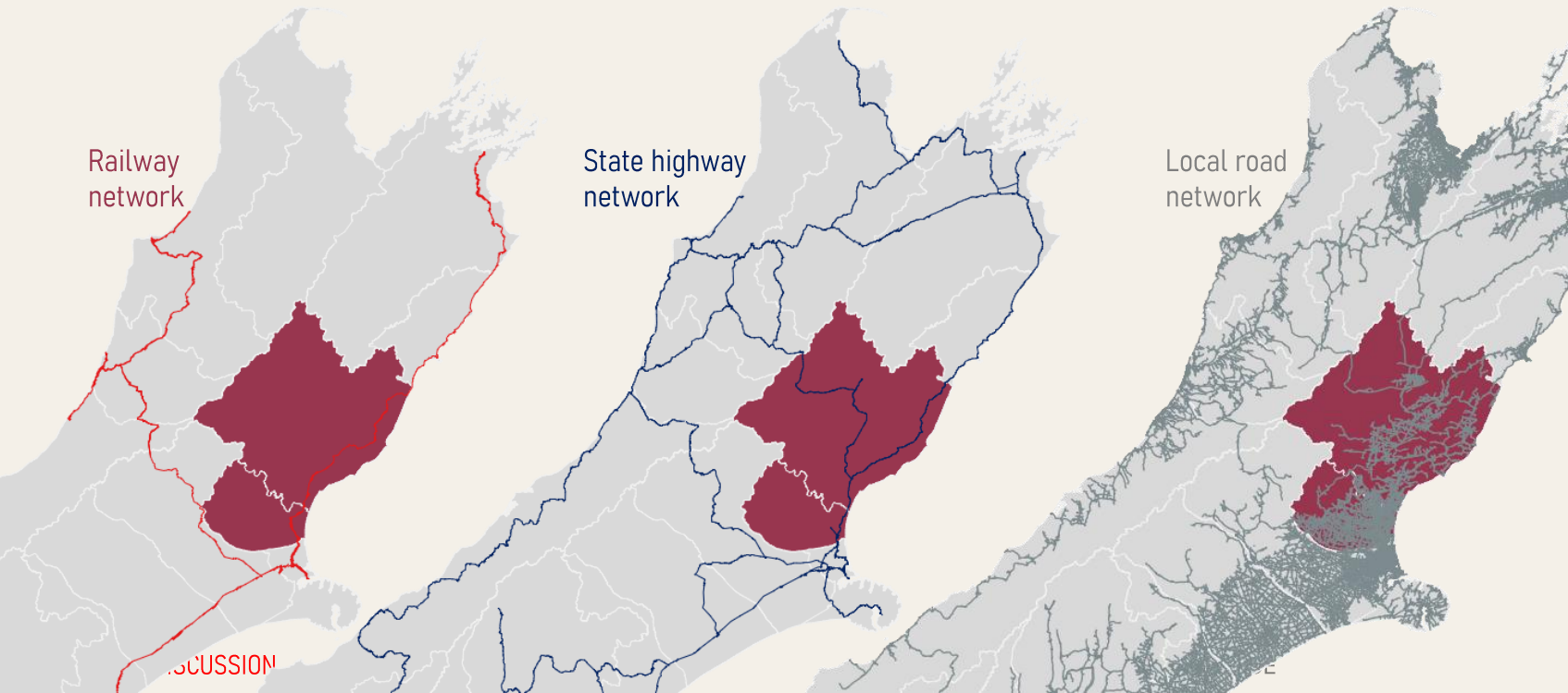
SH1, rail and strategic corridors: Partnership with NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi, KiwiRail, regional bodies, neighbouring authorities focus on nationally significant corridors, freight and resilience.

The North Canterbury Council would advocate for local and regional priorities while working with national agencies on investment, resilience and freight movement.

Railway network

State highway network

Local road network





Infrastructure and asset management

Infrastructure and asset management is one of the strongest areas of evidence supporting a combined North Canterbury Council. Our Councils are already managing broadly similar asset classes, but with different scale, growth profiles, risks, funding constraints and delivery capacity. Across roading, footpaths, water supply, wastewater, stormwater, community facilities and public assets, our Long-Term Plans (LTPs) and water services plans show a common set of pressures: maintaining levels of service, funding renewals, responding to growth, improving resilience, managing affordability and meeting regulatory expectations.

Overall, the evidence supports a case for a North Canterbury Council that can provide stronger asset management depth, more resilient project delivery, better procurement leverage, integrated infrastructure planning and a more consistent approach to long-term renewals, growth and resilience. Further analysis of transition costs, asset data harmonisation, rating impacts and service level alignment will need to be worked through during detailed design and will ultimately be considered by the new North Canterbury Council.

Waimakariri

Waimakariri has the larger of the two infrastructure programmes, reflecting our strong growth profile and large asset base. The LTP identifies \$734 million of capital expenditure over 10 years, including \$234 million for renewals, \$218 million for service improvements and \$282 million for growth projects. The LTP also identifies significant funding sources, including subsidies and grants, development contributions, depreciation and reserves and debt. This indicates a mature, growth-facing infrastructure environment with established asset management systems, but also significant long-term capital demand.

Waimakariri's infrastructure planning approach includes long-term population growth projections and the District Development

Strategy, which helps inform future infrastructure demand, resilience requirements and financing needs.

This approach demonstrates the maturity of infrastructure planning already operating within North Canterbury, which would provide a strong foundation for a future unitary authority. Waimakariri's long-term infrastructure planning includes a sector-leading 150-year renewals model supported by a depreciation funding policy and renewal reserves, with projected vested assets of around \$170 million over the next 10 years. Waimakariri's financial strategy also shows debt increasing from \$236 million in 2025 to \$291 million in 2034 while remaining within policy limits. This is an important foundation for the proposal because Waimakariri brings scale, established infrastructure planning capability and long-term modelling that would support a wider North Canterbury asset platform^[21].

Hurunui

Hurunui's infrastructure and financial planning reflect a different profile. Our LTP projects population growth from 12,561 in 2018 to 17,505 by 2034, and to 25,231 by 2054, with rating unit growth and infrastructure demand concentrated in areas such as Amberley and Hanmer Springs. Hurunui also faces staged depreciation funding, particularly for water services, and notes that roading depreciation is not funded because NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi subsidises direct costs rather than depreciation. The LTP identifies risks around inflation, asset lives, capital delivery, legislative change, climate change and natural disasters^[22].

Alone, Hurunui is faced with the challenge of balancing infrastructure investment, rates affordability, debt limits, asset renewal funding and growth-related pressures across a rural district with several distinct settlements. This includes a substantial bridge network, where ongoing renewal and replacement planning is essential to maintaining safety, reliability, rural access and freight movement over the long term.

A new North Canterbury Council would provide a broader platform for asset management capability, project delivery, procurement, risk management and long-term investment planning while still retaining targeted rating or local funding tools where appropriate^[27].

Water services

In 2026 Hurunui and Kaikōura established a joint Water Services Council-Controlled Organisation with a five-member independent board. The plan identifies projected investment of \$86.5 million in drinking water, \$33.6 million in wastewater and \$23.8 million in stormwater, with staged depreciation funding and ring-fenced finances from 2024–34. It notes that no operating efficiencies are assumed and that financial sustainability improves over time. By remaining open to including Kaikōura within our North Canterbury Council in the future, we have created the flexibility to enhance alignment of water services across our region even further^[28].

Waimakariri's Water Services Delivery Plan provides a separate but complementary evidence base. It confirms a long-term water services investment programme, performance targets for drinking water, wastewater and stormwater, asset management arrangements, compliance expectations, borrowing headroom and risks around regulatory change, growth, climate change, cost escalation, natural disasters and asset performance.

It is intended that the current water services arrangements would remain in place through the future transition, with any future review of water services delivery would be a matter for the new North Canterbury Council to consider following establishment.

Regional considerations

A new North Canterbury Council must be designed to ensure there are clear interfaces with retained or transferred regional functions, particularly where land use, infrastructure, hazards, water and transport decisions are interdependent. This is fundamental to supporting the new council's role as providing critical links to North Canterbury's rural sector.

Environment Canterbury's LTP details its approach to regional infrastructure, hazards, flood protection, public transport, environmental regulation and catchment-scale investment, plus its interaction with local infrastructure planning. Environment Canterbury's Infrastructure Strategy includes flood protection asset values of \$852 million with estimated benefits of \$9 billion per year, and a *Protect, Avoid, Retreat, Accommodate* approach to climate adaptation^[29].

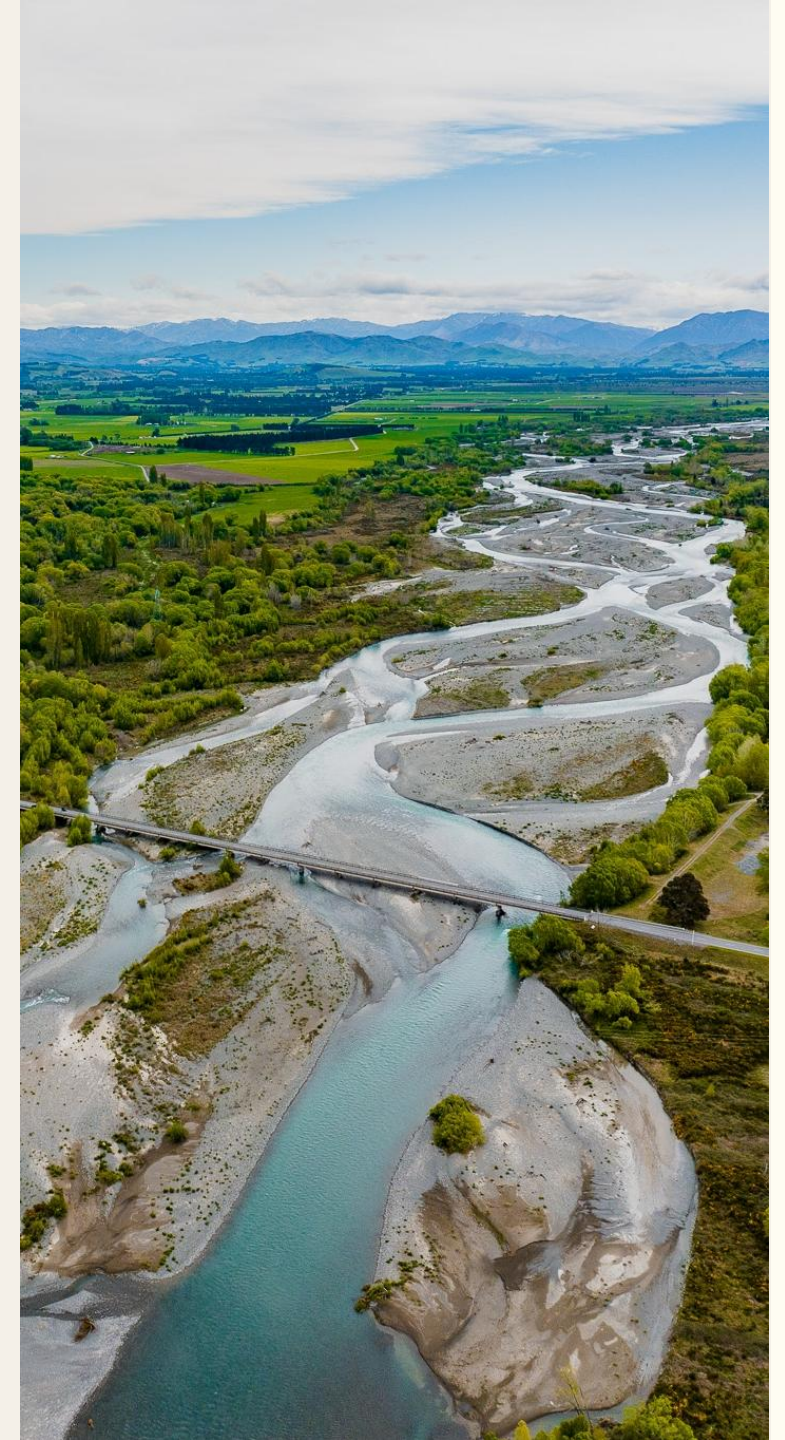
Catchments and North Canterbury's southern boundary

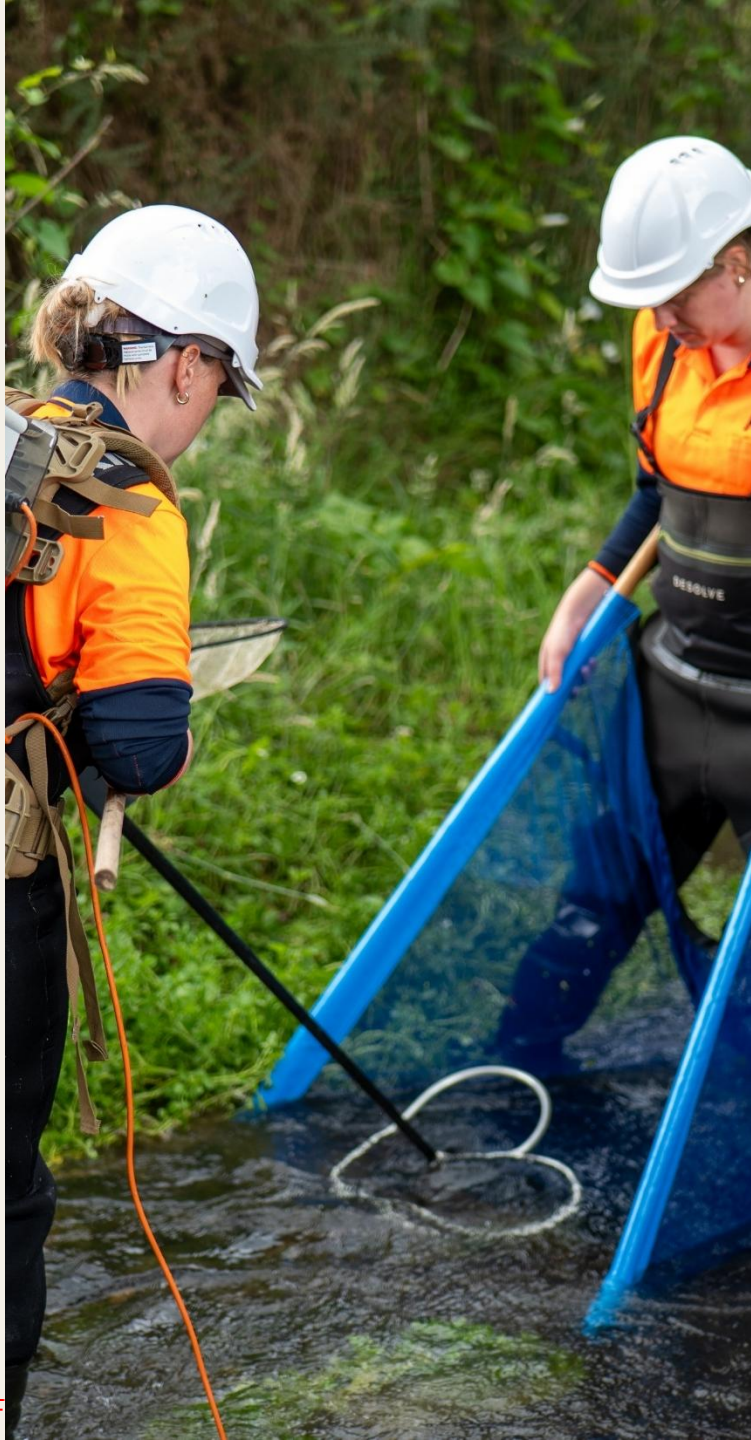
The Waimakariri District is largely hydraulically separated from districts to the south. From a water services and infrastructure perspective there is limited strategic or operational benefit in combining service delivery arrangements.

Waimakariri comprises three major catchments that discharge either directly to the coast or via the lower reaches of the Waimakariri River. There is little to no hydraulic relationship between most of the district and the Waimakariri River itself.

Similarly, the parts of Christchurch that discharge to the Waimakariri River are not hydraulically connected to the Waimakariri district. These catchments discharge to the river very near its mouth and from the southern side of the river. As a result, there is no meaningful hydraulic interconnection between Christchurch's stormwater catchments and those of the Waimakariri district.

The Waimakariri River provides an exceptionally clear and logical territorial boundary between Waimakariri and both Christchurch and Selwyn. Unlike many administrative boundaries that cross catchments and infrastructure networks, the Waimakariri River forms a strong physical and geographic separation that minimises many of the challenges commonly associated with managing infrastructure and services across district boundaries.





Physical infrastructure connections

There are very few transport and infrastructure connections between Waimakariri and its southern neighbours.

Between Waimakariri and Selwyn there is only one road connection, being the Waimakariri Gorge Bridge.

Between Waimakariri and Christchurch there are:

- The State Highway 1 motorway bridge.
- The Old Waimakariri Bridge east of the motorway crossing.
- The Main South railway bridge.

The motorway bridge is owned and managed by NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi. The Old Waimakariri Bridge and the Waimakariri Gorge Bridge have historically been jointly managed by the adjoining local authorities, with costs and responsibilities shared equally between the parties. This arrangement has operated successfully for many years and demonstrates that cross-boundary infrastructure can be effectively managed through targeted collaboration without requiring broader service integration. The railway bridge is the responsibility of KiwiRail.

Apart from these few transport links, there are very limited physical infrastructure connections between Waimakariri District and its southern neighbours.

Wastewater services

From a wastewater perspective there is no practical benefit in integrating Waimakariri's wastewater network with Christchurch or Selwyn.

The Waimakariri River is one of New Zealand's largest braided rivers and forms a substantial physical barrier to any interconnection of major wastewater infrastructure. Any pipeline crossing would be technically challenging, costly to construct, difficult to maintain, and vulnerable to natural hazard events.

Waimakariri District Council owns and operates our own ocean outfall, which has sufficient capacity to accommodate both current demand and future growth projections. Future upgrades associated with growth can continue to be managed within the district and connected to the existing wastewater system and ocean outfall.

Waimakariri was considering long-term wastewater disposal options in the early 2000s, and the possibility of connecting to Christchurch's wastewater system was investigated. That option was discounted largely because the Waimakariri River forms a significant physical barrier and because creating dependency on infrastructure outside the district would diminish resilience and increase vulnerability to service disruptions.

The conclusions reached at that time remain equally valid today.

Water supply

The district's drinking water supplies are entirely separate from those of Christchurch and Selwyn.

Each Waimakariri water supply scheme is serviced by its own groundwater sources and treatment facilities. These supplies have been progressively upgraded to meet regulatory requirements and include built-in redundancy and resilience measures appropriate to the scale of each scheme.

There is no practical or resilience-based rationale for connecting Waimakariri's water supplies to those of Christchurch or Selwyn. Such connections would require significant infrastructure investment, would need to cross a major braided river corridor, and would introduce unnecessary operational complexity and risk.

The district's water supply systems are already configured to meet local needs and are best managed as standalone networks.

Stormwater

From a stormwater perspective, Waimakariri is completely hydraulically separated from both Christchurch and Selwyn.

Each territorial authority manages distinct catchments that operate independently and have separate discharge points. There are no shared stormwater catchments and no common receiving environments that require integrated management across the district boundaries.

The physical separation provided by the Waimakariri River and the natural drainage patterns of the region mean there is little justification for comprehensive cross-boundary stormwater management arrangements. Stormwater planning, asset management, operations, and investment decisions are therefore most effectively undertaken within each territorial authority's own geographic area.

Waimakariri River Management

While most water service functions are clearly separated, flood management of the Waimakariri River itself is a different matter.

The Waimakariri River is one of Canterbury's major alpine-fed braided rivers and shares many characteristics with other large regional river systems.

The scale, technical complexity, specialist expertise, and regional significance associated with managing these river systems support the continued involvement of a regional authority in their management.

However, the fact that the river itself is currently managed regionally does not create a compelling case for combining water service delivery or infrastructure management functions between Waimakariri, Christchurch, or Selwyn. The river management function is distinct from the operation of local water supply, wastewater, stormwater, and transport infrastructure networks.

Groundwater Management

Environment Canterbury currently maintains specialised expertise and capability in groundwater management, hydrogeology, groundwater modelling, and groundwater engineering. These skills and resources have been developed over many years and are applied across Canterbury's complex groundwater systems.

While there is limited hydraulic connectivity between some of the aquifers recharged within the Waimakariri district and the deeper confined coastal aquifers underlying Christchurch, this interconnection is generally indirect and operates at a regional scale rather than being driven by local district boundaries. As a result, there is value in retaining capability in groundwater science, modelling, planning, and engineering to ensure consistent understanding and management of these interconnected systems.

This issue is comparable to the management of Canterbury's large braided river systems. The scale, complexity, and technical requirements associated with understanding groundwater recharge, aquifer interactions, and long-term water resource management support the continued provision of specialist expertise.

Catchment Mapping

Review of the catchment mapping for the wider Waimakariri River system and surrounding territorial authority areas highlights several important points relevant to discussions regarding future water service arrangements and catchment management.

The upper Waimakariri catchment is an alpine and high-country catchment that feeds the Waimakariri River. This is a distinct river system with characteristics that are significantly different from the plains environments of the Waimakariri district. The

upper catchment is dominated by mountain and high-country processes, while the lowland areas of the district contain separate catchment systems associated with the Eyre River, Kaiapoi River, and associated groundwater and drainage networks.

The mapping also demonstrates that much of the Selwyn District located south of the main Waimakariri River channel is not within the Waimakariri River catchment. Instead, these areas drain to separate river systems and groundwater catchments to the south. Consequently, land use activities, water quality issues, water quantity matters, and catchment management challenges within those areas are largely independent of those affecting the Waimakariri catchment.

Similarly, the map clearly shows that the main braided channel of the Waimakariri River, which forms much of the boundary between Waimakariri, Christchurch, and Selwyn, is not principally sustained by runoff generated within the territorial authority areas through which it flows. Rather, the river is predominantly fed from the extensive alpine catchment in the Southern Alps and foothills upstream of these districts.

These observations reinforce our conclusion that Waimakariri does not share a significant natural catchment with either Christchurch or Selwyn. While there are some regional groundwater interactions and shared interests associated with the Waimakariri River corridor, there is limited overlap in the broader surface water catchments that influence water management issues within each district.

Accordingly, from a catchment management perspective there does not appear to be a compelling catchment-based justification for the amalgamation of Waimakariri water service functions with either Christchurch or Selwyn.

The natural catchment boundaries (Figure 8), hydrological processes, and water management issues affecting Waimakariri are largely distinct from those occurring within the neighbouring territorial authorities, with relatively little shared catchment area between them. This suggests that catchment alignment should not be considered a primary driver for any future proposals involving Waimakariri District.

The Waimakariri District is, in practical terms, largely hydraulically separated from Christchurch City and Selwyn District.

Key reasons include:

- The Waimakariri River forms a major physical and geographic barrier between districts
- Water supply systems are independent and locally sourced.
- Wastewater systems are independent and serviced through Waimakariri's own ocean outfall
- Stormwater catchments are entirely separate and have distinct receiving environments
- Cross-boundary infrastructure connections are limited to a small number of transport links that are already successfully managed through collaborative arrangements
- Current regional management of the Waimakariri River does not necessitate integration of broader water service or infrastructure functions.

Accordingly, there is limited operational, hydraulic, resilience, or strategic justification for combining Waimakariri's infrastructure and water service functions with those of Christchurch or Selwyn. The current arrangements provide clear accountability, strong resilience outcomes, and effective management of local infrastructure assets.

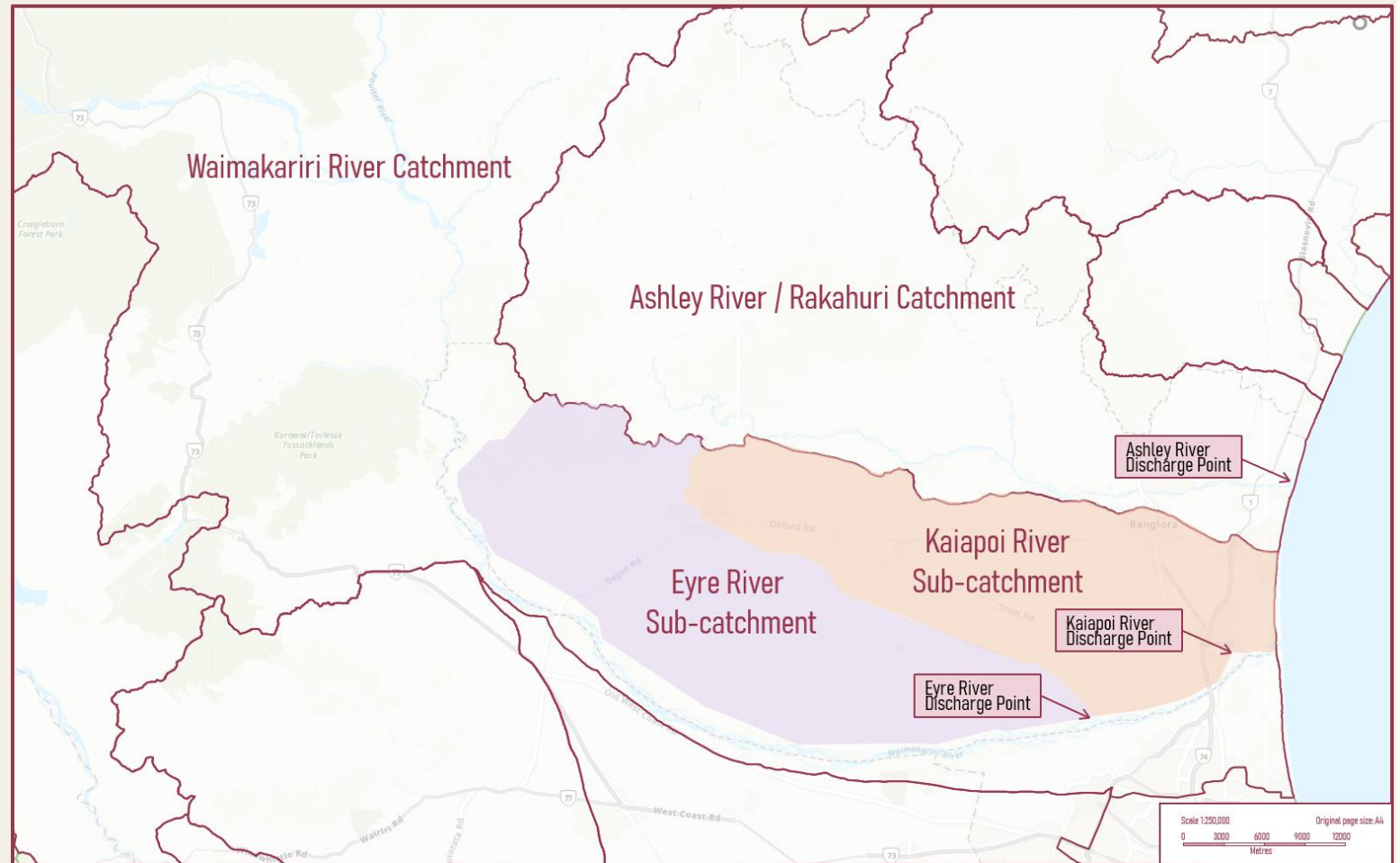
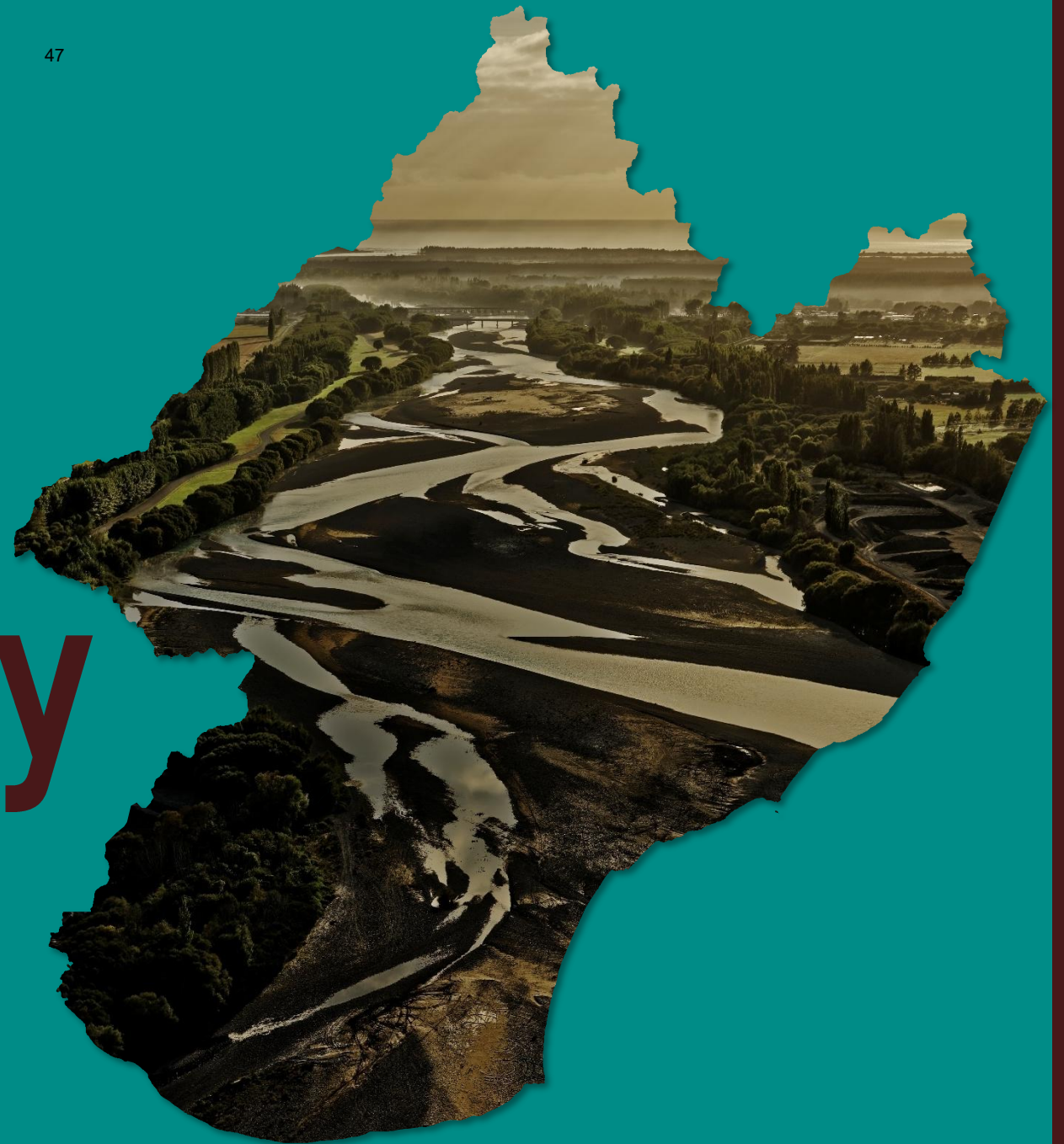
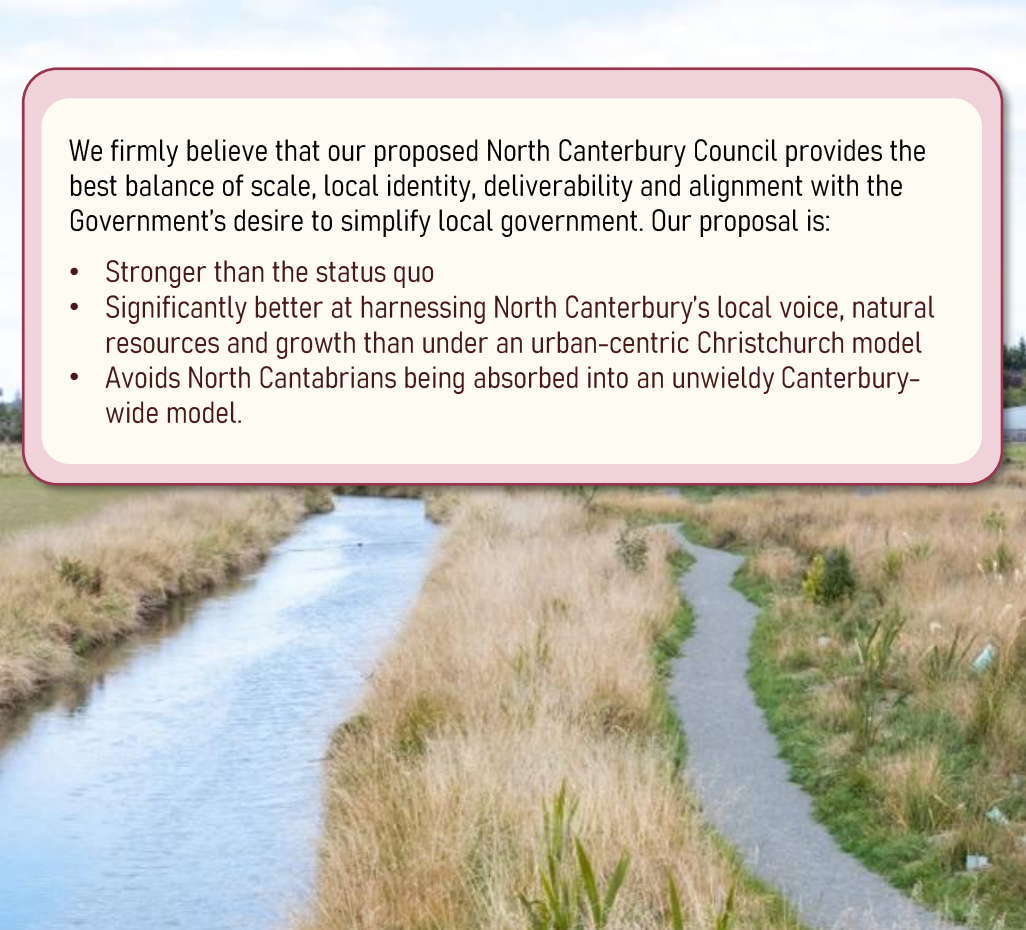


Figure 8: River catchment boundaries associated with Waimakariri District.

North Canterbury Council

Part 3: Assessment against Head Start criteria





We firmly believe that our proposed North Canterbury Council provides the best balance of scale, local identity, deliverability and alignment with the Government's desire to simplify local government. Our proposal is:

- Stronger than the status quo
- Significantly better at harnessing North Canterbury's local voice, natural resources and growth than under an urban-centric Christchurch model
- Avoids North Cantabrians being absorbed into an unwieldy Canterbury-wide model.

Assessment against Head Start criteria

Our proposal simplifies local government by creating a new North Canterbury Council that integrates planning, infrastructure, service delivery, asset management, resilience, local representation and regional functions across Hurunui and Waimakariri.

This section assesses the proposed North Canterbury Council against the Government's Head Start criteria, drawing on the strategic context outlined earlier in this proposal and on evidence from existing North Canterbury partnerships, shared services, planning initiatives and regional collaboration arrangements. Together, these examples demonstrate that our proposed North Canterbury Council builds on established relationships and delivery models rather than starting from scratch.

Each criterion is structured to answer the key guidance questions, identify the strongest evidence and explain what would improve compared with the

current state. Risks and trade-offs are consolidated in Part 5. The implementation pathway is set out in Part 6. This avoids repeating the same risks, dependencies and future workstreams throughout each criterion.

In addition to the Head Start assessment framework, our proposal has been informed by the statutory objectives for local government reorganisation contained in Schedule 3 of the Local Government Act 2002 as reflected in the Local Government Commission's Reorganisation Guidelines^[6]. These objectives focus on effective governance, long-term sustainability, productivity, economic development, community wellbeing and Treaty partnership arrangements – this is fully aligned with what our communities have told us that they want from a new North Canterbury Council.

Detailed assessment against Head Start criteria

How the proposed North Canterbury Council responds to the Government's Head Start assessment criteria

Strong

Moderate to Strong

Moderate

Weak

1 Supports new planning system

Strong

Integrates land use and regional functions locally, but Canterbury spatial planning interface must be designed

4 Maintains local voice

Strong

Strong if representation design protects rural, coastal and smaller communities

2 Simplifies local governance

Strong

Replaces two councils and transfers regional functions into one accountable authority

5 Deliverability

Strong

Deliverable with disciplined programme, but complex due to the transfer of Environment Canterbury functions, Treaty matters and transition requirements

3 Economies of scale

Moderate to strong

Clear scale gains in capability and fixed cost spreading enabled by growth, but no automatic short-term savings

6 Treaty/iwi considerations

Strong

Must uphold Ngāi Tahu and PSGE arrangements with equivalent effect

Criteria 1

One planning platform. Integrated delivery.
Clear accountability.

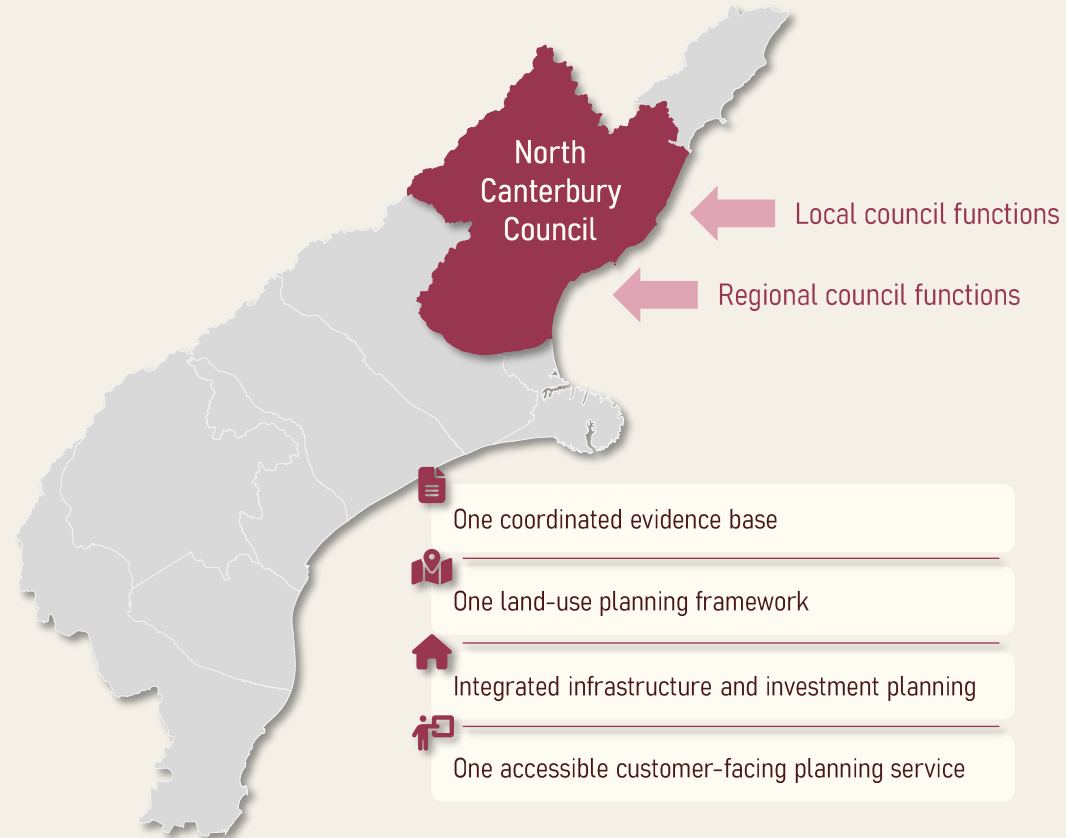


Planning system design principle

Bring land-use and natural-environment responsibilities together within a new North Canterbury Council while maintaining Canterbury-wide coordination where systems cross boundaries. Detailed design will protect planning continuity, specialist capability, environmental science and data, catchment integrity and mana whenua participation.

49

Supports the new planning system



How the proposal helps the new system work better



Land use and infrastructure alignment

Land use, growth, infrastructure and long-term investment considered through one North Canterbury framework.



Local and regional function integration

Land-use and natural environment responsibilities brought together within North Canterbury Council.



Clearer spatial planning voice

One coordinated North Canterbury contribution to Canterbury-wide spatial planning and implementation.



Stronger planning capability

A broader organisational platform supporting specialist capability, resilience and consistent implementation.

How does our proposal make the new planning system easier to deliver and operate?

Our proposal would make the new planning system easier to implement by bringing Hurunui and Waimakariri's land-use planning, growth management, infrastructure planning, consenting and compliance functions together within one North Canterbury framework. North Canterbury Council would assume responsibility for natural-environment planning and related regional functions within its area, bringing land-use, infrastructure and environmental decisions into one accountable organisation.

This would reduce local planning interfaces, support more consistent implementation and align planning decisions more closely with North Canterbury's growth, infrastructure and environmental context. North Canterbury Council would continue to participate in Canterbury-wide spatial planning and coordinate with neighbouring authorities where planning issues, natural systems or infrastructure networks cross its boundaries.

Our proposal also supports implementation of the first Canterbury Regional Spatial Plan and the long-term operation of the new planning system. The aim is to create a single North Canterbury planning and implementation platform that can operate efficiently and effectively within the new planning system, while providing more integrated local delivery. It will not replace or redefine the requirement for the existing Canterbury region to prepare a regional spatial plan, recognising that the regional spatial plan needs to be prepared prior to the implementation of any Head Start proposal.

The proposal provides a more consistent platform for applying the new planning framework across North Canterbury. Many of the efficiencies sought by government are already expected through planning reform, including regional spatial plans, combined planning frameworks, national direction and

standardised zones. Our proposal will make the new system easier to deliver as a result of improved implementation, one planning evidence base, one infrastructure planning interface and one land use plan within North Canterbury.

How does this structure help the new system work in practice?

For plan-making, a new North Canterbury Council would provide:

- One coordinated North Canterbury evidence base
- One land-use planning framework for the current Hurunui and Waimakariri areas
- Integrated input from growth, infrastructure, finance and environmental functions
- One coordinated contribution to Canterbury-wide spatial planning and implementation
- Clearer alignment between spatial planning, regulatory planning and Long Term Plan investment.

For implementation, a new North Canterbury Council would provide:

- One customer-facing planning and regulatory service
- Integrated land-use and regional consenting interfaces
- Coordinated monitoring, compliance and enforcement
- Clearer accountability for North Canterbury planning outcomes
- Continued access to locally based planning and regulatory services.

A key goal of our proposal has been to ensure that public-facing planning services would remain locally accessible while being supported by a larger and more resilient organisation.

Will this slow the first Canterbury Regional Spatial Plan?

No. The proposal does not seek to redefine the Canterbury planning region and the requirement to prepare a regional spatial plan, nor does it seek to replace, duplicate or delay preparation of the first Canterbury Regional Spatial Plan. North Canterbury would continue participating in the Regional Planning Committee and Secretariat as these are progressed following the anticipated implementation of the Planning and Natural Environment Bills, considering the most appropriate way our communities can be represented in the first Regional Spatial Plan process.

Our proposal therefore aims to support implementation of the first regional spatial plan while creating a stronger long-term implementation platform for future planning cycles.

Evidence in practice

Our Councils already participate in integrated planning at a regional scale, where we work together with Environment Canterbury, mana whenua, NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi and Te Whatu Ora on growth, housing and infrastructure planning. Examples of these initiatives include the Spatial Plan^[30] and Implementation Plan^[31], Housing Action Plan^[32] and Kāinga Nohoanga Strategy^[33].

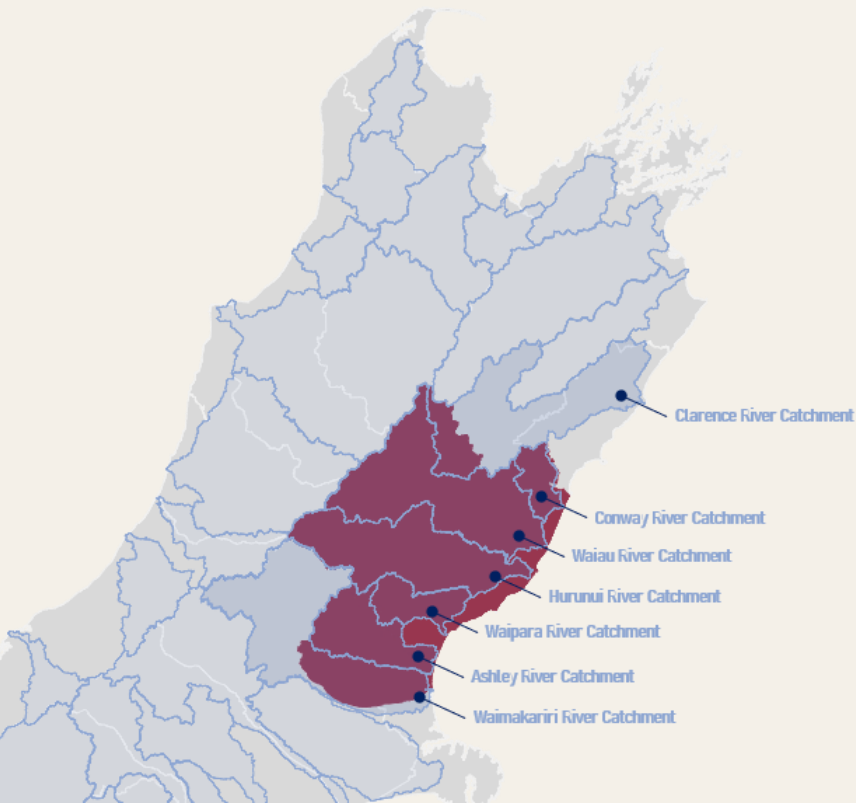
We envision that our proposal would not affect the success of these existing collaborations, which already occur as cross-boundary approaches, particularly in terms of considering housing markets and transport outcomes.

In addition, North Canterbury already operates within catchments, river systems and hazard landscapes that cross existing council boundaries, including the Waimakariri and Clarence River catchments^[34]. This demonstrates the need for planning arrangements that integrate land use, infrastructure, hazards and environmental management.

Future planning arrangements will need to recognise relevant iwi management plans as an important expression of mana whenua values, priorities and resource-management interests. For the area covered by the Mahaanui Iwi Management Plan 2013, detailed design should identify how its relevant objectives and policies inform spatial planning, land-use planning, natural-environment planning, consenting, monitoring and environmental management^[33].

Together, we are confident that governance boundaries – for both existing councils and under our proposed North Canterbury Council– do not restrict growth or confine it to specific districts, with existing partnerships able to be maintained.

Figure 9: River catchment associated with the North Canterbury Council



Natural environment planning and cross-boundary systems

Natural environment planning is the most significant planning system interface to resolve through detailed design. Territorial planning functions are broadly similar across Hurunui and Waimakariri but regional environmental functions rely on specialist science, hydrology, monitoring, compliance capability, data systems and operational assets.

These responsibilities would sit with a new North Canterbury Council. Detailed design will determine how they are most effectively delivered, including where joint or shared arrangements are required to maintain environmental outcomes, catchment integrity, specialist capability, data continuity and service resilience.

Existing territorial authority planning functions are comparatively straightforward to integrate because they involve broadly similar planning, consenting and compliance functions. Regional natural environment functions, including natural environment plans, are different. They rely on environmental science, monitoring systems, hydrology, freshwater management, flood protection, environmental data, specialist compliance capability and regional operational assets. These functions will ideally be subject to further evaluation to determine the most efficient and effective mechanism to deliver these functions, through a right-scale framework considering local accountability, economies of scale, capability, environmental outcomes, catchment integrity, data continuity and service resilience.

Integrated catchment management

We recognise that catchments and natural systems often do not align neatly with local government boundaries (Figure 9). The future treatment of catchment management functions would therefore be assessed on a catchment-by-catchment basis, considering local accountability, environmental outcomes,

operational capability and the integrity of natural systems (e.g. Canterbury Land and Water Regional Plan^[35]).

This is particularly relevant in the Canterbury context, where planning and environmental management are closely linked to issues such as nitrate management, groundwater and surface water quality and quantity, flood risk and hazard management, river corridor management and the sustainable management of riverine gravel resources^[36].

Catchment planning activities such as freshwater management, flood resilience, braided river management and gravel extraction are likely to benefit from continued regional collaboration where catchments extend across multiple territorial boundaries. For example, the Waimakariri River catchment spans the Waimakariri, Selwyn and Christchurch areas and relies on integrated management of flood protection assets, river engineering, environmental monitoring and land use activities across the wider catchment^[37].

Our proposal assumes all regional functions will transfer to the new North Canterbury Council from establishment, together with the people, systems, expertise and operational capability currently supporting those functions.

Detailed design will focus primarily on assessing the limited number of functions where regional coordination is likely to remain beneficial, including public transport, major flood protection schemes, regional Civil Defence Emergency Management coordination and selected coastal functions.

Where catchments are predominantly contained within North Canterbury, there may be opportunities for greater local integration of planning, environmental management and service delivery. However, some catchments and river systems extend beyond the proposed authority boundary and will continue to require collaboration with neighbouring councils and agencies.

Detailed design will investigate the potential role of catchment management boards or similar catchment-based leadership arrangements. These could strengthen local and mana whenua input into freshwater priorities, river and flood management, biodiversity, biosecurity, environmental monitoring and catchment investment while preserving North Canterbury Council's statutory responsibility and accountability. The investigation would consider appropriate boundaries, functions, membership, decision rights, delegations, funding and links to Council planning and investment. Joint or shared arrangements would also be considered where catchments extend beyond North Canterbury.

Canterbury has an established foundation for catchment-based leadership. Water zone committees have brought together community members with strong connections to each zone to recommend actions under the Canterbury Water Management Strategy. Environment Canterbury is now transitioning these committees to catchment-based Local Leadership Groups involving territorial authorities, rūnanga and Environment Canterbury, with a focus on strategic guidance, priority-setting and community engagement. New Zealand Landcare Trust guidance also highlights the role of community-led catchment groups in developing shared environmental objectives, coordinating action and strengthening local ownership. These models provide useful precedents for investigating catchment management boards or similar arrangements through detailed design^[38,39,40].

This is particularly relevant for the Waimakariri River catchment, which spans the Waimakariri, Selwyn and Christchurch areas. In these situations, joint

governance arrangements, shared services, regional entities or other collaborative models may be appropriate to ensure continuity of environmental monitoring, flood management, scientific expertise and catchment management.

Our proposal will therefore strengthen local integration where appropriate, recognising that some environmental functions are best delivered across wider geographic areas to reflect the scale of the natural systems they manage.

Treatment of regional functions

We expect that all Environment Canterbury functions will transfer to the new North Canterbury Council. Our expectation is that the resources, systems, and processes currently in place at Environment Canterbury would also transfer, and will need to be carefully planned to ensure service continuity. While the framework exists to undertake the regulatory functions of Environment Canterbury, an assessment of the additional need for appropriately qualified staff will form part of our detailed design phase. Bylaws and strategic documents shown in Table 1 that fit within our existing capability, capacity and systems and can be integrated in the early delivery phase.

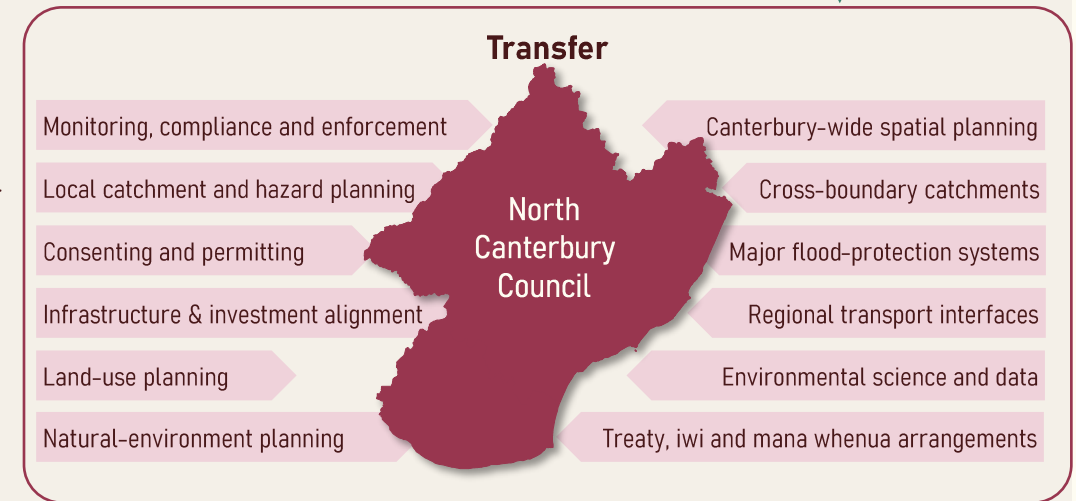
While we acknowledge the requirement for a Regional Level Civil Defence entity, our Councils have suitably qualified staff to support this function at both a district and regional level. Having experienced significant natural disasters in recent history, we are experienced and well placed to deliver the district function as well as assisting regional coordination efforts.

Environment Canterbury today

Planning, regulation, catchments, regional and public transport, flood protection, science, monitoring and resilience

Function assessment

- 1 Local accountability
- 2 Existing capability
- 3 Regional systems and catchments
- 4 Service continuity



North Canterbury Council

All responsibilities sit with the new North Canterbury Council. Delivery may be direct, joint or shared where wider coordination adds value.

Guide for design

- Environmental outcomes
- Statutory requirements
- Catchment integrity
- Mana whenua interests
- Specialist capability
- Data and system continuity
- Service resilience
- Value and accountability

Table 1: Environment Canterbury: Plans, strategies and bylaws ^[41]

Spatial and regulatory plans	Transport and resilience strategies
• Canterbury Regional Policy Statement • Canterbury Air Regional Plan • Canterbury Land and Water Regional Plan • Canterbury Regional Pest Management Plan 2018–38 • Regional Coastal Environment Plan for the Canterbury Region	• Canterbury Biodiversity Strategy • Canterbury Regional River Gravel Management Strategy • Canterbury Water Management Strategy • Floodplain management strategies • Greater Christchurch Urban Development Strategy • Canterbury Regional Public Transport Plan 2025–35 • Canterbury Regional Land Transport Plan 2024–34
Regional bylaws	
• Flood Protection and Drainage Bylaw 2013 • Navigation Safety Bylaw 2016	
Catchment and environmental plans	
• Hurunui Waiau River Regional Plan • Opihi River Regional Plan • Pareora Catchment Plan	• Waimakariri River Regional Plan • Waipara Catchment Plan • Waitaki Catchment Plan

How would regional functions transition?

Our proposal recognises that creating a new North Canterbury Council is not simply a transfer of territorial authority functions. It also requires consideration of those Environment Canterbury functions that currently support natural resource management, environmental regulation, resilience, public transport and regional-scale planning.

The proposal assumes that responsibility for all regional functions will automatically transfer through a transition phase if our proposal is accepted. During the detailed design phase we propose a function-by-function assessment to identify:

- Functions that could benefit from regional coordination, joint governance or shared service arrangements
- Functions that may be more efficient or better delivered through a successor regional entity, regional CCO or wider South Island arrangement.

This approach reduces implementation risk while preserving institutional knowledge, specialist capability, environmental outcomes and service continuity.

How does this help the new planning system work better?

The proposal reduces the number of local planning interfaces within North Canterbury while maintaining regional coordination where required. Planning, infrastructure, environmental management and implementation activities would be considered together, rather than through multiple organisational boundaries.

The proposal therefore improves integration while preserving Canterbury-wide coordination for functions that require wider scale.

- **Reduce local interfaces:** Instead of two councils preparing separate responses, North Canterbury would provide one coordinated land use plan.
- **Better align planning and investment:** Land use planning, infrastructure planning and long-term financial planning would sit within a single organisation.
- **Strengthen capability:** A larger authority would deliver further efficiencies in consenting, compliance, monitoring and infrastructure capability, drawing on the skillsets of both Councils.

This assessment recognises that some benefits are already anticipated through the new planning system itself, including fewer plans, stronger national direction, standardised zones and reduced duplication. The design of the new North Canterbury Council is not to duplicate those system-wide reforms. It is to make implementation clearer, more accountable and more locally integrated within North Canterbury.

What are the trade-offs and risks?

Our proposal will create a single North Canterbury planning and implementation platform. The principal trade-off is that broader New Zealand local government reform and planning reform will occur over a similar timeframe, meaning that without careful sequencing there is a risk that councils, mana whenua, regulators and communities are required to engage with multiple reform processes simultaneously.

Frameworks to carry forward:

- Canterbury spatial-planning arrangements
- Regional and catchment plans
- Environmental science and monitoring systems
- Iwi management plans
- Existing joint planning and governance arrangements



Some cross-boundary issues would remain, but many of these matters are already present today and would remain almost irrespective of the Head Start option. Joint management of some transport infrastructure (the Old Waimakariri Bridge and Waimakariri Gorge Bridge) will continue. Flood management for the Waimakariri River is undertaken at the regional level because of the regional impacts arising from major flood events, and because the specialist expertise associated with managing these river systems.

Key considerations

- Concurrent planning reform and local government reform
- Retaining specialist environmental capability and institutional knowledge
- Managing cross-boundary catchments and natural systems
- Maintaining continuity of science, data and monitoring systems

What still needs to be worked through in detailed design

With regard to future Regional Spatial Planning, we anticipate that as part of any change to regional boundaries that the Minister for Resource Management Reform (or the otherwise responsible Minister) will need to consider the need for secondary regulations to define the area in which spatial planning is required, in the event that a North Canterbury unitary is formed and the Canterbury Regional Spatial Plan is still within its implementation phase post-2028. We note this matter is also considered within the select committee's report on the Planning Bill, which we understand is still progressing through the parliamentary process.

The detailed design phase will therefore need to focus on defining the future planning system interface between North Canterbury and Canterbury-wide planning arrangements. This includes implementation of Canterbury-wide regional spatial planning, preparation and implementation of future land use plans and the

treatment of natural environment planning functions.

A separate workstream in detailed design will focus on regional functions. This includes the transfer all regional functions directly to a new North Canterbury Council while exploring which may be best delivered through joint arrangements.

Catchment management arrangements, environmental monitoring systems and science could be undertaken in partnership with Environment Canterbury, mana whenua, Central Government and neighbouring councils.

Finally, detailed implementation planning will be required to ensure consenting, compliance, monitoring and enforcement functions continue seamlessly during system transition.

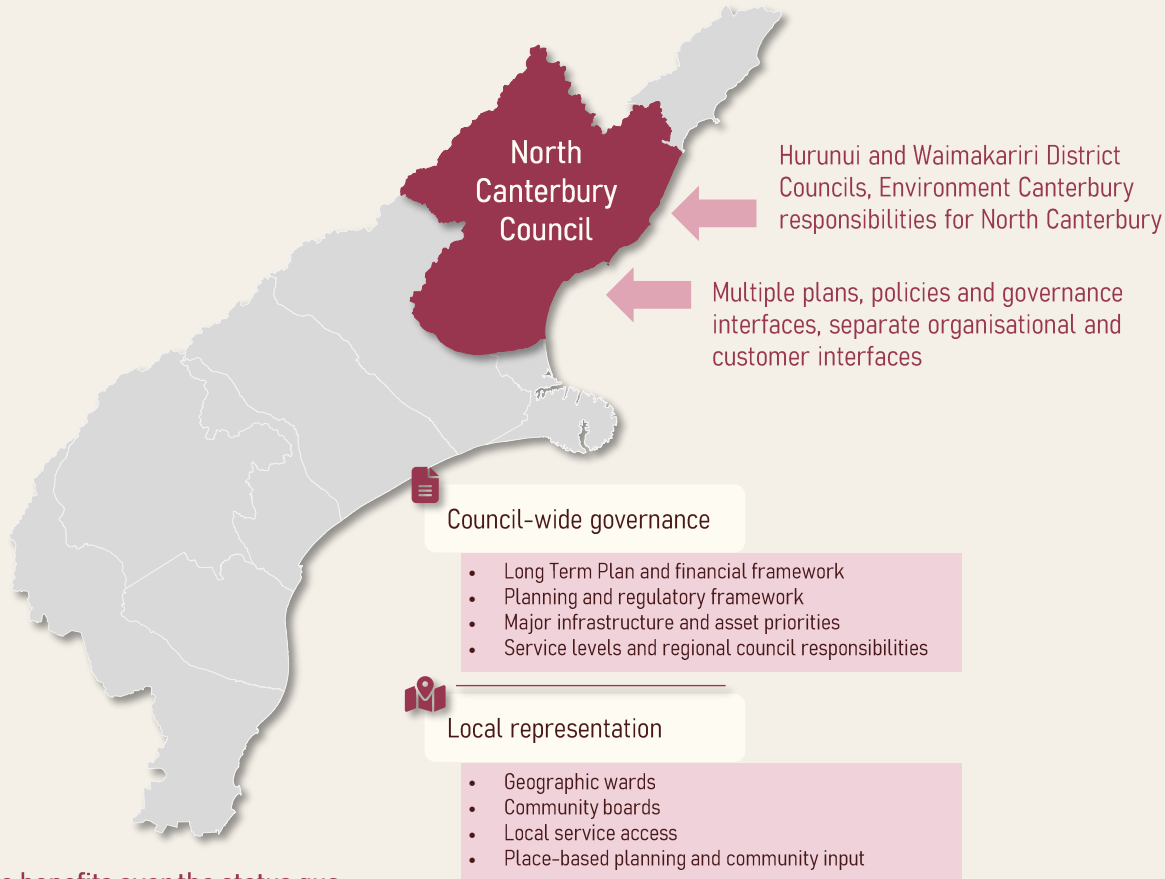
Detailed design priorities

- spatial-planning and combined-plan interfaces
- natural-environment planning and delivery
- catchment management boards or equivalent leadership arrangements
- cross-boundary catchment governance
- environmental science, monitoring and data continuity
- mana whenua participation and relevant iwi management plan interfaces
- service continuity through transition

Overall, the proposal strongly supports the new planning system. It would simplify local implementation, integrate planning with infrastructure and investment and provide clearer accountability for North Canterbury outcomes. Its success will depend on disciplined detailed design of natural-environment functions, Canterbury-wide spatial-planning interfaces, cross-boundary catchments, specialist capability and mana whenua participation.



Simplifies local governance



Governance benefits over the status quo

Clearer accountability

One Council responsible for North Canterbury decisions.

Fewer interfaces

Fewer organisations, plans and processes for communities and partners to navigate.

Stronger local representation

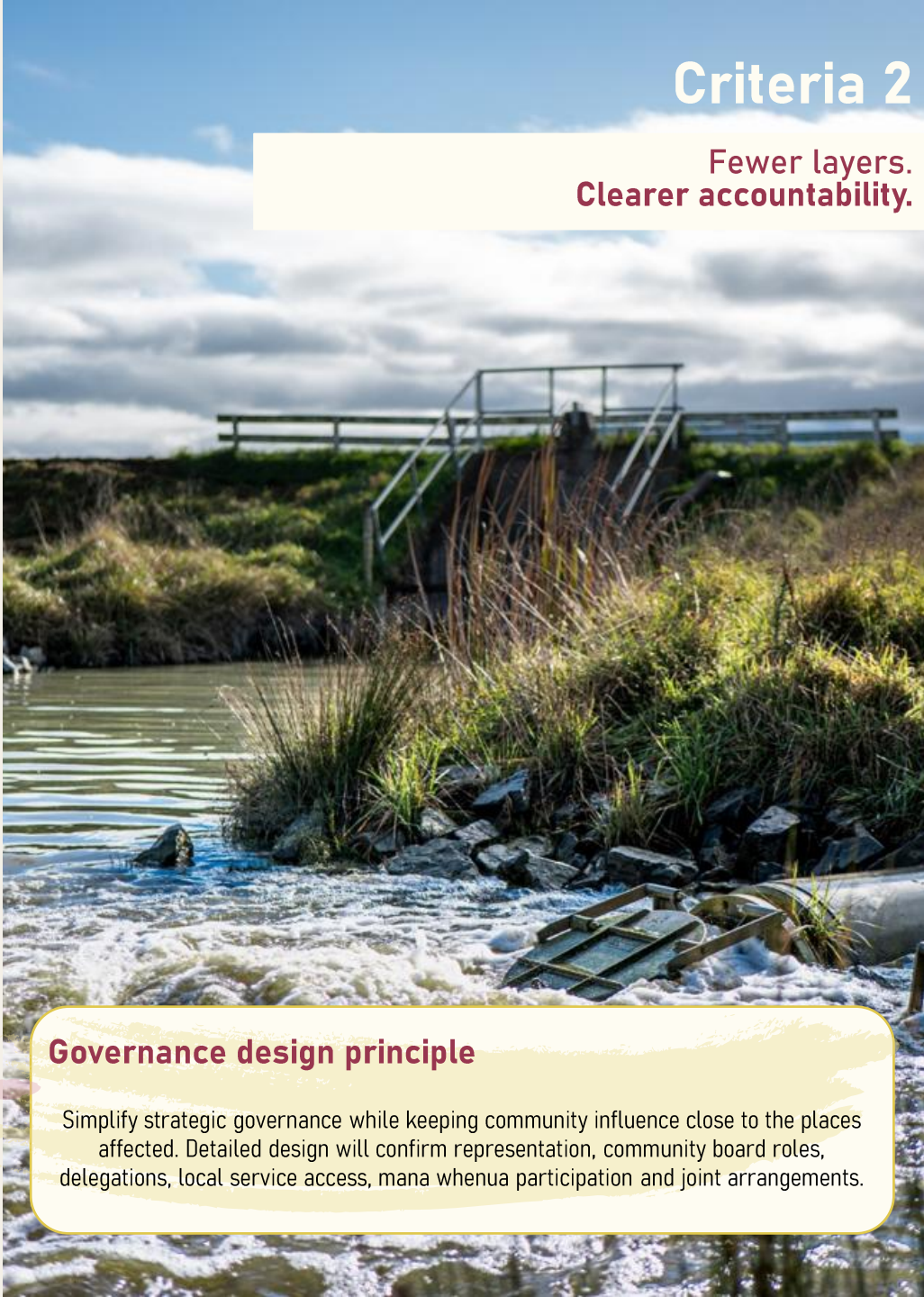
Geographic representation and community mechanisms retain local influence.

Better integrated decisions

Growth, infrastructure, environment and affordability considered together.

Criteria 2

**Fewer layers.
Clearer accountability.**



NORTH CANTERBURY COUNCIL

Governance design principle

Simplify strategic governance while keeping community influence close to the places affected. Detailed design will confirm representation, community board roles, delegations, local service access, mana whenua participation and joint arrangements.

Table 2: Current and proposed governance structures (indicative and subject to detailed design)

Governance features	Waimakariri District	Hurunui District	Environment Canterbury	North Canterbury Council
Mayor	1	1	-	One Mayor elected at-large across North Canterbury
Councillors	10	10	2 (plus a Chair)	Indicatively 14 Councillors (nine from Waimakariri; five from Hurunui)
Councillors and Wards	4: Kaiapoi-Woodend 4: Rangiora-Ashley 2: Oxford-Ohoka	4: West Ward 2: East Ward 4: South Ward	Constituencies	7 wards (potential to redraw new ward boundaries across existing district boundaries)
Community Boards	4: Kaiapoi-Tuahiwī, Woodend-Sefton, Rangiora-Ashley, Oxford-Ohoka	2: Hanmer Springs Community Board, South Ward Community Board	-	7 Community Boards (potential to redraw new ward boundaries across existing district boundaries)
Regional functions	-	-	Governed through Environment Canterbury	Full responsibility, with joint or shared delivery where appropriate

Table 3: Proposed governance roles and responsibilities

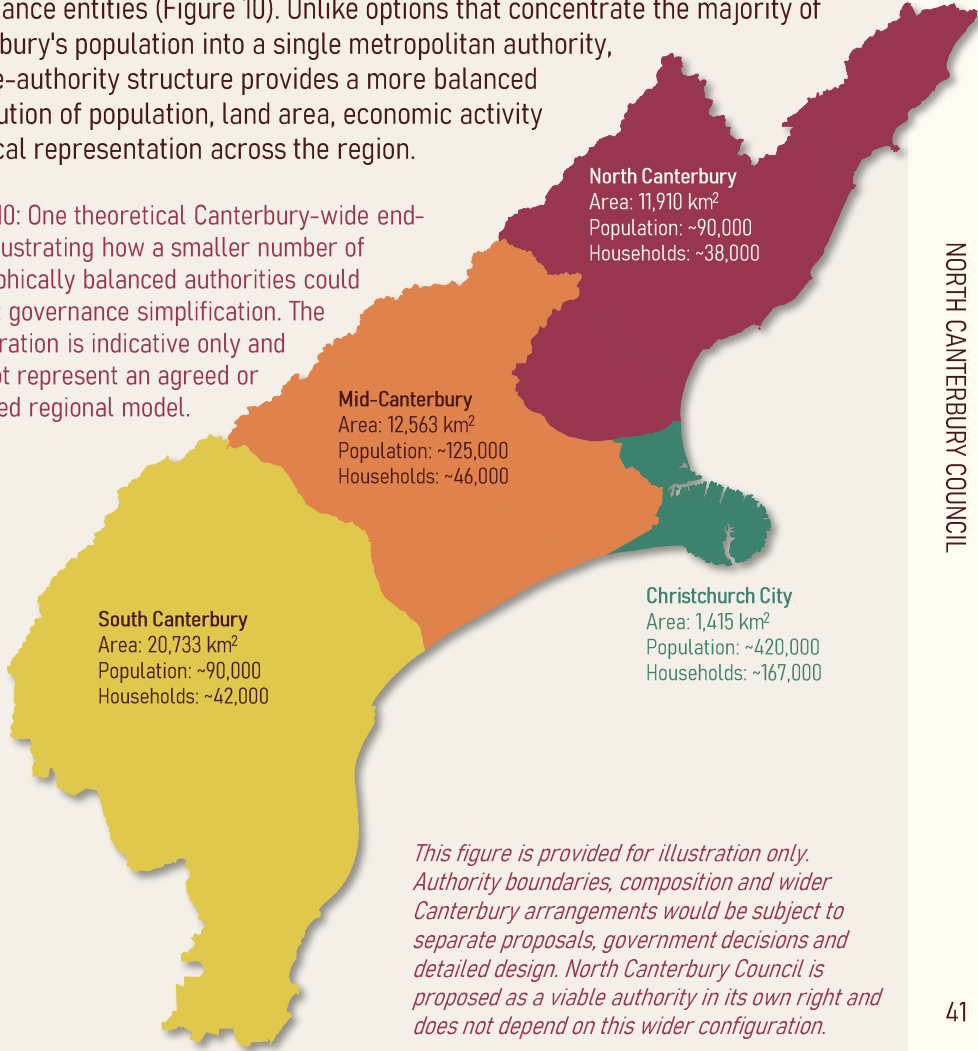
Governance layers	Roles and responsibilities
North Canterbury Council governing body	- Sets the overall strategic direction - Adopts the Long Term Plan and financial and funding policies - Sets Council-wide service levels and major infrastructure priorities - Oversees territorial and regional council responsibilities - Determines participation in Canterbury-wide and joint arrangements
Community boards and place-based mechanisms	- Provide local input and delegated decision-making where appropriate - Support township and rural priorities - Provide input on local facilities, reserves, grants and place-based plans - Maintain accessible channels between communities and the Council
Joint and shared arrangements	- Support cross-boundary systems and functions requiring wider coordination - Enable shared capability, systems or service delivery - Operate within clear accountability, funding and reporting arrangements
Mana whenua participation	- Support agreed partnership and participation arrangements - Maintain statutory and settlement-related continuity - Be designed collaboratively through detailed design

Roles and responsibilities

The model is capable of operating independently and can also form part of any wider simplification of governance across Canterbury.

A new North Canterbury Council should therefore not be viewed in isolation, rather it would exist within a simplified Canterbury-wide governance landscape. The current eleven councils could ultimately be simplified into three or four balanced governance entities (Figure 10). Unlike options that concentrate the majority of Canterbury's population into a single metropolitan authority, a three-authority structure provides a more balanced distribution of population, land area, economic activity and local representation across the region.

Figure 10: One theoretical Canterbury-wide end-state illustrating how a smaller number of geographically balanced authorities could support governance simplification. The configuration is indicative only and does not represent an agreed or preferred regional model.



NORTH CANTERBURY COUNCIL

How does our proposal simplify local governance?

The proposal would dissolve Hurunui District Council and Waimakariri District Council and establish North Canterbury Council as a new local authority. North Canterbury Council would be responsible for all territorial authority and regional council functions within North Canterbury.

This would replace separate governance, planning, funding and organisational arrangements with one governing body, one Long Term Plan, one financial and funding framework and one organisational platform. North Canterbury-wide decisions on planning, infrastructure, assets, resilience, regulation and service delivery would sit within one accountable structure.

For communities, central government, mana whenua, infrastructure providers and neighbouring authorities, the model would provide a clearer point of engagement and accountability.

How governance would work

The new unitary authority would provide: One council, one long-term plan, one infrastructure strategy, one financial strategy, one organisational platform, and one North Canterbury voice in regional and national discussions.

Council-wide decisions

The new North Canterbury Council's governing body would set the Council's strategic direction and be accountable for the Long Term Plan, financial and funding policies, major infrastructure and asset priorities, planning and regulatory frameworks, Council-wide service levels and regional council responsibilities.

Local and place-based decisions

Geographic representation, community boards and other place-based mechanisms would maintain community input into local priorities, facilities, reserves, grants, local planning and service access.

Cross-boundary and shared delivery

Joint or shared arrangements could support functions requiring Canterbury-wide coordination, cross-boundary management or specialist capability. While these arrangements may change how functions are delivered, the North Canterbury Council would retain full accountability for functions within its area.

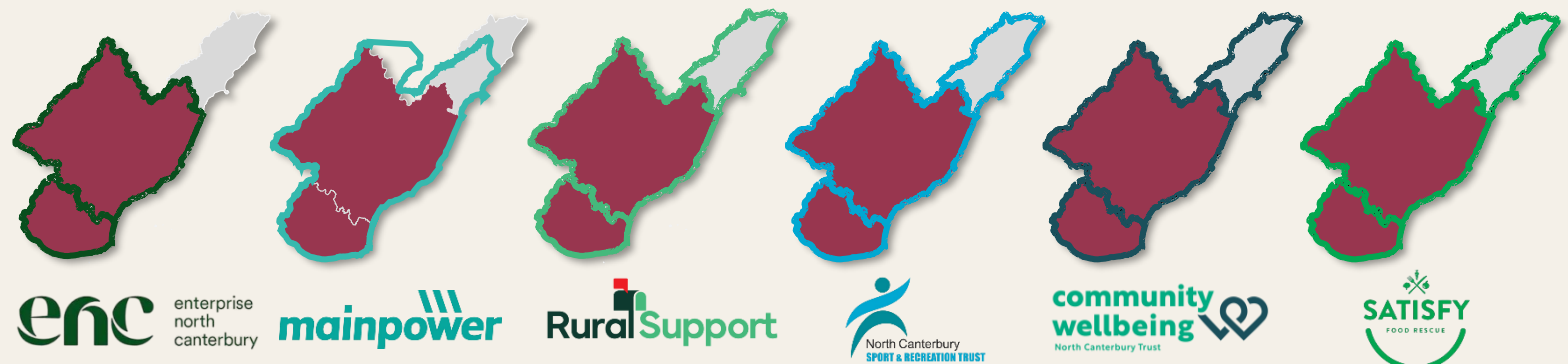
Mana whenua and Māori participation

Future arrangements will be designed collaboratively with affected mana whenua, iwi, hapū and post-settlement governance entities. Treaty settlement continuity and Māori participation will be addressed through a dedicated Treaty and iwi workstream.

Local participation mechanisms will continue to ensure decision-making remains connected to communities.

How does this create clearer accountability and decision-making?

Our proposed North Canterbury Council will simplify how we engage with central government, infrastructure providers, partner organisations and neighbouring councils. Decisions relating to growth, infrastructure and service delivery will sit within a single governance structure rather than across multiple local authorities.



Evidence in practice

A new North Canterbury Council would build on our extensive existing collaboration and shared governance arrangements.

Existing North Canterbury collaboration: Our proposal builds on existing collaboration, rather than creating entirely new governance relationships. Several cross-region initiatives are already in place that work closely with us, and would do so even more effectively under a North Canterbury Council, including:

- Canterbury Mayoral Forum brings together all 11 Canterbury mayors and supports regional coordination through technical working groups covering planning, infrastructure, finance, climate adaptation and regulatory services.
- Canterbury Waste Joint Committee has successfully provided regional governance arrangements since 2006.
- The Kate Valley Landfill and Transwaste partnership involving multiple Canterbury councils, the Tiromoana Bush conservation area and a range of shared infrastructure, environmental and economic development initiatives that operate successfully across district boundaries
- Enterprise North Canterbury already provides a shared economic development platform.
- MainPower
- North Canterbury Sport and Recreation Trust
- Community Wellbeing North Canterbury Trust

A new North Canterbury Council would go further than collaboration by bringing responsibility for North Canterbury-wide decisions into one organisation. Joint arrangements would remain available only where wider coordination adds value.

Current governance complexity: At present, North Canterbury-wide matters can require coordination between two territorial authorities, Environment Canterbury, multiple governance forums and separate planning, funding and investment processes. Our proposal would consolidate many of these interfaces into a single accountable authority.

What improves compared with the current state

The current arrangements provide strong local identity and proximity, but distribute North Canterbury-wide responsibilities across separate governing bodies, plans, organisations and regional interfaces. A new North Canterbury Council would provide:

- One accountable governing body
- Clearer responsibility for North Canterbury-wide outcomes
- Fewer planning, funding and organisational interfaces
- More integrated decisions across planning, infrastructure, environment and services
- A stronger and more coherent voice with government and regional partners
- Continued community-level representation and local service access.

What are the trade-offs and risks?

The principal trade-off is between simplifying strategic governance and retaining meaningful local influence. Some rural, township and coastal communities may perceive decision-making as becoming more distant. Conversely, creating too many committees, boards or delegated structures could reproduce the complexity the model is intended to remove. The design response

is to maintain a clear allocation of decision rights: Council-wide matters sit with the governing body, place-based matters are informed or decided through local mechanisms, and cross-boundary functions use joint arrangements only where required.

Key considerations

- Perception of centralised decision-making
- Balancing population and geographic representation
- Avoiding unnecessary governance complexity
- Maintaining meaningful local influence.

What still needs to be worked through?

Detailed design will solidify preliminary arrangements of the final representation structure, including councillor allocation, ward arrangements and community board responsibilities.

The role, authority and delegations of community boards will be further clarified to ensure local communities retain meaningful influence over local issues, facilities and place-based priorities. Decision-making responsibilities between the governing body, community boards and future joint arrangements will also require further refinement. During detailed design we will work with mana whenua to develop future Māori participation arrangements that reflect both local aspirations and statutory obligations.

As discussed in Criteria 5 (Deliverability), prior to finalising our proposed representation model during detailed design, we will seek immediate direction from central government on whether planned formal representation reviews are still required, noting that planning to undertake these reviews is already underway.

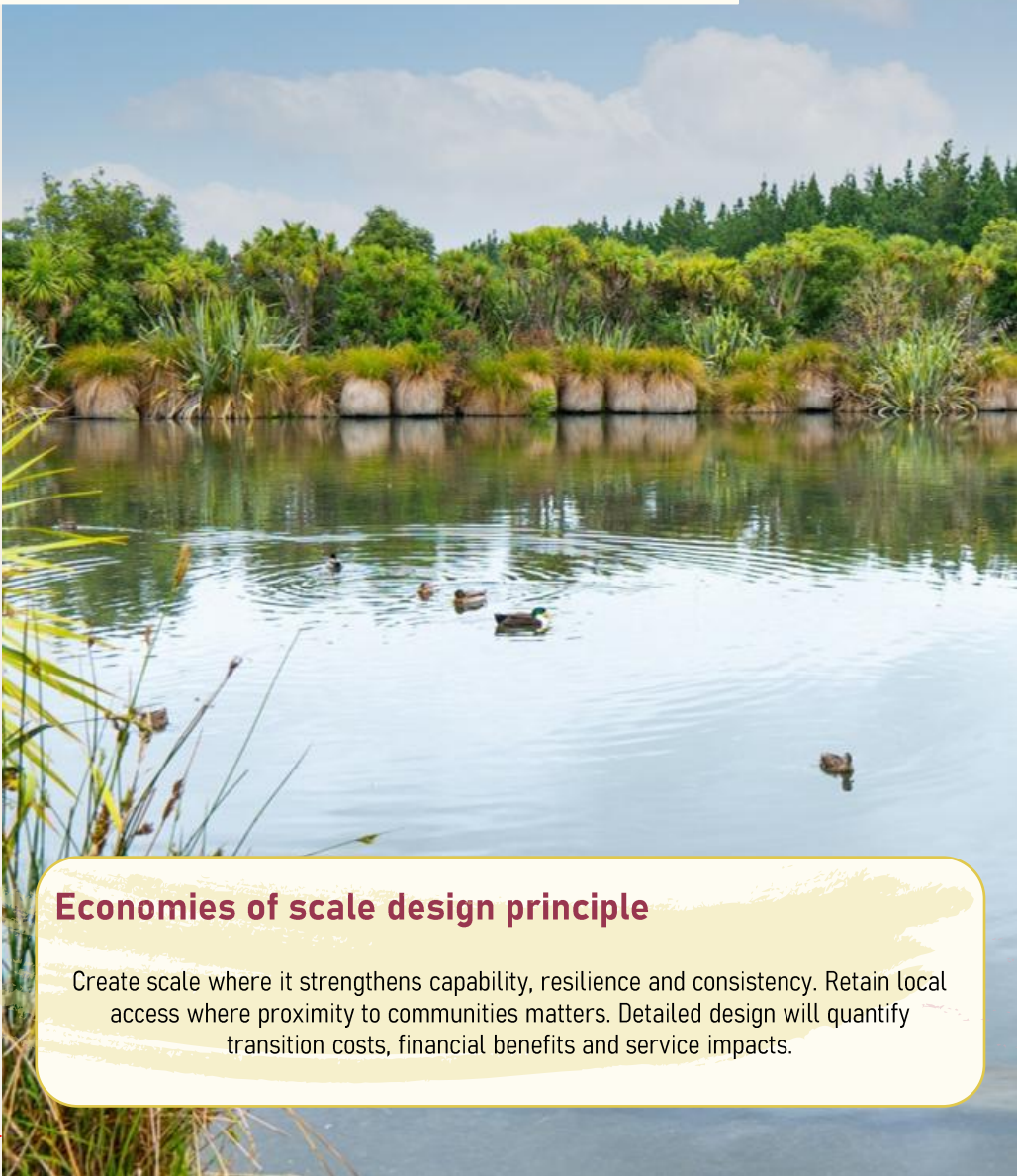
Detailed design priorities

- Final governing-body and representation model
- Ward and community board arrangements
- Decision rights and delegations
- Local service access and place-based planning
- Mana whenua and Māori participation
- Governance, funding and accountability for joint arrangements
- Statutory representation-review pathway
- Transition from existing governing bodies and committees.

Overall, the proposal strongly meets Criteria 2. It materially simplifies governance by replacing separate territorial and regional interfaces with one accountable North Canterbury Council, one strategic framework and one organisational platform. The principal challenge for detailed design will be to preserve meaningful local influence without recreating unnecessary governance complexity.

Criteria 3

Improved capability.
More resilient delivery.

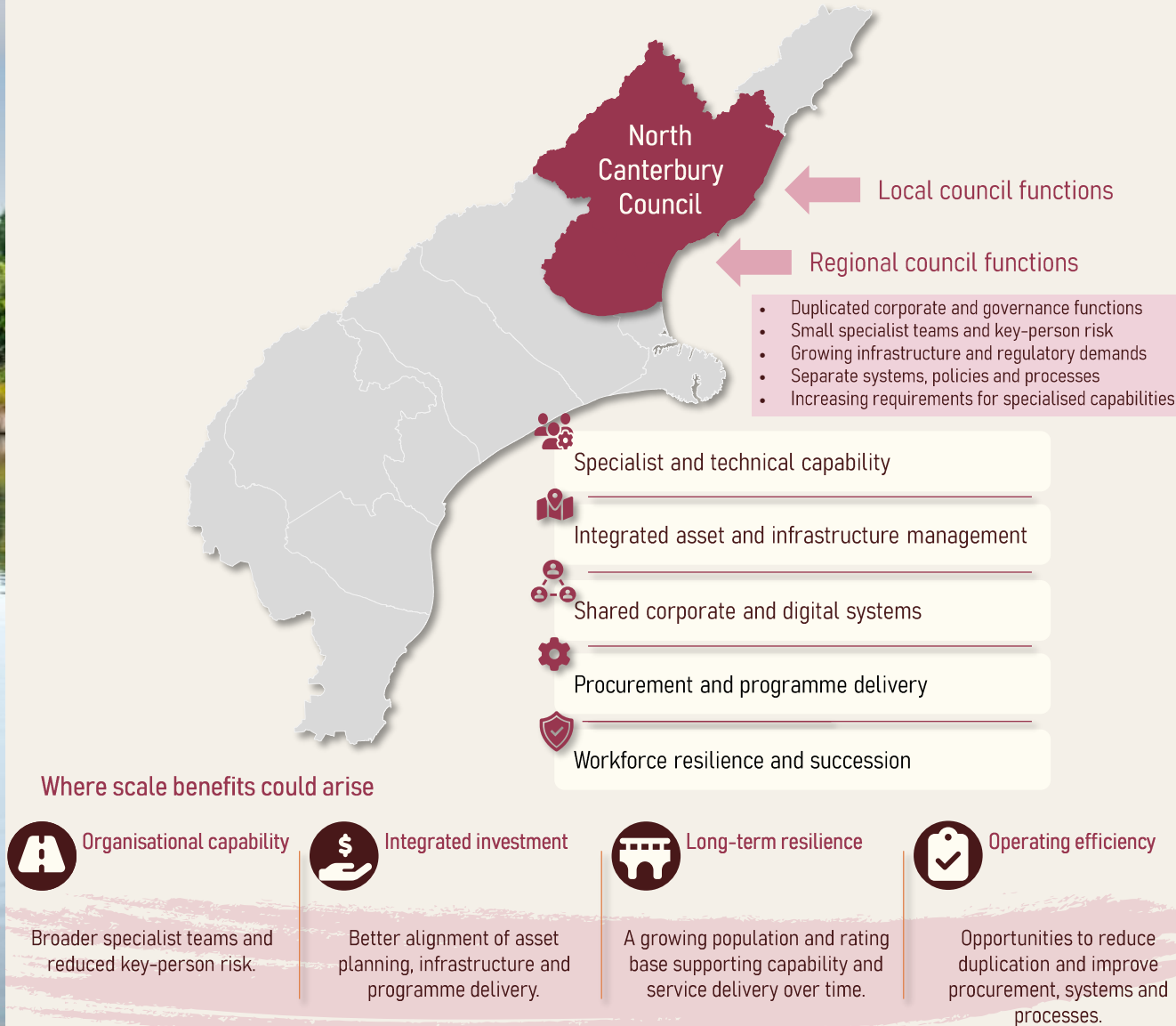


Economies of scale design principle

Create scale where it strengthens capability, resilience and consistency. Retain local access where proximity to communities matters. Detailed design will quantify transition costs, financial benefits and service impacts.

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Economies of scale



How does the proposal create economies of scale?

The new North Canterbury Council would begin with a population of approximately 89,000 in 2028, reaching 120,000 by 2053 under a high-growth projection. This growth is supported by a diverse economy, substantial infrastructure and community assets and an established base of council capability. The estimated growth in our region's population broadens the rating base over which organisational capability, systems and fixed costs can be further developed.

The new Council would create opportunities to consolidate duplicated organisational functions, make better use of specialist capability and integrate planning, asset management, procurement, systems and programme delivery. The most immediate benefits are expected to be stronger capability and organisational resilience. Financial efficiencies would be tested through detailed design and are more likely to emerge progressively than immediately. These benefits are summarised in Table 4.

How does our proposal improve efficiency, capability and value for money?

The new North Canterbury Council will leverage its scale to support resilience and augment capability. Hurunui and Waimakariri already provide valued services to our residents and communities, but we face growing demands for specialist capability, asset management depth, infrastructure delivery, resilience planning and regulatory capacity. North Canterbury is well placed to strengthen this partnership, and as a unitary authority will share and augment the capability we already have while de-duplicating effort across shared systems, procurement, contract management, asset management and organisational support functions.

Should Kaikōura subsequently choose to participate in the North Canterbury Council those benefits would increase further. While our proposal is fully viable without Kaikōura, any future participation by that district would require separate assessment of the financial, capability and service implications.

Where could economies of scale be achieved?

The proposal is expected to deliver benefits through a combination of governance simplification, reduced organisational duplication, stronger specialist capability and improved coordination of planning and infrastructure investment. Importantly, the primary benefits are expected to arise from increased organisational scale, resilience and capability rather than immediate cost reductions.

Many of the economies of scale benefits build on existing examples of collaboration. Hurunui and Waimakariri already work together through Enterprise North Canterbury, shared water and

technical services, hydraulic modelling support, Canterbury-wide planning initiatives, emergency management arrangements and regional governance forums. The proposal would formalise and strengthen many of these existing relationships, rather than creating entirely new operating models.

Consolidation benefits

A new North Canterbury Council will bring together activities that are currently delivered by two separate organisations. This creates opportunities to reduce duplication, streamline decision-making and adopt the strongest practices already operating within either council.

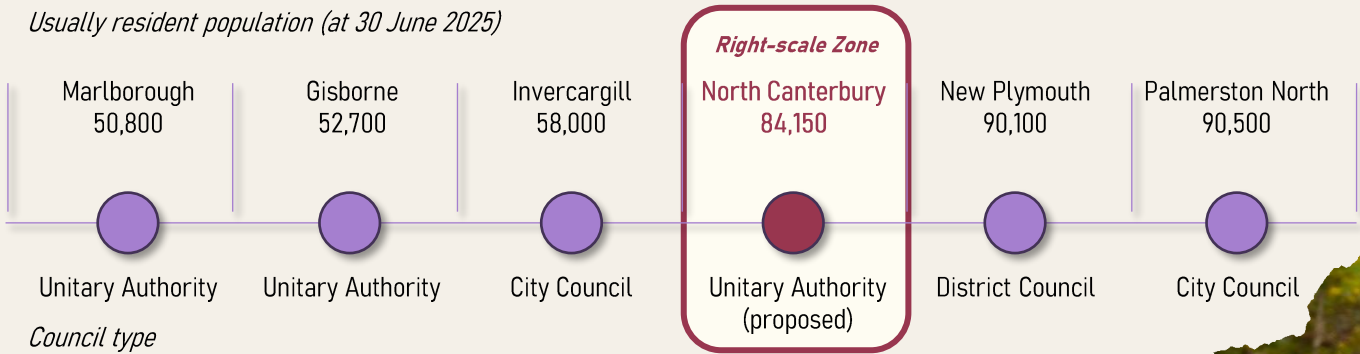
Table 4: Areas of potential efficiency and capability improvements

Area	Source of scale	Potential benefit
Governance and strategy	Two existing governing bodies and parallel strategic processes replaced by one new Council	Fewer duplicate governance processes and one strategic direction for North Canterbury
Corporate functions	Consolidated leadership, finance, procurement, treasury, assurance, risk, legal, communications and organisational support	Opportunities to reduce duplication, strengthen specialist capability and improve consistency
Planning and regulatory	Larger combined workforce and more consistent systems, policies and processes	Greater resilience, reduced key-person risk and more consistent customer experience
Asset management	Integrated asset data, standards, planning and investment prioritisation	Better coordination of renewals, resilience and long-term investment
Infrastructure and programme delivery	Broader engineering, project-management and delivery capability	Stronger programme coordination and procurement with reduced reliance on individual roles
Digital and customer services	Common core platform and opportunity to align channels, data and processes	A foundation for better data use, streamlined processes and potential long-term system efficiencies

Population scale comparison

North Canterbury would be comparable with established New Zealand councils and larger than several existing unitary authorities.

Usually resident population (at 30 June 2025)



North Canterbury at establishment

A substantial population, geographic and infrastructure platform from day one.



~89,000

Residents

A population comparable with established New Zealand city councils and larger than several existing unitary authorities.



12,000 km²

Land area

A large and diverse geography spanning growing towns, productive rural areas, alpine environments and coast.



38,000+

Rateable properties

A broader rating base than either existing council can provide independently.



\$321m+

Indicative annual revenue

A stronger financial and organisational platform for infrastructure, specialist capability and service delivery.



\$3.9bn

Combined council assets

A substantial asset base requiring long-term stewardship, renewal and investment.



One accountable Council

A united platform for planning, infrastructure, regulatory services, resilience and community outcomes.



Economies of scale are expected to arise primarily through consolidation of duplicated functions, improved utilisation of specialist capability and greater organisational scale.

While our proposal does not rely on immediate staff reductions or short-term cost savings, a larger North Canterbury Council would reduce duplication, improve resilience and create opportunities for ongoing efficiency improvements over time.

Importantly, many of these efficiencies arise because North Canterbury is large enough to support specialist capability and integrated service delivery, while remaining small enough to maintain direct accountability, local knowledge and responsiveness to community needs.

Capability and resilience benefits

The most significant benefits are likely to come from increased organisational depth and reduced reliance on small specialist teams.

A larger organisation can support stronger succession planning, greater specialist expertise and reduced key-person risk. This is particularly important in areas such as planning, engineering, asset management, environmental management, procurement, project delivery, legal services and iwi engagement, where smaller councils can struggle to recruit and retain specialist expertise. These benefits are summarised in Table 5.

Future efficiency opportunities

A larger organisation may create opportunities over time to improve efficiency and reduce avoidable duplication of cost and effort.

These opportunities are most likely to arise through:

- shared procurement and contract management
- consistent consenting framework and process
- improved purchasing power

- consolidated finance, human resources and information technology systems
- integrated project delivery and programme management
- common asset management frameworks
- coordinated infrastructure investment.

Table 5: Areas of potential capability and resilience improvements

Area	Capability benefit
Planning and regulatory functions	Larger specialist teams and reduced dependence on individual staff members.
Engineering and infrastructure	Greater technical depth and specialist engineering capability.
Asset management	Improved maturity of asset planning, data and investment decision-making.
Emergency management and resilience	Enhanced capacity to respond to natural disasters and significant regional events.
Iwi engagement and partnerships	Better resourcing to support consistent and enduring relationships with mana whenua.
Organisational resilience	Stronger workforce planning, professional development and succession management.

One immediate opportunity to deliver operational efficiencies is through shared software. Unlike Christchurch, Hurunui and Waimakariri already use the same software platform, which will greatly improve the ability to harmonise information and data, and save significant ICT and technology costs.

The scale and timing of any financial benefits should be tested and quantified during detailed design. Consistent with experience elsewhere in New Zealand, the primary rationale for reform is capability, resilience and long-term sustainability rather than short-term cost savings.

How does the proposal improve organisational capability and resilience?

A larger North Canterbury authority would have greater ability to attract and retain specialist staff, support succession planning and build organisational depth across planning, engineering, infrastructure, finance and regulatory functions.

Scale matters because it provides the ability to attract and retain specialist staff, spread overhead costs across a larger organisation, support investment in technology and systems, strengthen procurement capability and improve organisational resilience. At the same time, the proposed North Canterbury Council remains small enough to retain direct connections between communities, elected members and decision-makers.

Evidence in practice

Waimakariri: Scale and growth

- \$734 million capital programme over 10 years
- Significant growth-related infrastructure investment
- Mature asset management systems
- Established long-term financial modelling.

Hurunui: Rural infrastructure stewardship

- Large geographic area
- Significant bridge network
- Rural transport and resilience challenges
- Distributed settlements creating infrastructure complexity.

Existing collaboration already occurs across planning, engineering, procurement and infrastructure functions.

Critical infrastructure providers already operate across North Canterbury as a single functional area. For example, MainPower's network spans communities across the sub-region^[42], reinforcing the existence of a coherent North Canterbury service geography.

The proposed North Canterbury Council would commence operations at a scale comparable with many successful New Zealand councils and would exceed the population of several existing unitary authorities.

Financial sustainability

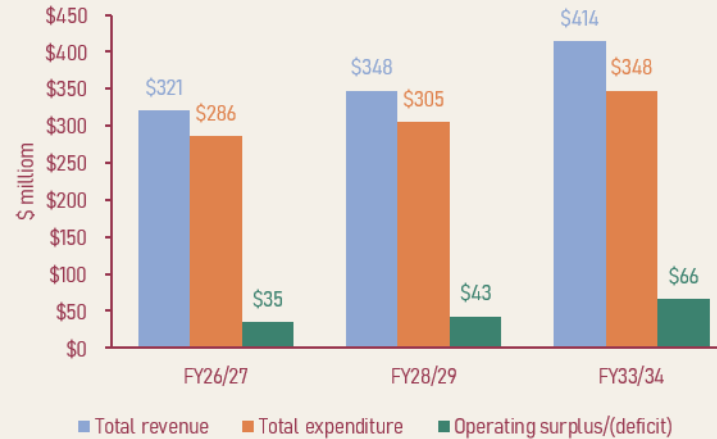
A new North Canterbury Council would commence operations with a substantial and sustainable financial base. As summarised in Table 6, based on the current Long Term Plans of Hurunui and Waimakariri District Councils and an allocation from Environment Canterbury rates revenue, the North Canterbury Council would expect to generate \$348 million in revenue at establishment, increasing to more than \$414 million by FY33/34 (Figure 11). While net debt is expected to increase during the peak infrastructure investment period, combined debt levels remain within manageable ranges (estimated at \$355 million at establishment as shown in Figure 12) and are forecast to reduce over the longer term.

The new North Canterbury Council would commence operations from a position of substantial scale. North Canterbury ratepayers currently contribute an estimated 10.9% of Environment Canterbury's rates revenue, equivalent to approximately \$21.5 million based on actual rates revenue of \$197.1 million in 2024/25. With approximately 39% of Environment Canterbury's \$324.9 million operating revenue coming from fees, charges, subsidies, grants and other income, detailed design will need to determine the appropriate allocation of non-rates funding associated with transferred regional functions.

Hurunui and Waimakariri District Councils share existing areas of commonality in our current rating structures. These include the use of capital value for the general rate alongside a Uniform Annual General Charge (UAGC) rate, as well as fixed charges for several council services. This includes differentiating some charges between service provision to rural or urban areas. We would consider how these are best integrated alongside rating for regional functions as part of the detailed design phase.

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Indicative Income Metrics



Indicative Debt Metrics

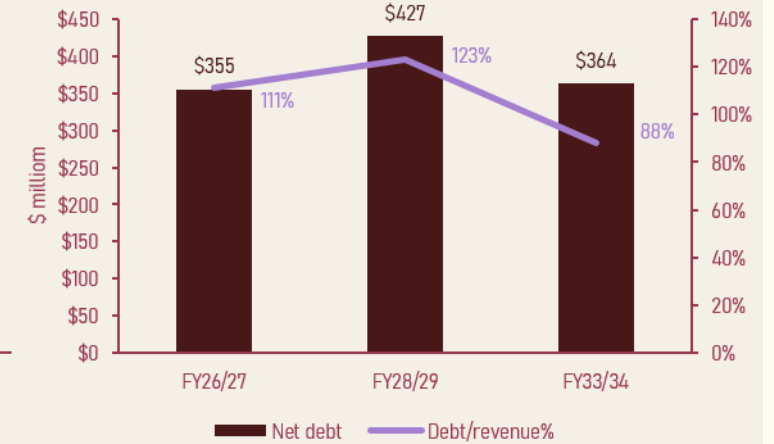


Figure 11 and Figure 12: Indicative North Canterbury Council financial performance forecast

Table 6: Indicative consolidated financial position of a new North Canterbury Council

Entity	Households	Median Annual Income	Total rates per household	Assets per household	Debt per household
Ashburton District Council	15,343	\$57,400	\$3,544	\$81,594	\$9,359
Christchurch City Council	166,029	\$57,500	\$4,658	\$130,843	\$16,462
Hurunui District Council	7,353	\$52,000	\$4,327	\$137,101	\$11,848
Kaikōura District Council	2,466	\$46,700	\$4,444	\$145,512	\$2,960
Mackenzie District Council	4,134	\$51,900	\$4,456	\$102,378	\$5,760
Selwyn District Council	30,075	\$64,300	\$3,835	\$113,229	\$9,809
Timaru District Council	21,429	\$57,100	\$3,932	\$98,237	\$11,703
Waimakariri District Council	27,375	\$58,600	\$3,609	\$102,692	\$8,037
Waimate District Council	3,957	\$54,800	\$4,039	\$144,620	\$1,893
Waitaki District Council	12,051	\$53,900	\$3,877	\$114,216	\$6,097
North Canterbury Unitary (estimated, derived)	34,728	\$57,200	\$3,761	\$109,978	\$8,844
Environment Canterbury	279,888	\$58,100	\$704	\$5,525	\$343

Both our Councils are operating from a position of relative strength, creating a platform to support future growth, infrastructure investment and service delivery. Waimakariri has comparatively low rates as a proportion of household income (6.2%), relatively low debt per household, and an independent Fitch AA (Stable) credit rating^[43]. Hurunui contributes a significant asset base, diversified revenue streams and valuable tourism and commercial activities (e.g. Hanmer Springs), with the opportunity to further reduce our reliance on rates through planned growth in these commercial revenue streams.

Based on current growth trends, Hurunui and Waimakariri together are projected to have approximately 38,000 households in mid-2026, strengthening the combined rating base and supporting the long-term sustainability of a new North Canterbury Council.

Detailed design will need to consider rating transition, debt treatment, reserves, assets, service levels, localised funding tools, transition costs and affordability impacts. We also recognise that Waimakariri ratepayers will need confidence that the proposal does not create unmanaged cross-subsidies or dilute investment in Waimakariri’s growth needs. Equally, Hurunui’s communities will also need confidence that local identity, service access and local investment priorities remain protected.

What are the trade-offs and risks?

The principal trade-off associated with generating economies of scale is that capability benefits are likely to emerge more quickly than financial benefits. Transition costs will be incurred through systems integration, organisational redesign, governance changes, legal processes and implementation activities. These costs require transparent assessment and management.

We recognise there is a risk that standardisation could reduce local flexibility if service levels are harmonised without

recognising differences between growing urban communities, rural districts and visitor destinations.

Evidence from local government reform both in New Zealand and internationally suggests that economies of scale are not unlimited. Beyond a certain point, larger organisations tend to experience increased coordination costs, more complex decision-making structures and reduced organisational agility. The North Canterbury model seeks to capture the efficiencies associated with scale while avoiding unnecessary organisational complexity.

Key considerations

- Transition costs precede efficiency gains
- Benefits primarily arise from capability and resilience
- Service harmonisation must reflect community differences

What still needs to be worked through in detailed design?

The largest area of future work relates to financial integration. Detailed design will need to assess debt treatment, rates impact, reserves, asset ownership, funding arrangements and transition costs.

The future operating model and organisational structure also require development. This includes management structures, specialist capability requirements and opportunities to consolidate duplicate functions.

Asset management integration, procurement opportunities and infrastructure planning arrangements will be examined in more detail.

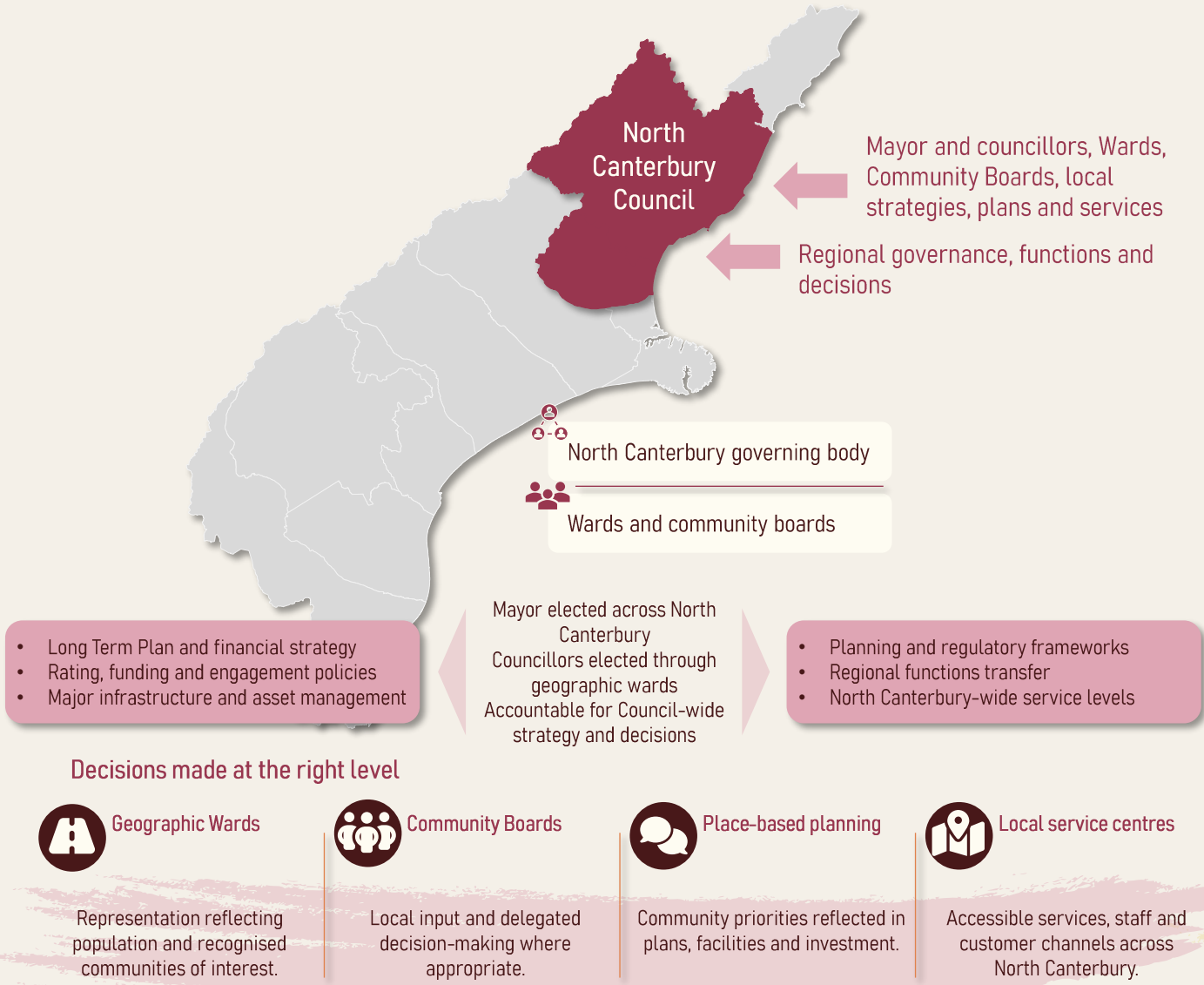
Benefits realisation should be quantified wherever practical, so that communities can understand both the costs and benefits of reform.

Detailed design priorities

- Financial modelling and debt treatment
- Future operating model
- Workforce and capability design
- Asset management and procurement integration

While the overall is positive, detailed design will be required to determine the treatment of rates, existing debt, reserves and assets, implementation costs and any future council-controlled organisations. The objective will be to ensure that the benefits of increased scale and capability are achieved while maintaining affordability, financial sustainability and fairness for both Hurunui and Waimakariri communities.

Maintains Local Voice



Criteria 4

A centre with scale.
Communities with a voice.



NORTH CANTERBURY COUNCIL

Local voice design principle

Create scale where it improves capability and decision-making. Keep influence close to communities where local knowledge, identity and access matter most. Detailed design will confirm representation, community board roles, local decision rights, service access and mana whenua participation.

How will people elect representatives?

Under a new North Canterbury Council, residents would elect a Mayor and councillors to govern the new authority, replacing the current separate governing bodies of Hurunui and Waimakariri. The objective is to simplify strategic governance while retaining strong community-level representation and accountability.

The detailed representation model, including a Mayor elected at-large from North Canterbury, councillor numbers (five for Hurunui and nine for Waimakariri), ward arrangements (seven) and electoral boundaries, will be confirmed through detailed design and would be subject to the statutory representation review process. This process would consider population, communities of interest, geographic considerations and effective representation.

How will communities be represented?

Existing community board arrangements would provide a starting point for detailed design and support continuity during transition. Detailed design will test whether existing boundaries, membership and delegations continue to reflect North Canterbury's communities of interest, including growing towns, rural areas, coastal communities, visitor destinations and smaller settlements.

The objective will be to retain established relationships and local knowledge while ensuring the future arrangements are effective, representative and not unnecessarily complex. Any future representation arrangements would need to balance population-based representation requirements with recognition of North Canterbury's diverse communities, including rural areas, townships and distinct local communities. A key objective is to ensure that governance arrangements reflect how communities see themselves, how they interact with local government and how they wish to influence future decision-making. The aim is to ensure that local identity, community priorities and place-based

decision-making remain visible and influential within the North Canterbury Council while meeting legislative requirements.

How does our proposal maintain local voice?

Our proposal is based on the principle that greater scale should not come at the expense of local representation or community identity. Hurunui and Waimakariri share similarities but also have distinct communities, priorities and aspirations that should continue to influence local decision-making.

How would communities continue to influence decisions?

Local voice is more than representation. It includes place-based planning, community participation, local partnerships and continued investment in community facilities and local services. It also includes the ability of communities to shape local priorities and express their aspirations for the future of their towns, rural areas and neighbourhoods. The proposal recognises that successful local government reform depends not only on how representatives are elected, but also on how communities continue to participate in decision-making once the new authority is established.

Detailed design will consider mechanisms such as:

- community boards and the nature of their delegated authority
- local area plans
- the extent of local input into planning (e.g. through delegated authority or formal representations to Council)
- local service access arrangements.

Future engagement arrangements will also need to reflect the significance and engagement policies of the new Council. Any proposal to establish, remove or materially change wards, community boards or other local representation mechanisms would require community engagement and consultation consistent with statutory requirements.

Across North Canterbury, our Councils support libraries, aquatic centres, community halls, reserves, parks, sports facilities, recreation programmes, volunteer organisations and community grants. These assets contribute directly to community wellbeing, social connectedness and local identity.

How does the proposal balance scale and local representation?

Our proposal seeks to create scale where scale improves capability and efficiency, while preserving local influence where proximity to communities matters most.

Evidence in practice

Established local representation

Hurunui and Waimakariri District Councils already host six active community boards, supporting community-led initiatives and actively participating in Council business and the annual planning process. These community boards provide a strong foundation for future representation arrangements.

Distinct communities of interest

Community engagement undertaken by Hurunui and Waimakariri demonstrates strong local identity and support for maintaining local voice alongside any future governance changes.

The strength of this identity is reflected by active communities of interest. These communities are diverse and range from the Mayors Business Advisory Group, to the Hurunui Youth Council, and Together Hurunui for social services, and the Mayors Taskforce for Jobs, WaiYouth, and the Age Friendly Waimakariri Advisory Group.

Both Hurunui and Waimakariri are proud to be part of Immigration New Zealand's Welcoming Communities initiative. This programme supports newcomers to feel included and have a sense of belonging in the economic, civic, cultural and social life of their new community.

Community infrastructure

Hurunui and Waimakariri District Councils support:

- eight libraries and a mobile pop-up library, and five pools
- community focussed facilities (including Town Halls, Community Centres, Pavilions, and Community Halls)
- regional events venues like the MainPower Stadium that are used primarily by North Cantabrians
- North Canterbury team sports, including 139 rugby teams across 12 clubs based in North Canterbury.

The Councils also contribute to events that help define community identity, lift the visibility of distinct areas, and support economic growth.

Notably, Matariki Kaiapoi, the North Canterbury Food and Wine Festival, Kaiapoi Art Expo, Hurunui Garden Festival and Hanmer Springs Fete, alongside multiple Agricultural and Pastoral shows and Farmers Markets, are a sample of the iconic events defining our Councils’ districts, emphasising the peri-urban and rural nature of the region.

Our Councils also provide for multiple reserves, parks, and sports grounds for volunteer organisations alongside community wellbeing programmes that play an important role in shaping local identity and participation.

Health and wellbeing

Hurunui Council has invested in four commercial buildings specifically to house medical clinics across Rotherham, Waikari, Cheviot and Hanmer Springs. The buildings are offered at a reduced rent to 100% community-owned trusts, enabling those remote communities to have access to medical care without having to travel long distances to achieve good health outcomes. This model is not replicated by metro councils.

As part of its ongoing support of equitable health outcomes for

rural communities, Hurunui and Waimakariri Councils have supported the Oxford Community Clinic as well as the establishment of an extended hours and urgent care medical facility in Rangiora. The Waimakariri District Council entered into a partnership with the South Link Education Trust, with the council agreeing to loan fund the project. South Link Education Trust, which is a charitable trust, will be responsible for servicing the loan, meaning there is no cost to ratepayers.

How our proposal responds

Our proposal maintains local voice by designing representation around communities of interest, rather than population alone. As summarised in Table 7, we recognise that local voice is fundamentally about providing communities meaningful input into and influence over decisions that affect them. Communities across North Canterbury have distinct identities, priorities and aspirations, and these differences will continue to be reflected in our future governance arrangements.

Detailed design will be supported by engagement with residents, mana whenua, community organisations, elected members and other stakeholders to ensure future representation arrangements continue to reflect local aspirations and communities of interest.

Table 7: Allocation of decision making responsibilities

Representation	Decision making responsibilities
Overall governance of a new North Canterbury Council	The North Canterbury Council’s governing body would make council-wide decisions. These would include the long-term plan, financial strategy, rating policy, major infrastructure, planning framework, service levels, asset management and regional function settings.
Community representation and local voice	Local voice mechanisms would support place-based input or delegated decision-making. These could include community boards, local area committees, local area plans, service centres or other bespoke mechanisms developed through detailed design. These mechanisms would help shape local priorities, community facilities, parks, reserves, local grants, township matters, local service access and place-making decisions.



Detailed design will test wards, community boards, local area plans, service centres and any bespoke mechanisms needed to protect Hurunui and Waimakariri's communities of interest.

While representation arrangements will ultimately be confirmed through detailed design, the current working assumption is a governing body comprising a Mayor elected at-large, nine councillors representing Waimakariri and five councillors representing Hurunui.

This would create a governing body of 15 elected members and provide a balance between population-based representation and recognition of distinct rural and urban communities of interest.

The North Canterbury Council will expand on existing community board structures (four in Waimakariri and two in Hurunui) to include seven wards and community boards, with the potential to redraw new ward boundaries across existing district boundaries).

Community aspirations will be an important input into detailed design. As the scale of unitary authorities become larger, the importance of community boards that reflect local interests increases. This may mean that North Canterbury Council delegates greater decision-making about local investment and community planning to community boards. Of necessity, however, the powers, decision-rights, and make-up of community boards must be informed by engagement with their communities.

These decisions about delegation are part of normal Council planning, and undertaking them as part of the planning for a unitary authority – and as one of its first considerations on establishment – will help communities understand and identify opportunities to participate in their local government.

How will iwi/Māori participate in decision-making?

We recognise that meaningful Māori participation in local government decision-making is a fundamental requirement of the Local Government Act 2002. Opportunities for Māori to contribute

to decision-making already exist through planning processes, environmental management, infrastructure planning, community development and partnership arrangements with mana whenua. These existing relationships provide a strong foundation for the future North Canterbury Council.

Māori participation is an important component of local voice, but it is distinct from Treaty settlement arrangements and statutory settlement redress. While Treaty matters are addressed separately in Part 4: Treaty settlements, the proposal also recognises the importance of ensuring that Māori can continue to participate effectively in local government decision-making.

Hurunui and Waimakariri currently engage with iwi, hapū and mana whenua through a range of formal and informal arrangements. This includes the Whitiōra partnership arrangement, which will be an important consideration during detailed design and will help inform how existing relationships and participation mechanisms can continue and evolve within a future North Canterbury authority.

Detailed design will identify existing relationship agreements, engagement processes and participation arrangements across the two councils and assess how these should continue under the new governance model. This work would be undertaken collaboratively with mana whenua, iwi, hapū and relevant post-settlement governance entities (PSGEs).

Potential options could include:

- Mana whenua partnership arrangements
- Māori representation mechanisms permitted under legislation
- Committee, advisory or governance arrangements
- Participation in planning and environmental decision-making
- Place-based partnership models
- Other approaches developed jointly through the detailed design process.

The starting assumption is that the new North Canterbury Council will need a geographically-based or mixed representation model, rather than at-large representation alone.

The objective would be to ensure Māori participation remains effective, well-resourced and aligned with the aspirations of mana whenua, while maintaining continuity of existing relationships. Treaty settlement redress, statutory acknowledgements, co-governance arrangements and other settlement obligations would be considered separately through the Treaty settlement assessment in Section 5.

What improves compared with the current state

The current state provides strong local identity and proximity through separate councils. That is an important strength and should not be dismissed. However, it also means North Canterbury-wide decisions are split across separate governance structures, separate planning processes, separate long-term plans and separate interfaces with regional functions.

The proposal would bring council-wide strategic decision-making together into one North Canterbury Council while retaining local voice mechanisms for place-based matters.

This would allow the new authority to make more integrated decisions on planning, infrastructure, asset management, rating, resilience and service delivery while designing local mechanisms to keep decision-making close to communities.

Local voice would not be limited to formal representation. Place-based planning provides ways for community organisations, business groups, mana whenua, social service providers, infrastructure partners, sector groups and stakeholders to work alongside elected members, staff and technical experts to shape priorities and help deliver outcomes for their places and spaces.



This change drives more effectively aligned decision-making, where North Canterbury-wide matters are considered through one set of governance focussed on the needs of North Cantabrians. Local priorities would be shaped through local mechanisms, including place-based plans and community development processes. Regionally significant or cross-boundary functions could be managed through regional or joint arrangements where this provides efficiencies.

What are the trade-offs and risks?

The central trade-off is between achieving greater scale and maintaining strong local representation. While our proposal seeks to retain community identity and local influence, some communities may nevertheless be concerned about reduced visibility in a larger authority. This risk is particularly relevant for rural communities and smaller settlements where proximity to elected representatives is highly valued. Local identity is a significant strength of both Hurunui and Waimakariri and remains a central design principle for further detailed design.

We are also conscious of not creating overly complex local governance structures in an effort to preserve local voice. Local voice arrangements must enhance democratic participation rather than duplicate council decision-making processes.

The proposal manages these risks through retention of community boards, place-based planning, local service access and a representation model that recognises communities of interest as well as population.

Key considerations
• Perceived loss of local influence • Representation of rural and township communities • Maintaining local identity • Avoiding duplication of governance structures

What still needs to be worked through in detailed design?

Future representation arrangements require detailed consideration, including wards, councillor allocation and community board boundaries. The role of place-based planning and community-led decision-making will also be developed further, building on existing community networks and local governance arrangements.

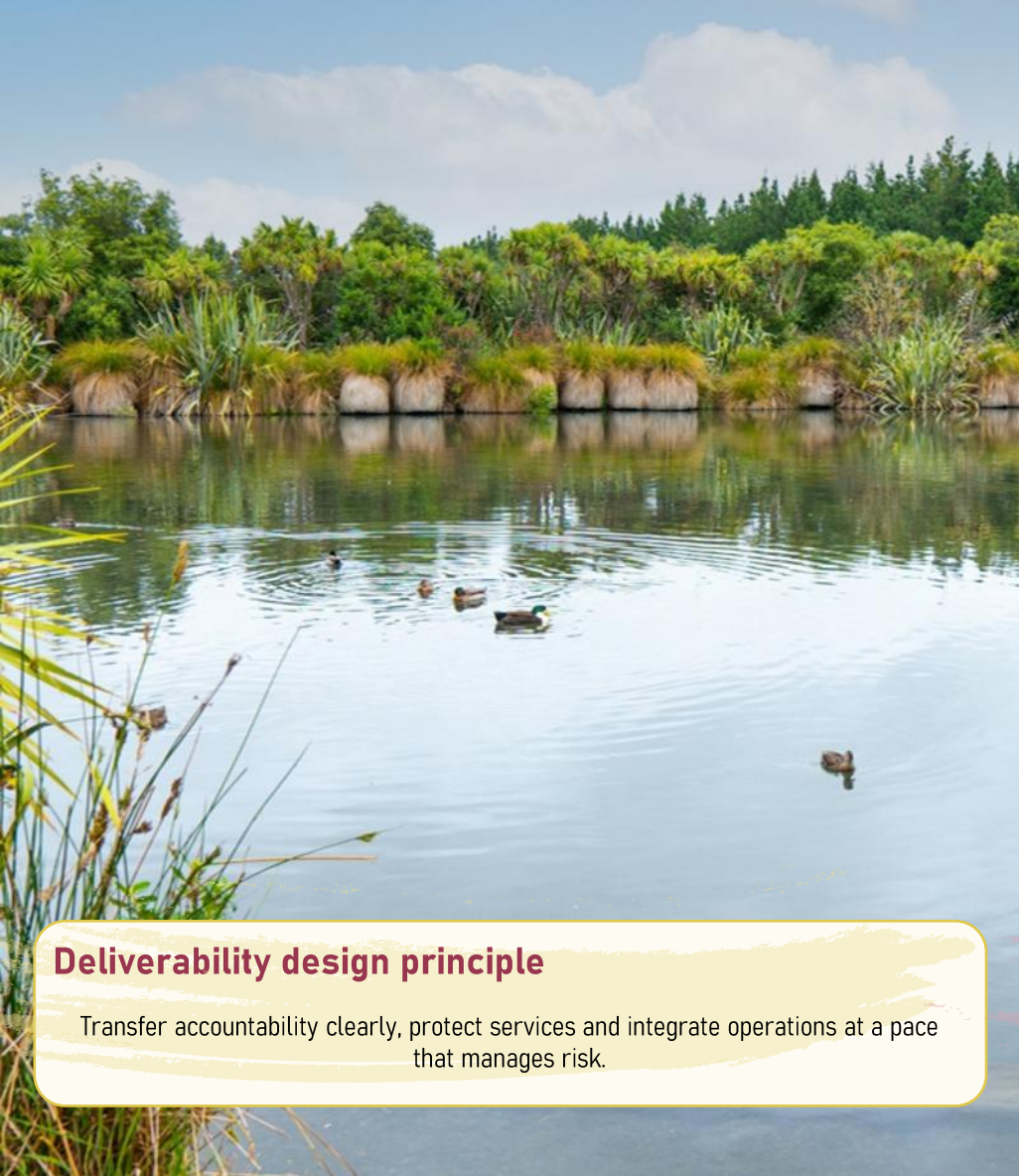
Future Māori participation arrangements will be designed collaboratively with mana whenua rather than predetermined through the proposal process. Community engagement throughout detailed design will be critical to ensuring the final model continues to reflect local identity and local aspirations.

Detailed design priorities
• Representation arrangements • Place-based planning • Community governance mechanisms • Māori participation and local voice

Overall, the proposal strongly meets Criteria 4, subject to detailed representation design. A new North Canterbury Council will combine a Council-wide mandate and organisational scale with geographic representation, community boards, place-based planning and accessible local services. The key detailed-design task is to preserve meaningful local influence without recreating unnecessary governance complexity.

Criteria 5

Four workstreams
Service continuity protected.

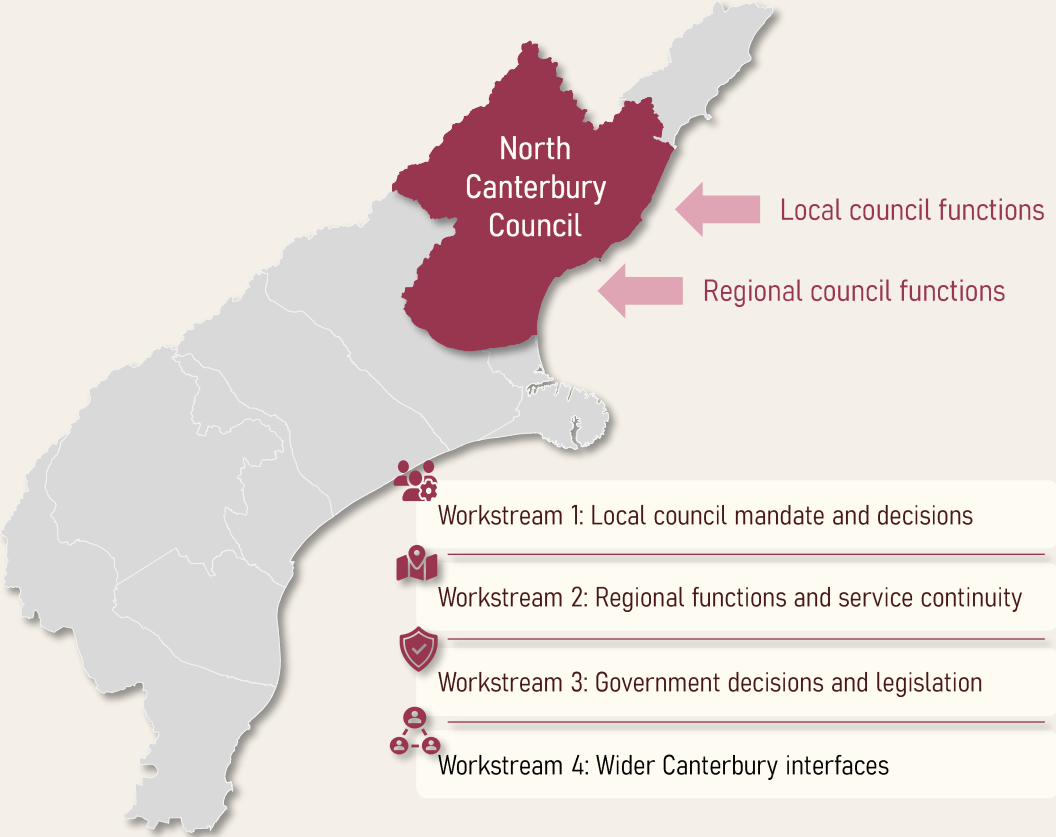


Deliverability design principle

Transfer accountability clearly, protect services and integrate operations at a pace that manages risk.

DRAFT

70 Deliverability



Where scale benefits could arise



Service continuity

Business-as-usual services protected throughout transition and establishment.



Government and regional alignment

Legislation, regional settings and cross-boundary arrangements confirmed before establishment.



Proven foundation

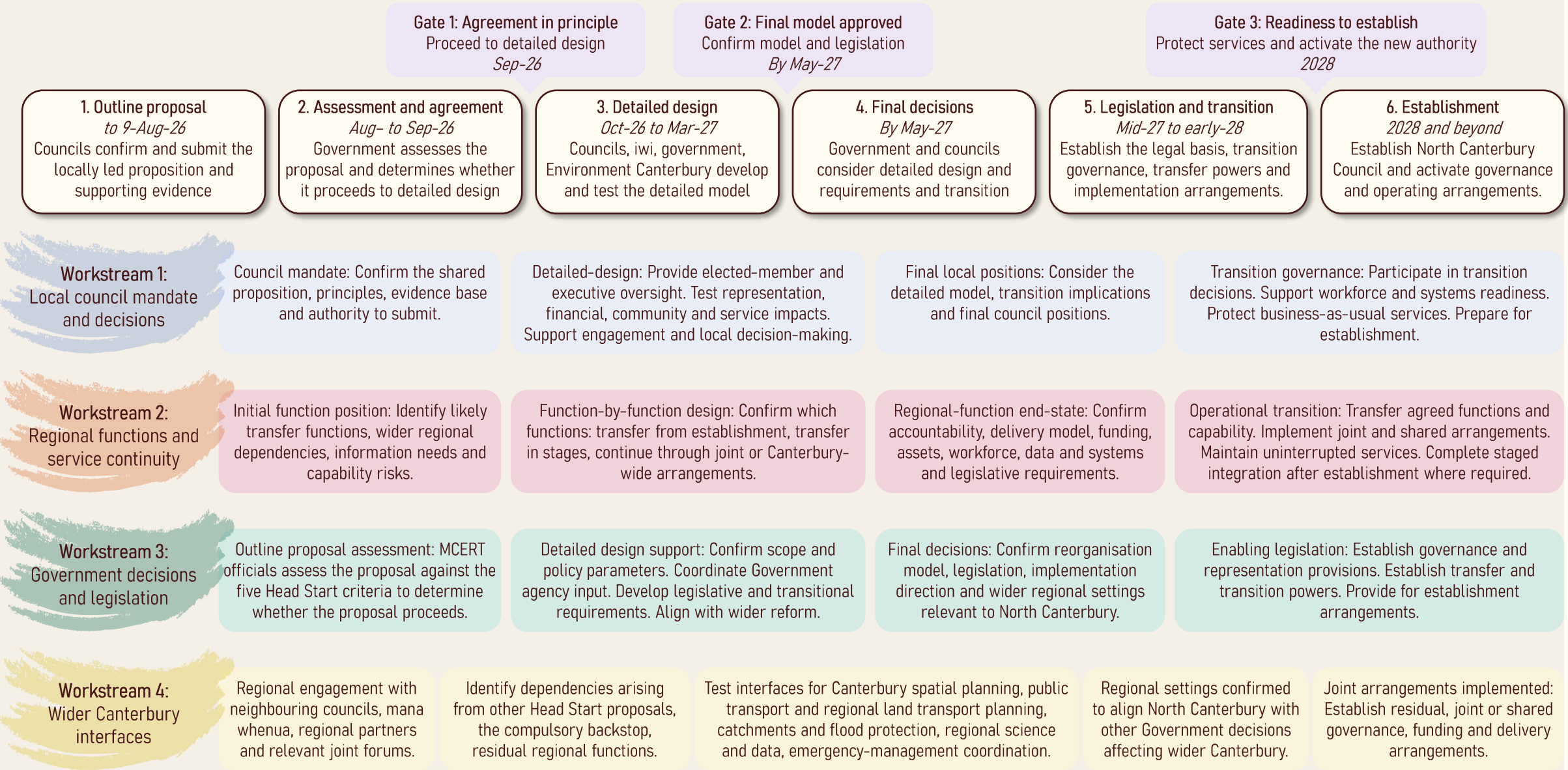
Existing Council capability, collaboration, systems and delivery relationships.



Disciplined detailed design

Governance, representation, finance, workforce, systems, assets, regional functions and Treaty and iwi arrangements.

Figure 13: Indicative North Canterbury Council implementation roadmap



Why is this proposal deliverable?

Our proposal builds on existing relationships, governance arrangements and collaborative delivery models rather than creating entirely new structures. It does this at a scale that is manageable, and where there is already significant integration of service delivery. Hurunui and Waimakariri already work together across economic development, water services, technical support, regional governance and strategic planning, demonstrating a proven ability to collaborate where shared outcomes and economies of scale justify a joint approach.

The new North Canterbury Council will therefore strengthen arrangements that often already exist in practice. This provides a practical foundation for transition, reduces implementation risk and creates opportunities for the progressive integration of functions such as procurement, asset management, specialist technical services, economic development, communications and corporate support activities.

Early integration opportunities:

In the first year, we will leverage existing collaboration across our Councils to deliver better, more integrated, more consistent services, and more effective:

- Consolidated reporting and programme governance
- Shared procurement planning and delivery when needed
- Alignment of selected policies and processes
- Coordinated communications and engagement
- Common data and asset-information standards
- Initial workforce and capability mapping
- Joint preparation for transferred regional responsibilities

By building on established partnerships and operating practices, we will focus our implementation effort on governance integration, organisational design and service optimisation rather than creating entirely new relationships or delivery models. This significantly improves the likelihood of successful implementation within the Government's proposed reform timeframe.

What gives confidence that implementation can succeed?

Existing examples demonstrate that our Councils can successfully collaborate where scale, capability or shared outcomes are beneficial.

Our proposal builds upon proven arrangements rather than creating entirely new relationships.

How would transition be managed?

Transition would occur through a structured detailed design process addressing governance, workforce, systems, finance, regional functions and implementation arrangements. Service continuity would remain a core principle throughout transition.

Evidence in practice

North Canterbury councils already share several operational relationships, technical services and digital platforms, reducing implementation complexity and providing a foundation for future integration:

- **Shared technical capability:** Hydraulic modelling services are already provided across council boundaries, demonstrating practical capability sharing
- **Economic development:** Enterprise North Canterbury already provides a shared economic development platform
- **Emergency response:** The councils have successfully worked together during Canterbury and Kaikōura earthquake response and recovery activities
- **Existing systems and platforms:** The proposal identifies existing shared systems, aligned practices and common

platforms (e.g. DataScape) that can reduce implementation complexity and support transition

- Greater Christchurch Partnership
- Canterbury Mayoral Forum and Chief Executives Forum.

Transition governance

Formal programme governance would be established during detailed design. This will include elected-member oversight, chief executive governance, programme leadership and specialist workstreams, supported by structured engagement with mana whenua, Environment Canterbury, central government, employees, communities and regional partners.

Each phase should conclude with a clear decision gate supported by defined deliverables, costs, risks and readiness criteria. The programme will maintain a single integrated plan covering policy, legislation, governance, finance, people, systems, assets, functions and service continuity.

Consistency with the Local Government Commission Reorganisation Framework

The proposal has been developed using a council-led approach consistent with the Local Government Commission's Reorganisation Guidelines. The proposal:

- Has been developed collaboratively by the affected councils
- Includes community engagement and evidence of community views
- Considers multiple governance options and compares alternatives
- Assesses benefits, costs, risks and trade-offs
- Addresses governance, representation, service delivery and financial implications
- Considers Treaty settlement and iwi arrangements
- Provides a pathway to implementation through detailed design and transition planning.

Consistency with the Future for Local Government Review

Our proposal reflects themes identified through the Future for Local Government Review, including capability, resilience, integrated planning, community wellbeing and partnership with iwi and mana whenua.

Interactions with other programmes

Local Water Done Well is a critical dependency. Hurunui and Kaikōura are establishing a joint water services entity. Waimakariri has progressed its own water services pathway. A new North Canterbury Council will need to align with these arrangements and avoid disrupting agreed or emerging water services delivery models.

Our proposed model will also need to align with planning reform, regional spatial planning, transport planning, regional function decisions and any wider Canterbury reform settings. These matters will be worked through in detailed design and will require central government and regional partner involvement.

Service continuity

Service continuity will be the primary implementation safeguard. Current services and statutory obligations will continue throughout detailed design and transition, including roading, consenting, regulatory services, emergency management, customer services and community-facing activities.

The new North Canterbury Council will assume responsibility for the approved territorial and regional council functions from establishment. Where full operational integration cannot be completed safely by that date, interim, contracted, joint or shared delivery arrangements would be used while accountability remained with the North Canterbury Council.

The same principle will apply to people, systems, information, records, contracts, assets and operational relationships. Day-one

arrangements should prioritise continuity and risk reduction, with broader integration following a controlled and transparent plan.

Government decisions and support required

To successfully progress a new North Canterbury Council through detailed design and through to implementation, our proposal will require support from Government in several areas, including:

- A clear decision on whether the proposal proceeds to detailed design
- Clear policy parameters and scope for detailed design
- Confirmation of the legislative and reorganisation pathway
- Clarity on the transfer of territorial and regional responsibilities, assets, liabilities and powers
- Decisions on Canterbury-wide regional settings and interfaces
- Direction on statutory representation-review requirements
- Coordinated participation by relevant government agencies
- Appropriate transition funding arrangements
- Sufficient time for councils, mana whenua and affected parties to engage on legislation and implementation
- Legal mechanisms for interim, joint and shared delivery arrangements where required.

We require immediate direction on whether planned formal representation reviews are still required, noting that Waimakariri District Council's is currently due in 2027 and planning to undertake these reviews is already underway.

Government support may be needed for transition costs, particularly where systems, staff, functions, records, rating arrangements, legislation and regional function transfers create one-off implementation costs.

Discussions should be held at a Central Government level about the potential for alternative funding arrangements to fund regionally significant functions through a levy or similar.



Crown coordination will be required for Treaty settlement arrangements and engagement with affected PSGEs. The Crown is responsible for upholding Treaty settlements and our proposal will align with that process.

Government decisions will be needed on how our proposal interacts with any wider Canterbury arrangements.

What are the trade-offs and risks?

The principal risk is programme complexity. While our proposal is considered achievable within the Head Start timeframe, successful implementation depends on disciplined governance, clear decision-making and strong project management.

Another likely challenge relates to how systems, people and processes will be integrated across multiple organisations while maintaining business-as-usual service delivery.

Community confidence will depend on services continuing uninterrupted throughout any transition period.

We know that successful delivery of a new North Canterbury Council will depend on ongoing alignment between councils, mana whenua, Environment Canterbury, central government and regional partners. Delays in any one area may create implications for the wider programme.

Key considerations

- Compressed implementation timeframe
- Systems and workforce integration
- Regional function allocation
- Multi-agency coordination requirements

What still needs to be worked through in detailed design?

Detailed design must establish a formal transition programme, governance framework and implementation roadmap.

The final operating model, workforce transition arrangements and organisational structure will need to be developed in partnership with affected staff and organisations.

Financial transition arrangements, service continuity planning and technology integration will also require detailed investigation.

Detailed design priorities

- Transition governance and programme management
- Systems and workforce transition
- Financial transition arrangements
- Service continuity planning

Table 8: Key transition risk and proposed responses

Delivery risk	Proposed response
Compressed programme and legislation timetable	Integrated programme plan, clear decision gates, early legislative drafting and readiness-based establishment decisions
Service disruption	Business-as-usual protections, function-level continuity plans and interim delivery arrangements
Workforce uncertainty and capability loss	Early staff engagement, employment principles, critical-role protection and capability-transfer planning
Systems and data complexity	Full application, interface, data and records assessment before migration
Financial and rating transition	Establishment forecast, transition budget and transparent treatment of debt, assets, reserves and rates
Regional-function discontinuity	Function-by-function transfer plans covering funding, people, assets, systems, data and delivery arrangements
Treaty and iwi discontinuity	Dedicated collaborative workstream and equivalent-effect assessment
Wider Canterbury decisions remain unresolved	Government-led coordination, defined interfaces and contingency arrangements
Water-service misalignment	Explicit dependency management and no assumption of immediate operational integration
Community confidence	Transparent engagement, local service continuity and clear reporting on transition impacts

Overall, the proposal provides a credible basis for meeting Criteria 5. A new North Canterbury Council will build on established local capability, working relationships and systems and would follow a structured pathway through detailed design, legislation and transition. Deliverability is nevertheless conditional on disciplined programme governance, service-continuity safeguards, coordinated government decisions and detailed function-by-function planning for the transfer of regional responsibilities.

The proposed 2028 establishment date is achievable as a planning assumption but remains subject to legislation, detailed design and a formal readiness assessment.

North Canterbury Council

Part 4: Treaty settlements



Treaty, iwi and settlements

- Agree how affected parties wish to participate
- Identify affected PSGEs, papatipu rūnanga and mana whenua
- Identify settlement arrangements, statutory obligations and relationship agreements
- Map arrangements linked to local and regional council functions.

Engage



North
Canterbury
Council



Assess continuity

- Identify what can transfer directly
- Assess where succession or replacement provisions are required
- Test same-or-equivalent-effect requirements
- Identify relationship, resourcing, governance and legislative implications.



Confirm future arrangements

- Direct transfer or statutory succession
- Replicated or replacement mechanisms
- Joint or wider arrangements where appropriate
- Agreed Māori participation and partnership arrangements
- Legislation where required.



Settlement arrangements and statutory obligations preserved



Relationships maintained

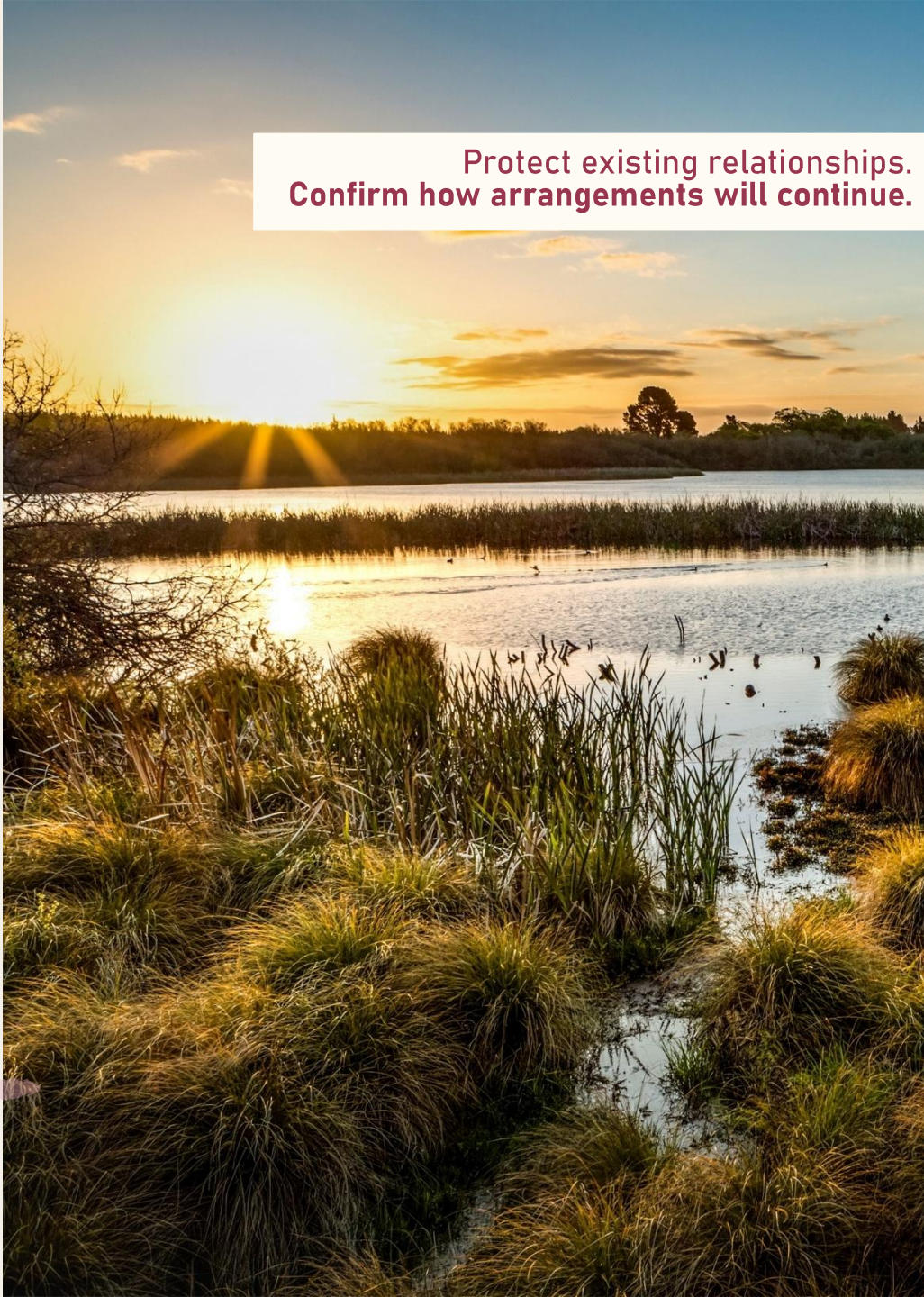


Māori participation designed collaboratively



Regional function interfaces protected

Protect existing relationships.
Confirm how arrangements will continue.



How does the proposal uphold Treaty settlement arrangements and relationships?

Our proposal is designed around a clear principle that no Treaty settlement right, mechanism or relationship will be diminished through implementation of a new North Canterbury Council. Existing Memorandum of Understanding documents, partnership and service agreements would be collaboratively reviewed for the North Canterbury Council to ensure mana whenua aspirations and matters of shared interest are pursued in partnership.

How does the proposal support partnership with iwi and mana whenua?

Mana whenua have provided valuable insight into the development of this proposal, and in-principle support for the formation of a new North Canterbury Council. This proposal and the following stages present an opportunity to further explore how mana whenua aspirations and takiwā boundaries can better align with territorial and regional government functions.

Further consultation with mana whenua regarding river catchments will be undertaken. We acknowledge the request that river catchments be used as the primary determinants of unitary council boundaries within the Ngāi Tahu takiwā, and will explore how this may work in practice.

When established, the new North Canterbury Council will support the proposed establishment of a joint Takiwā/ South Island “Centre of Expertise” entity to provide shared back-office and specialist functions on behalf of new unitary councils.

Evidence in practice

Treaty and iwi matters are design-critical to our proposal. A new North Canterbury Council will bring together territorial authority functions and regional council functions, many of which relate to natural resources, catchments, freshwater, coastal management, environmental monitoring, planning and environmental governance.

The Mahaanui Iwi Management Plan 2013 is an important mana whenua planning document for this work. Prepared collectively by Ngāi Tūāhuriri Rūnanga, Te Hapū o Ngāti Wheke (Rāpaki), Te Rūnanga o Koukourārata, Ōnuku Rūnanga, Wairewa Rūnanga and Te Taumutu Rūnanga, the Plan provides a values-based policy framework for protecting and enhancing Ngāi Tahu values and the relationship of Ngāi Tahu with natural resources across its plan area. Detailed design will identify how its relevant objectives and policies are reflected in future planning, environmental management and regional-function arrangements^[13].

The proposed North Canterbury area sits within the recognised takiwā of Te Ngāi Tūāhuriri and includes important cultural, historical and community connections, including Tuahiwi and Māori Reserve MR873, which continue to play an important role in the identity and governance of the district. These relationships are not peripheral to local government. They are closely connected to local voice, community wellbeing, environmental stewardship and place-based decision-making.

Waimakariri District Council already has an established partnership and services agreement with Whitiōra, representing Te Ngāi Tūāhuriri, supported by regular rūnanga kaitiaki meetings, annual hui and ongoing engagement across planning, infrastructure and community matters. Mana whenua have also provided input and feedback through the early development of this proposal, providing an important foundation for the detailed design phase.

Existing partnership models also demonstrate how local government and iwi can work together effectively. Te Kōhaka o Tūhaitara Trust provides an example of a successful partnership between Waimakariri District Council and Te Ngāi Tūāhuriri, bringing together environmental restoration, biodiversity enhancement, recreation, education and mana whenua values through a shared governance model. The Trust demonstrates how local government functions, community aspirations and Treaty relationships can be integrated in practice.

Te Rūnanga o Kaikōura worked collaboratively with Hurunui District Council to establish a wharehau and ātea within the Queen Mary Hospital building in Hanmer Springs exclusively for use by the Rūnanga. The Mayor and Chief Executive hold monthly meetings with Te Rūnanga o Kaikōura and have established collaborative projects, including a Te Tai O Marokura – Mother and Pepi support clinic available to all residents, and plantings on farmland and riparian areas across the District.

Te kaupapa matua, on behalf of Ngāi Tahu, has significant farming operations and landholdings within both the Hurunui and Waimakariri. Their sustainable farming practices supply products to local processors for export around the world.

Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu comprises multiple Papatipu Rūnanga, each with distinct interests, responsibilities and governance arrangements. This reinforces that engagement cannot be generic and must be designed with affected rūnanga, mana whenua and PSGEs.

The Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act 1998 is a central part of the settlement context. Any reorganisation affecting territorial or regional functions must therefore be designed so that settlement arrangements, statutory obligations and iwi relationships continue with the same or equivalent effect.

Māori participation in local government decision-making is also relevant. Section 81 of the Local Government Act 2002 requires councils to establish and maintain processes that provide opportunities for Māori to contribute to decision-making. This is related to, but distinct from, Treaty settlement redress.

Our principle

Our principle is that no Treaty settlement right, mechanism or relationship should be diminished through the creation of a North Canterbury Council.

Where existing arrangements are affected by reorganisation, they should be transferred, replicated, replaced, jointly governed, retained regionally or supported through legislation so they continue with the same or equivalent effect. This work would include identifying the iwi management plans and other mana whenua planning documents relevant to transferred functions, including the Mahaanui Iwi Management Plan 2013, and assessing how their objectives and policies should inform future planning, governance and delivery arrangements.

This principle would apply to every relevant function allocation decision. It would be especially important for functions involving natural resources, catchments, freshwater, coastal management, environmental monitoring, planning, compliance, biosecurity, flood protection, regional science, data and state of the environment reporting.

How the proposal responds

Our proposal does not seek to determine or amend Treaty settlement redress at outline proposal stage. That would not be appropriate. The Crown remains responsible for Treaty settlements and engagement with PSGEs on any changes required to settlement arrangements.

Instead, our proposal establishes a pathway for detailed design. A dedicated Treaty and iwi workstream would identify affected arrangements, map existing local and regional council obligations and assess how any future governance model can maintain relationship continuity and equivalent effect.

Importantly, the transfer of regional functions would bring additional relationships and responsibilities connected to te ao Māori and mātauranga Māori. Functions relating to freshwater,

catchment management, biodiversity, environmental monitoring, natural hazard management and resource management already incorporate mātauranga Māori, mana whenua values and iwi participation. Detailed design would therefore need to consider not only the transfer of functions themselves, but also the transfer and strengthening of the associated iwi relationships, governance arrangements and decision-making processes that support those functions.

The workstream would be undertaken collaboratively with mana whenua, affected PSGEs, councils, Environment Canterbury and the Crown, ensuring that Māori participation, Treaty obligations and iwi relationships remain integral to the development of the future North Canterbury authority.

Takiwā and regional function interfaces

Council boundaries do not define iwi relationships, mana whenua interests in catchments, waterways, or culturally significant areas. Detailed design will ensure regional functions continue to recognise and respect these relationships and interests.

All regional functions will transfer into the proposed North Canterbury Council. Transfer will preserve equivalent effect, maintain relationship continuity and support effective governance. Where these outcomes may be better achieved through alternative delivery models, such as through shared or joint arrangements, or through legislative mechanisms, those options would also be considered.

Māori participation in local government decision-making

Māori participation would also be a core design matter for the new authority. This is separate from, but related to, Treaty settlement continuity.

Detailed design would identify existing iwi and hapū relationship agreements, advisory arrangements, committee arrangements, planning engagement processes and other mechanisms that currently support Māori contribution to local government

decision-making across Hurunui, Waimakariri and the wider Canterbury region.

The design process would then test how Māori participation should be provided for in the new North Canterbury Council. Options could include Māori representation, committee or advisory arrangements, mana whenua partnership mechanisms, local planning participation mechanisms or other arrangements designed with affected iwi, hapū, PSGEs and mana whenua.

We have been careful to ensure our proposal does not predetermine the final model. The important point at outline stage is that Māori participation is recognised as a design requirement and will be worked through alongside the people and entities directly affected.

What are the trade-offs and risks?

Our proposal is based on a clear principle: no Treaty settlement right, statutory mechanism, governance arrangement or relationship should be diminished through the establishment of a new North Canterbury Council. Because the proposal involves both territorial authority functions and regional council functions, Treaty and iwi considerations are not a peripheral issue. They are a core design requirement that must inform governance, planning, environmental management and service delivery.

The most significant risk is that obligations currently spread across Hurunui District Council, Waimakariri District Council and Environment Canterbury could become fragmented or inadvertently altered during transition. This is particularly relevant for functions relating to freshwater management, catchments, coastal environments, biodiversity, environmental monitoring and natural resource governance, where iwi relationships and settlement arrangements are often closely linked to the function itself rather than the organisation delivering it.

We recognise the importance of our iwi partners' capacity for ongoing engagement. Mana whenua, rūnanga and PSGEs are already participating in multiple reform processes, including planning reform, water services reform and wider Crown engagement. Any detailed design process must therefore be collaborative, appropriately resourced and aligned with Crown-led processes to avoid consultation fatigue and duplication.

These risks can be managed through an equivalent-effect approach, early engagement with affected PSGEs and mana whenua and a dedicated workstream operating alongside the governance, planning and regional functions workstreams. Existing relationships, including partnership arrangements with Te Ngāi Tūāhuriri, regular rūnanga engagement and place-based governance models such as Te Kōhaka o Tūhaitara Trust, provide a strong foundation for this work.

Key considerations

- Preserve Treaty settlement arrangements & statutory obligations
- Maintain continuity of iwi and mana whenua relationships
- Align with Crown-led engagement and settlement processes
- Ensure Māori participation remains strong under any future model

What still needs to be worked through in detailed design?

Detailed design will begin with engagement rather than mapping exercises. The first priority should be confirming with affected PSGEs, rūnanga and mana whenua how they wish to participate in the design process and what principles will guide future governance arrangements. This recognises that Treaty and iwi matters are relationship-based and should not be treated solely as technical workstreams.

We will then need to understand the extent of current obligations and arrangements across territorial authority and regional council functions. This will include existing partnership agreements, statutory acknowledgements, co-governance arrangements, participation mechanisms and planning-related obligations.

The new North Canterbury Council intends to deliver all regional functions currently delivered by Environment Canterbury. The timeframe has not allowed a full investigation of functions, however regionally significant functions such as those related to river catchments, foreshore management and biosecurity hold importance, not just at a local level, but also to mana whenua and central government. There is the opportunity to extend certain functions through shared services or various governance structures to incorporate all interests over a takiwā or the wider South Island.

The detailed design process offers an opportunity where mana whenua, central government and local authorities engage in consultation, cooperation and responsible delivery of regionally impactful functions. Collaborative management of functions such as river management, civil defence and the foreshore, would be delivered in partnership between levels of government and mana whenua. It would also be appropriate to look at the funding mechanisms, where a mix of ratepayer or taxpayer funding (e.g. much the same as the ACC levies system) would fund and protect our future generations, ngā reanga o āpōpō.

Finally, Māori participation within the future North Canterbury Council will be considered alongside, but distinct from, Treaty settlement arrangements. Detailed design will explore how mana whenua can continue to contribute to strategic decision-making,

place-based planning, environmental stewardship and governance in ways that reflect local aspirations and existing relationships.

Detailed design priorities

- Agree engagement process with PSGEs and mana whenua
- Identify affected settlement arrangements and obligations
- Assess equivalent-effect requirements across regional and local functions
- Develop future Māori participation arrangements
- Confirm any legislative or governance mechanisms required

The proposal provides an appropriate basis for progressing Treaty, iwi and mana whenua matters to detailed design. It does not seek to predetermine settlement or participation arrangements, and recognises continuity and equivalent effect as core requirements. Its credibility will depend on accurate identification of all affected parties and arrangements, early and appropriately resourced engagement and clear involvement of the Crown where legislation or settlement provisions may be affected.



Part 5: Risks and trade-offs

Risks, dependencies and safeguards

Our proposal to establish a new North Canterbury Council provides a credible basis for detailed design, but involves material choices, dependencies and transition risks that must be resolved before implementation.

The principal risks relate to local voice, Treaty and iwi arrangements, rating and funding fairness, workforce confidence, regional-function continuity, service continuity and decisions affecting the wider Canterbury system. These matters are not reasons to defer detailed design. They define the work required to test the proposal transparently and determine whether the final model is ready to proceed.

The proposed approach is to:

- Identify each material risk and dependency early
- Assign clear ownership through the detailed-design programme
- Develop specific safeguards and transition plans
- Test impacts with affected communities, mana whenua, staff and delivery partners
- Use formal decision gates and readiness criteria before establishment.

The proposal should proceed only if detailed design demonstrates that local voice is protected, Treaty and iwi arrangements continue with the same or equivalent effect, financial impacts are transparent and services can continue without avoidable disruption.

The key considerations and proposed safeguard approaches are summarised in Table 9.

Our approach to risk

Identify early. Design collaboratively. Protect continuity. Proceed when ready.





Table 9: Key considerations and proposed safeguard approaches

81		
Matter	Principal risk or dependency	Proposed safeguard
Local voice and community confidence	Rural, coastal, township and smaller-community priorities may be perceived as less visible within a larger Council.	Test geographic representation, community boards, place-based planning, local service access and local decision rights.
Treaty and iwi arrangements	Settlement arrangements, statutory obligations, participation mechanisms or relationships could be fragmented or altered during transition.	Establish an appropriately resourced Treaty and iwi workstream with affected PSGEs, papatipu rūnanga, mana whenua, Environment Canterbury and the Crown.
Rating and funding fairness	Communities may face uncertainty about rates, debt, reserves, service levels, assets and cross-subsidy.	Undertake transparent modelling and distinguish Council-wide, local, targeted and activity-specific funding. Develop a staged transition where required.
Workforce and capability	Uncertainty may affect staff retention and specialist or institutional capability may be lost.	Establish employment and transition principles, engage staff early, protect critical roles and map capability required for transferred responsibilities.
Regional-function continuity	Functions may lose capability, data, systems or cross-boundary integration during transfer.	Undertake function-by-function planning covering accountability, funding, assets, people, information, systems, science and delivery arrangements.
Service continuity	Existing services could be disrupted while the new organisation is established.	Adopt business-as-usual protections and use interim, joint, contracted or shared delivery where full operational integration is not ready.
Systems, information and contracts	Common platforms may still contain different configurations, data, interfaces, records and processes.	Complete a full systems, information, records and contracts assessment before migration or consolidation.
Wider Canterbury dependencies	Government decisions, regional settings and other proposals may affect boundaries, legislation or delivery arrangements.	Maintain direct government and regional engagement and design interfaces that can operate under different wider Canterbury outcomes.
Water services	Reform could disrupt confirmed or emerging water-service arrangements.	Treat water services as a dependency and align the Council without assuming immediate operational integration.
Transition costs and timetable	Costs or unresolved decisions could place pressure on business-as-usual services or the proposed 2028 establishment.	Develop an establishment budget and integrated programme plan and make the establishment date subject to legislation and readiness assessment.
Matter	Principal risk or dependency	Proposed safeguard
Alternative governance arrangement: Greater Christchurch proposal	A future Greater Christchurch proposal may include all or part of Waimakariri within a larger metropolitan authority. Although this could support coordination of metropolitan-scale functions, it may weaken the established North Canterbury connection between Waimakariri and Hurunui and reduce the visibility of North Canterbury's rural, growth, infrastructure and community priorities within a substantially larger urban-focused structure. Uncertainty over its scope and timing could also affect boundaries, representation and wider Canterbury service arrangements.	Assess North Canterbury Council on its own merits against the Head Start criteria. Maintain clear evidence of community preferences, communities of interest, organisational and financial scale, local voice and infrastructure and service relationships. Compare alternative models transparently using consistent criteria and maintain effective collaboration with Christchurch and neighbouring authorities on cross-boundary matters regardless of the final governance outcome.



Part 6: Implementation pathway

We confirm that our proposal can be implemented through a disciplined programme aligned with the Head Start timetable. Achieving the proposed 2028 establishment date will depend on government decisions, enabling legislation, detailed design and formal readiness assessment.

The programme would protect business-as-usual services while progressively confirming governance, legal, financial and operational arrangements required to establish the North Canterbury Council.

Our implementation programme will require clear governance, staged decision-making, central government support and strong protection of business-as-usual services. Implementation will be managed through four linked pathways:

1. **Local council decisions:** Hurunui District Council and Waimakariri District Council mandate, shared principles, submission decisions, detailed design decisions and final local positions.
2. **Central government decisions:** Acceptance into detailed design, legislation, transition powers, final Cabinet confirmation, funding support and interaction with any backstop arrangements.
3. **Regional function outcomes:** Transfer all regional functions while ensuring continuity of service delivery and plan for data and science continuity.
4. **Wider Canterbury dependencies:** Other Head Start proposals, Canterbury-wide spatial planning and coordinated service delivery.

Indicative implementation pathway

- **Outline proposal by 9 August 2026:** Hurunui and Waimakariri confirm the shared proposition, supporting evidence, design principles and mandate to submit.
- **Government assessment August to September 2026:** Government assesses the outline proposal and determines whether it proceeds to detailed design.
- **Detailed design October 2026 to March 2027:** Councils, mana whenua, Environment Canterbury, central government and affected partners develop and test the detailed governance, representation, finance, function, workforce, systems and transition model.
- **Final decisions March to May 2027:** Councils and government consider the detailed model, identified impacts, legislative requirements, transition plan and wider Canterbury settings.
- **Legislation and transition 2027 to 2028:** Establish legal powers, transition governance, representation arrangements and mechanisms for transferring responsibilities, assets, liabilities, people, systems, information and contracts.
- **Establishment and staged integration 2028 and beyond:** Establish North Canterbury Council, activate transferred responsibilities and progressively integrate operations while protecting service continuity.

Three formal gates:

- **Gate 1 – Proceed to detailed design:** Government agreement in principle and confirmation of scope.
- **Gate 2 – Approve the final model:** Confirmation of the governance, representation, financial, functional, legislative and transition model.
- **Gate 3 – Ready to establish:** Evidence that governance, people, systems, funding, information, contracts and service-continuity arrangements are ready for activation.

Programme governance

Detailed design should be managed through an integrated programme with elected-member oversight, chief executive governance, dedicated programme leadership and accountable workstream leads.

Engagement with mana whenua, staff, communities, Environment Canterbury, central government and regional partners would be built into the programme rather than treated as a separate end-stage consultation exercise.

Each workstream would have defined outputs, dependencies, risks, costs and decision requirements. The programme would report against a single integrated plan and readiness framework.

We propose that detailed design is managed through a joint programme structure involving elected member oversight, chief executive governance and technical workstreams. The proposed workstreams and focus are summarised in Table 10.

Service continuity principle

The transition will protect business-as-usual services. Roads, consents, compliance, emergency management, customer services, libraries, community facilities, water services interfaces and statutory functions should continue without avoidable disruption. Where functions are not ready to transfer on day one, interim, retained or shared arrangements should be used. The proposed workstreams, focus and stakeholders are summarised in Table 11.

Table 10: Proposed detailed-design and transition workstreams for North Canterbury Council

Workstream	Scope
Governance, representation and local voice	Governing-body model, wards and representation, community boards and delegations, local service access, and transition governance.
Treaty, iwi and mana whenua	Engagement process and participation principles, affected settlement and statutory arrangements, equivalent-effect assessment, Māori participation, and legislative and governance mechanisms
Functions and service continuity	Territorial and regional council responsibilities, direct, joint and shared delivery, service levels, operational continuity, and function-specific transition plans.
Finance, funding, assets and liabilities	Rates and funding, debt and reserves, asset and liability transfer, establishment and transition costs, and regional-function funding.
People and organisation	Target operating model, leadership and organisational structure, workforce transition, employment principles, critical capability and institutional knowledge.
Systems, information, contracts and property	and specialist systems, data and records, customer channels, contracts and procurement, and property and accommodation.
Planning, infrastructure and wider interfaces	Planning-reform interfaces, transport and public transport, water-service dependencies, cross-boundary catchments and flood protection, science, environmental monitoring and emergency management, and wider Canterbury and government interfaces

Table 11: Proposed service continuity workstreams and stakeholders

Workstream	Focus	Stakeholder
Detailed programme setup	Establish formal programme governance, workstreams, resourcing and reporting	Councils
Function mapping	Map all territorial and regional functions	Councils, and Environment Canterbury, CCOs
Treaty settlement workstream	Work with PSGEs, mana whenua and Crown to transfer or preserve arrangements with equivalent effect	Councils, iwi, Crown, and Environment Canterbury
Representation model	Design wards, community boards, Māori representation and local decision rights	Councils, communities, iwi
Finance and rating	Model debt, assets, reserves, rates, harmonisation, transition and affordability impacts	Council finance teams
Transport model	Determine treatment of local roads, public transport, RLTP input and regional transport governance	Councils, and Environment Canterbury, NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi
Catchments and resilience	Design river, flood protection, biosecurity, monitoring, science and hazard management arrangements	Environment Canterbury, councils, iwi
Organisation design	Develop future operating model, leadership structure, staffing transition and employment principles	CEs, HR leads
Systems and service continuity	Plan IT, data, customer service, property, policies and records integration	Council ops teams
Economic development	Develop North Canterbury economic development proposition and transition approach	EDAs, councils
Social and community continuity	Design local service access, community grants, local facilities and wellbeing safeguards	Social services, community groups
Regional alignment	Use Canterbury Mayoral Forum to test interfaces with wider Canterbury arrangements	Mayoral Forum
Government support	Confirm legislative, funding, policy and transition support required	Councils, Government

Matters for detailed design, transition and delivery phases

This outline proposal establishes the case for progressing a new North Canterbury Council to detailed design. Hurunui and Waimakariri have agreed the core proposition of creating one new Council with responsibility for local and regional council functions within North Canterbury.

Detailed design will test and confirm the arrangements required to implement that proposition. It would not simply combine the existing organisations. It would design the governance, operating model, service arrangements and transition pathway for a new Council.

Governance and representation

The current working model provides for one Mayor (elected at-large), geographic representation and community boards. Detailed design and the applicable statutory processes would confirm councillor numbers, wards, boundaries, community board arrangements, delegations, mana whenua participation and other local voice mechanisms.

Community and mana whenua engagement would inform the preferred model before final decisions are made.

Regional functions

A new North Canterbury Council would assume responsibility for the territorial and regional council functions approved for transfer at establishment. Detailed design would identify the assets, funding, workforce, systems, data, statutory powers, relationships and operational capability required for each function.

Where direct operational delivery could not be safely established by day one, or where wider coordination adds value, interim, joint, shared or contracted arrangements would be put in place while the new North Canterbury Council retains clear accountability within its area.



People, workforce and organisational readiness

The transition would require clear workforce principles, early staff engagement and a structured process for transferring critical roles, capability and institutional knowledge. Detailed design should identify key-person risks, specialist capability requirements, employment implications, leadership arrangements and the workforce needed to deliver transferred regional responsibilities.

Staff and organisational integration should be sequenced around service continuity and readiness rather than treated as an automatic early deliverable.

Systems, data and records

Hurunui and Waimakariri's use of a common core enterprise platform provides a useful foundation for integration. It does not remove the need to assess configurations, processes, data standards, interfaces, specialist applications, records, licences, cybersecurity and migration requirements.

Detailed design should establish the day-one system architecture and a controlled integration roadmap, including the additional systems and information required for regional council functions.

Finance, rating and debt

Detailed design would produce a complete establishment forecast and funding model for the North Canterbury Council. This would cover rates, debt, reserves, assets, liabilities, transition costs, service levels, regional-function funding and existing or emerging water-service arrangements. The work should distinguish between arithmetic consolidation of current plans and the actual financial position of the new Council at establishment.

Infrastructure and assets

Established working relationships between our Councils' infrastructure teams provide a useful foundation. Detailed design

would confirm the ownership, transfer and management of assets, liabilities, reserves, contracts, information and funding obligations and would develop an integrated infrastructure and asset-management framework.

Existing water-service arrangements would continue unless changed through their own governance and statutory processes. The new North Canterbury Council should align with those arrangements rather than assume immediate integration.

Detailed design phase

Solidify pre-existing agreements

Communication programmes and public engagement with the public is consistently delivered by both Councils in the lead up to the delivery date for the new North Canterbury Council.

We will ensure appropriately qualified persons are engaged to ensure delivery of regional functions is uninterrupted and levels of service will remain.

Further, we will liaise with neighbouring new unitary entities and those in backstop to ensure we take advantage of efficiencies that could be found in delivery of regional functions via a shared services agreement or council-controlled organisation

Government decisions and support required

During the detailed design phase additional costs will be incurred, such as the integration of enterprise systems, rebranding and staff accommodation. Government support for eligible transition costs would reduce implementation pressure and help protect business-as-usual services. Achieving the proposed 2028 establishment date will remain subject to government decisions, legislation, detailed design and readiness assessment.

When the enabling legislation is drafted by Central Government, it is important to allow sufficient time for submissions from emerging unitary authorities. As the legislation will shape the

future of local government in the long-term, the new North Canterbury Council's elected representatives should be part of the conversation shaping this legislation.

What we need from Government is:

- Timely confirmation that the proposal may proceed to detailed design
- Clear scope and policy parameters
- Confirmation of the legislative and reorganisation pathway
- Mechanisms for transferring responsibilities, powers, assets, liabilities, people, information and contracts
- Decisions on wider Canterbury regional settings
- Direction on statutory representation-review requirements
- Coordinated involvement of relevant government agencies
- Crown involvement where settlement or statutory arrangements may be affected
- Appropriate support for eligible transition costs
- Sufficient time for councils, mana whenua and affected parties to engage on legislation and implementation.

North Canterbury Council

Part 7: Letters of support

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION

IN-CONFIDENCE





24 July 2026

Jeff Millward

Chief Executive Waimakariri District Council

By email: jeff.millward@wmk.govt.nz

Cc: His Worship Dan Gordon, Mayor of Waimakariri District dan.gordon@wmk.govt.nz

Tēnā koe Jeff

Re: Treaty Partnership – Local Government

I am writing to follow up on the letter sent to your Mayor by Kaiwhakahaere Justin Tipa on 14 July 2026, which outlined Ngāi Tahu's initial perspectives on the Local Government Head Start process.

As noted in that letter, Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu (TRoNT) and Papatipu Rūnanga have given considerable thought to these reforms. In our view, the reforms present a once-in-a-generation opportunity to modernise our 1989 local government system and design governance and service delivery arrangements that are genuinely fit for the future of South Island communities. Ngāi Tahu strongly supports all regions within our takiwā submitting a compliant Head Start proposal by 9 August. We acknowledge the tight timeframe and appreciate the significant effort already undertaken to engage with communities and work collaboratively across the region.

The four principles that we believe should help guide the development of Head Start proposals:

1. Local government boundaries should align with the Ngāi Tahu takiwā boundary.
2. River catchments should be the primary determinant of unitary council boundaries within the Ngāi Tahu takiwā.
3. A joint Takiwā/South Island "Centre of Expertise" entity should be established to provide shared back-office and specialist functions on behalf of new unitary councils.
4. Future arrangements should incorporate genuine cooperation between councils and Papatipu Rūnanga.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these principles further as your proposal develops, and to hear your Council's views on whether it supports them.

Please contact Emma Jacka at emma.jacka@ngaitahu.iwi.nz or Sam Broughton at samuel.broughton@ngaitahu.iwi.nz to arrange a time for discussion.

Ngā mihi

Ben Bateman
Chief Executive
Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu

23 July 2026

Dear Minister Watts,

On behalf of Enterprise North Canterbury, we are writing to express our support for the proposed North Canterbury Unitary Council as part of the Government's Head Start Pathway.

Since 2002, Enterprise North Canterbury is jointly owned and funded by the Waimakariri and Hurunui District Councils and exists to support businesses and programmes across both districts. While our office is based in Kaiapoi, our workforce and day-to-day operations extend across the wider North Canterbury region, with staff regularly travelling between communities including Hanmer Springs, Amberley, Oxford, Rangiora and beyond. From where we sit, this is already one region.

Our business community and stakeholders are spread across both Waimakariri and Hurunui, and we do not differentiate between the two in how we deliver our services. Businesses operate across district boundaries, events draw participants and visitors from the entire region and beyond, and our engagement reflects a single, connected economic and community network.

This is also reflected in our workforce. Staff live in one district and work in another, and our recruitment and labour market naturally span across North Canterbury. The same is true for education and daily life. Families in Amberley and Leithfield, for example, often access schooling at Rangiora High School, their closest high school, reinforcing that the community is regional rather than confined to district lines.

In our experience, infrastructure, services, and economic activity do not align neatly with existing council boundaries. Instead, they function as part of an integrated system. At times, the current structure can create unnecessary duplication in processes and engagement, which does not reflect how organisations like ours, or the communities we serve, operate in practice.

A single North Canterbury Unitary Authority would better align with this reality. It would provide a governance model that reflects how people live, work and do business across the region, and support more coordinated planning, service delivery and investment.

We are also seeing continued growth across North Canterbury, alongside increasing demand for business support, infrastructure, and events. This growth further reinforces the need for a cohesive and aligned approach to governance.

Based on our direct and existing experience operating across North Canterbury, we support the proposed North Canterbury Unitary Authority as the governance model that best reflects how this region already functions.

Yours sincerely,

Heather Warwick,
CEO, Enterprise North Canterbury

Clare Giffard,
Chair, Enterprise North Canterbury

office@enterprisenc.co.nz
03 327 3135
northcanterbury.co.nz

143 Williams Street,
PO Box 80 Kaiapoi,
7644

Connect,
Invest &
Grow

28th July 2026

Dear Minister Watts,

On behalf of the Community Wellbeing North Canterbury Trust, I am writing to express support for the proposed North Canterbury Unitary Council as part of the Government's Head Start Pathway. Since 1988, Community Wellbeing has supported families, whānau and individuals across both the Waimakariri and Hurunui districts through free, community-based services focused on resilience and wellbeing.

The people we support live across the region, not within council boundaries. Individuals and whānau access services where they are needed, and our approach is to respond flexibly across both districts without distinction. Our Trust deed and corresponding service delivery reflects a connected community where needs, challenges and support networks naturally span North Canterbury.

This is also reflected in how we work alongside others. We collaborate closely with iwi, health providers, schools, and community organisations across both districts to ensure people receive the right support. This level of coordination reinforces the reality of a shared regional system.

From a funding perspective, our various service delivery contracts with Te Whatu Ora, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Justice and Oranga Tamariki show that resources are allocated to reflect this shared community. We do not want to see funding directed to one district in isolation when, in reality, communities across Waimakariri and Hurunui often have similar needs and are closely connected geographically. A more unified approach would support greater efficiency and ensure funding is used where it can have the most impact across the region.

A single North Canterbury Unitary Authority would better reflect the lived experience of our communities. It would support more aligned decision-making and enable a more integrated approach to planning and service delivery, ultimately strengthening outcomes for families and whānau.

We are seeing continued growth across North Canterbury, alongside increasing demand for social and community services. This reinforces the importance of a coordinated and regionally aligned approach to governance.

Given our role supporting communities across both districts, we consider a single North Canterbury Unitary structure to be the most appropriate model for enabling effective, coordinated outcomes for the region.

Yours sincerely,

Deirdre Ryan
Chief Executive
Community Wellbeing North Canterbury Trust

OFFICES

www.wellbeingnc.org.nz

- 200 King Street, Rangiora, PO Box 409, Rangiora, 7440
- Kaiapoi Community Centre, 24 Sewell Street, Kaiapoi
- Karanga Mai Early Learning Centre, Robert Coup Rd, Kaiapoi

P 03 310 6375
P 0800 88 34 88
P 03 327 8315

29 July 2026

Minister Watts and Minister for Local Government

C/- Mr S Hart

Via email: simon.hart@wmk.govt.nz

Dear Minister,

Letter of support — North Canterbury position under the Head Start pathway

Thank you for the opportunity to confirm MainPower New Zealand Limited's support for the North Canterbury position under the Government's Head Start for Simplifying Local Government pathway. MainPower is pleased to record its strong support for Hurunui and Waimakariri remaining part of North Canterbury under any future local government arrangements, and for the North Canterbury proposal these Councils are developing together. We understand that Kaikōura is currently aligning with Marlborough while retaining the flexibility to join a North Canterbury arrangement in the future and we would warmly welcome that outcome should it eventuate.

MainPower has served the communities of North Canterbury for around 100 years, tracing our origins to the North Canterbury Electric Power Board. We are a community-owned organisation, the shares in MainPower are held by the MainPower Trust on behalf of the qualifying customers who live within our district. Our network extends from north of the Waimakariri River across the Waimakariri, Hurunui and Kaikōura districts, delivering electricity to more than 46,000 connections and supporting the approximately 90,000 people who call North Canterbury home. Our purpose, our ownership and our accountability are therefore rooted entirely in this region.

We note that the footprint proposed for a North Canterbury arrangement – the Waimakariri and Hurunui districts – sits wholly within the electricity network MainPower has served for a century. Approximately 95% of our customers lie within these two districts, so a Waimakariri–Hurunui arrangement would bring local governance and our regional infrastructure into very close alignment. That alignment is not a coincidence of geography; it reflects how these communities live, work, travel and connect as one region. Aligning local governance with the natural boundaries of the communities it serves, and with the infrastructure networks that underpin them, supports coherent and efficient long-term planning for the essential services North Canterbury residents rely on.

We were encouraged, though not surprised, by the strength of the community's voice in the Council's recent engagement. Of the approximately 1,700 residents who responded, 90.8% identified Waimakariri as part of the wider North Canterbury community, and a North Canterbury unitary model attracted clear majority support as the preferred option. This mirrors what we see every day: a distinct and enduring North Canterbury identity, with strong communities that value local representation and a genuine local voice in the decisions that affect them.

mainpower

MAINPOWER NEW ZEALAND LIMITED
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PO Box 346, Rangiora 7440
0800 30 90 80

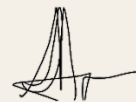
As a long-term infrastructure provider, MainPower plans and invests across multi-decade horizons. Our ongoing programme of network upgrades, renewable generation and resilience works is designed around the growth, land use and economic development of North Canterbury. Close coordination between local government, infrastructure providers and economic development partners delivers better outcomes for our shared customers: more resilient networks, better-sequenced growth, and a stronger, faster response when our communities face major storms and other natural hazards.

Our connection to North Canterbury also runs deeper than the network alone. Through the MainPower Trust, the value we create is returned to the qualifying customers and communities we serve, and each year we invest directly in the wellbeing of the region through community funding, scholarships, biodiversity support and local energy initiatives. These commitments are made with North Canterbury in mind as a single, coherent community. A governance model that keeps Waimakariri, Hurunui and, potentially, Kaikōura together would reinforce that shared sense of place and purpose and make it easier for organisations like ours to plan, partner and invest with confidence for the long-term benefit of the people who live here.

MainPower is committed to working constructively alongside the Council, our fellow North Canterbury infrastructure providers and the wider community to support strong outcomes for the region. We are proud to lend our support to a proposal that keeps North Canterbury's communities, services and identity together, and we would be pleased for this letter to be included in the Council's proposal to the Government.

For the reasons set out above, MainPower fully supports the Waimakariri District Council's position that Waimakariri should remain part of North Canterbury under any future local government arrangements. We wish the Council every success as it progresses its submission, and we look forward to continuing to serve and strengthen our North Canterbury communities for the next hundred years.

Ngā mihi nui



Sean Horgan
Chief Executive
MainPower New Zealand Limited

Minister Simon Watts
Minister of Local Government
Email: S.Watts@ministers.govt.nz

Dear Minister,

Support for a North Canterbury Unitary Council Proposal

On behalf of the Board of Trustees of the North Canterbury Sport & Recreation Trust, I am pleased to provide this letter, in strong support of Waimakariri and Hurunui District Council's proposal for the establishment of a North Canterbury Unitary Council.

About the North Canterbury Sport & Recreation Trust (NCSRT)

Established in 1982, the NCSRT is a charitable trust dedicated to improving the wellbeing of our communities through participation in sport, recreation and physical activity. Formed through a partnership between local government, education and community leaders, the Trust has grown into the region's most significant providers of community sport, recreation, health and wellbeing services.

Today, our purpose remains: to create opportunities that improve the lives of North Cantabrians by making physical activity accessible, inclusive and affordable for everyone.

As an organisation that has served the communities of North Canterbury for more than four decades, we are uniquely placed to comment on how this region functions in practice. Our approach to servicing our community is simple and consistent: North Canterbury is already one connected region. The organisations we work with, the people we serve, the partnerships we maintain, and the services we deliver extend seamlessly across the Waimakariri, Hurunui and Kaikōura districts. While administrative boundaries may exist on paper, they do not define the way our communities operate, participate, volunteer, travel or engage with recreation and sport. The NCSRT operates across North Canterbury as a single, integrated region, reflecting the way our communities naturally live, work and connect.

Every year, thousands of people participate in NCSRT programmes and services, which are delivered across the entire North Canterbury region, stretching from the Waimakariri River through the Hurunui District and north to Kaikōura.

We support tamariki through fundamental movement and school coaching programmes, rangatahi through youth sport initiatives, adults through recreation and fitness programmes, and older adults through active ageing initiatives that help maintain independence, health and social connection. Increasingly, our work also supports wider community health outcomes by delivering programmes designed for people with specific needs and those living with long-term health conditions.

The NCSRT delivery model was founded on, and continues to reflect, the way North Canterbury communities naturally interact. We do not separate programmes, services or investment according to district boundaries. Instead, we plan, resource and deliver across the wider region as one interconnected community. These include NCSRT stakeholders such as schools (all primary, high schools and area schools), sporting clubs, community organisations and local businesses, domiciled across the wider North Canterbury area.

In addition to managing five independent fitness facilities, NCSRT also manage MainPower Stadium, a 6000msq 4-court sports facility and community hub, on behalf of the Waimakariri Council. This facility serves as a regional sporting and community service centre, attracting participants, Spectators, volunteers, clubs and event organisers from throughout North Canterbury..



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The venue hosts regional sporting competitions, school events, community programmes and major events that services the wider North Canterbury community. The success of these events relies upon collaboration between organisations, volunteers and participants from both the Waimakariri and Hurunui districts, demonstrating the strong regional identity that already exists.

NCSRT facilities and programmes operate continuously throughout the year. Our staff travel throughout North Canterbury every day, delivering programmes, supporting clubs, meeting with schools, working alongside councils and engaging with community organisations. These daily activities routinely cross district boundaries, reflecting the practical reality that our communities are interconnected through education, employment, recreation and social networks, not geographical, delineation.

The partnerships that underpin our success also demonstrate this regional approach.

One example is our long-standing partnership with MainPower, the electricity distribution network, with its head office in Rangiora. As a naming sponsor of several of our long-term, foundational programmes, and MainPower Stadium, the NCSRT / MainPower partnership is strengthened by our shared regional footprint, with both organisations investing in the same communities, people and places throughout North Canterbury.

In fact, many of our stakeholders – sponsors, funders, schools, sporting organisations, health providers and community agencies – are located throughout North Canterbury and work collaboratively without regard for local government boundaries. These relationships have been built over many years because there is a shared understanding that North Canterbury functions as one community with common aspirations and shared cultural practices, with community at their centre.

From an organisational perspective, managing our services across multiple territorial authorities can create unnecessary administrative complexity. Different processes, priorities and planning frameworks require additional time and resources despite our services operating within what is effectively one integrated North Canterbury sub-region.

A unitary council structure has the potential to simplify collaboration, improve strategic planning and provide greater certainty for organisations like ours that work across both districts every day. Most importantly, it would better reflect how our communities already live, move and connect.

North Canterbury – a distinct identity

North Canterbury has developed a distinct regional identity that has been shaped over many generations. While experiencing significant population growth, particularly following the Canterbury earthquakes, the region has retained the character, values and sense of community that have long defined it.

The community infrastructure and connections that sports provide has grown and evolved through local leadership, volunteerism and community investment, resulting in places that have been built by the community, for the community.

We believe preserving North Canterbury's independent identity is essential. The region has developed its own culture, relationships and community-led approach to growth that differs significantly from Christchurch.

A governance model centred on North Canterbury would recognise and protect this identity while supporting the continued development of communities that have evolved together over generations.

The North Canterbury region's strength lies in its network of connected rural communities and thriving satellite towns. Although each township has its own unique history and character, they are united by shared values, common aspirations and longstanding relationships that extend across the wider North Canterbury area. Residents regularly travel between these communities for work, education, recreation, healthcare and social connection, reinforcing the reality that North Canterbury already functions as one cohesive region while maintaining the individuality of its local communities.

North Canterbury is also one of New Zealand's fastest-growing regions, supported by a diverse and resilient economy built on agriculture, tourism, construction, retail, manufacturing and professional services. This growth has increased demand for infrastructure and community services, particularly those supporting physical health, mental wellbeing and social connection. The NCSRT has responded by developing programmes that reflect the unique needs and culture of North Canterbury communities. These include toddler and youth gymnastics, Green Prescription programmes, cancer rehabilitation exercise classes, social connection initiatives, home education physical activity programmes, special needs and para sport opportunities, walking netball, Silver Fitness classes and a wide range of affordable community fitness programmes. These initiatives have been designed specifically around the needs of North Canterbury residents and recognise the importance of accessible recreation in supporting healthy, resilient rural communities.

The strength of this regional identity is reflected in the Trust's membership across North Canterbury. More than 4,300 people actively use our network of community fitness facilities, including approximately 1,600 members at Rangiora Fitness Centre, 1,200 at Stadium Fitness Centre, and around 500 members at each of our satellite Fitness Centres, in Kaiapoi, Oxford and Amberley. Our members do not view these facilities as belonging to separate districts; they see them as part of one regional network that supports their health and wellbeing wherever they choose to live, work, play or travel within North Canterbury.

A United North Canterbury – a Working Mode

North Canterbury has developed a distinct regional identity that has been shaped over many generations. While experiencing significant population growth, particularly following the Canterbury earthquakes, the region has retained the character, values and sense of community that have long defined it.

Practical Example 1 – MainPower Primary School Coaching Programme

The MainPower Primary School Coaching Programme provides one of the clearest examples of North Canterbury operating as a single region. Delivered by eight full-time coaches, the programme reaches more than 7,500 children annually across over 42 primary schools from Kaiapoi through to Kaikōura. Schools are selected based on community need and educational partnerships rather than district boundaries.

Coaches travel continuously throughout the region, often delivering sessions in both the Waimakariri and Hurunui districts within the same day. Schools collaborate with one another, share resources and participate in common sporting pathways without regard for local authority boundaries.

From the perspective of participating schools, students and whānau, the programme is simply a North Canterbury initiative. There is no practical distinction between districts in its delivery or participation, demonstrating that the region already functions as one interconnected community.

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Practical Example 2 – Regional Fitness Membership and Programme Participation

Our fitness network provides another practical demonstration of this regional approach. A single membership gives individuals access to all five North Canterbury Sport & Recreation Trust fitness centres, regardless of where they live. It is common for members to train at one facility near home, another near work, or while travelling throughout the region, perhaps for their family's sport.

Someone living in Amberley may regularly use the Rangiora or Stadium Fitness Centres, while a Kaiapoi resident may attend classes in Amberley. Members choose facilities based on convenience, programmes and personal preference rather than district boundaries. This flexibility reflects the daily movement of people throughout North Canterbury and reinforces that our communities already operate as one connected region.

Practical Example 3 – Community Wellbeing Programmes

Many of our community wellbeing programmes naturally draw participants from across North Canterbury. Initiatives such as Blue Brothers, which supports men recovering from cancer, to the Reactivate programme for socially isolated individuals, Silver Fitness classes, gymnastics programmes and adaptive recreation opportunities regularly welcome participants from both the Waimakariri and Hurunui districts.

Health, wellbeing and community connection already transcend administrative boundaries. From the perspective of those who participate in our programmes, North Canterbury functions as one community, and our service delivery reflects that reality every day.

An Economic and Political Powerhouse of Its Own

Over recent decades, North Canterbury has evolved into a strong and increasingly self-sufficient region with its own economic identity, employment base and community infrastructure. While Christchurch has historically been the primary commercial centre for many residents, this relationship has changed significantly, particularly following the Canterbury earthquakes and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Population growth, changes in working patterns and substantial investment in local infrastructure have enabled North Canterbury to develop its own thriving business community and employment opportunities. Increasing numbers of residents now work from home, operate businesses within North Canterbury, or are employed by organisations that primarily service the North Canterbury market.

In fact, Enterprise North Canterbury's most recent statistics state that only 32% of Waimakariri workers commute to Christchurch for work, whereas 66.5% of the working population choose to work within the district.

This economic transformation has been accompanied by significant commercial investment throughout the region. National retailers, service providers and professional businesses have established themselves in centres such as Rangiora and the rapidly expanding Pegasus-Ravenswood growth area in response to increasing demand. Over the past 14 years, North Canterbury has experienced a significant increase in businesses operating within the region.

As one of North Canterbury's largest community organisations, the NCSRT has adapted to this growth and we can always see a need to expand many of our services.

Many local businesses actively support our programmes through sponsorship, partnerships and community investment because they recognise the value of investing directly in the communities where they operate and employ local people.

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Regional, Funding does not recognise the NC demand

The Trust's experience with regional sport funding provides a practical example of current wider regional delivery models being at the detriment of the North Canterbury community.

This can be seen with Sport Canterbury, who receives central government funding to support sport and recreation across the wider Canterbury region. Despite NCSRT delivering dozens of programmes within their catchment area that directly benefit thousands of North Canterbury residents each year, the Trust receives no operational funding from Sport Canterbury towards these services. While this reflects the priorities and funding framework of that organisation, it also illustrates the challenges that can arise when the needs of a rapidly growing sub-region competes within a much larger metropolitan catchment.

As a result, the Trust has had to strategically diversify its funding strategy, seeking support from organisations whose priorities more closely align with the needs and aspirations of North Canterbury communities. This approach has enabled us to continue investing in programmes that respond directly to local demand rather than relying on funding models designed to serve a much broader region.

The Waimakariri River continues to represent more than a geographical feature; it often functions as a practical dividing line in the perception of many organisations based in Christchurch. North Canterbury is frequently viewed as being "over the Waimak"-a separate area that sits beyond the city's immediate focus. While some residents cross the river every day, regional decision-making and investment do not always follow the same pattern.

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Our extensive experience suggests that this perception can influence where attention, resources and funding are directed, reinforcing the importance of governance arrangements that recognise North Canterbury as a distinct region with its own priorities, opportunities and growing community needs.

In Summary

For more than 40 years, the North Canterbury Sport & Recreation Trust has been privileged to support the health, wellbeing and social connectedness of our region.

Throughout that time, we have witnessed continued growth in regional identity, collaboration and shared purpose. The relationships between our communities have strengthened naturally and the way we deliver services has evolved accordingly.

Our experience is that North Canterbury already operates as a single functional region.

Accordingly, the North Canterbury Sport & Recreation Trust fully supports the proposal to establish a unified North Canterbury Unitary Council.

We believe this proposal recognises the existing realities of our communities, aligns governance with how services are already delivered, and provides an opportunity to strengthen regional leadership for future generations.

Thank you for considering our position on this matter, and our experience as a long-standing regional community-focused organisation. We would welcome the opportunity to provide any further information that may assist with your assessment.

Yours sincerely,



Michael Sharpe | msharpe@sportstrust.org.nz
Chief Executive Officer | North Canterbury Sport & Recreation Trust



Tony Hall
Trustee | North Canterbury Sport & Recreation Trust



Don Robertson
Chairperson, Trustee | North Canterbury Sport & Recreation Trust

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Guidance for Head Start outline proposals

Simplifying Local Government



New Zealand Government
Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa

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Purpose

The purpose of this guidance is to support councils to develop outline proposals for Head Start. The content in your outline proposal will help central government assess alignment with the Head Start pathway, and enable the Government to make decisions on which proposals should be accepted into the next phase of the Head Start pathway for detailed proposal development.

This Guidance builds on the Head Start [Policy Document](#) and should be read alongside that document.

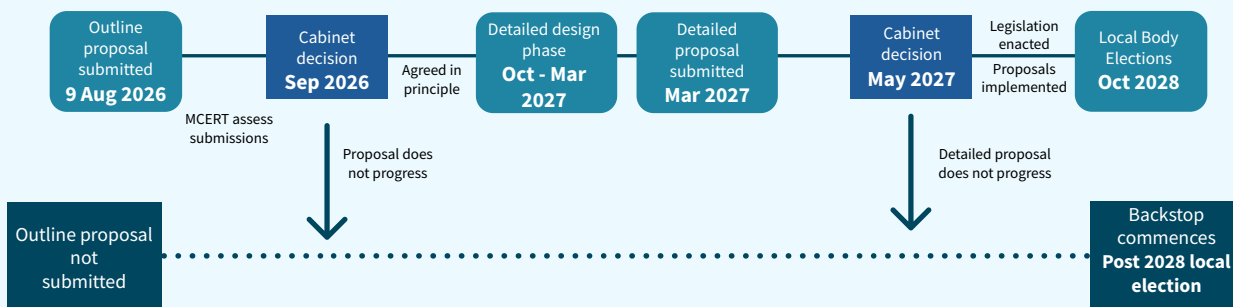
Who will assess proposals and how will they assess them?

Outline proposals will be assessed by Ministry of Cities, Environment, Regions, and Transport officials against the agreed criteria, recognising that:

- outline proposals are intended to be ‘light touch’, high-level, and strategic
- there are no strict content requirements (guidance is a guide)
- there are no set thresholds for meeting each of the criteria; and
- Ministers are prepared to make trade-offs when considering outline proposal assessments.

For example, while outline proposals should address all criteria, one might score well against ‘supports the new planning system’ and ‘economies of scale’ assessment criteria, whereas another might score well against those for ‘maintains local voice and deliverability’. Outline proposals will be assessed by how well they meet the criteria as a whole.

Cabinet will make final decisions on which outline proposals are agreed in principle for the detailed design phase. Detailed proposals approved by Cabinet will be given effect through primary legislation.



Eligibility

Who can submit an online proposal?

Any two or more territorial and/or unitary authorities (except for Auckland Council) including cross-boundary groupings, may submit an outline proposal. To ensure the right scale, proposals must represent a majority of either the:

- directly affected territorial authorities; or
- population across directly affected areas.

A directly affected territorial authority is one that is proposed to be part of the creation of a unitary authority or authorities. It may or may not be a party to the proposal.

A cross-boundary grouping could include a territorial authority from a neighbouring region or a proposal that divides existing boundaries within a region.

Outline proposals cannot be submitted by minority groupings, individual territorial authorities or individual unitary authorities, regional councils, individuals or other organisations. However, the support for or contribution to an outline proposal by a regional council or other organisation can be highlighted.

For examples of how eligibility criteria may work, see page 7 of the [Head Start Policy Document](#)

What types of reorganisations can be proposed?

Outline proposals must provide for the amalgamation of at least two territorial authorities or unitary authorities into a new unitary authority.

The most straightforward approach is for all territorial authorities in a region to combine to form a single unitary authority, which takes on the functions of the regional council.

We will also consider outline proposals for subregional unitary authorities and potential cross-boundary proposals, where:

- existing territorial authorities are amalgamated, and regional council functions are transferred

- the proposed arrangements would result in fewer local authorities overall
- the proposed arrangements would deliver clearer accountability and effective delivery of key functions, including regional planning, transport, and catchment management.

More than one unitary authority in a region is only likely to be approved if:

- the region is geographically large, contains a large number of territorial authorities and has significantly complex issues; and
- the proposal clearly meets the criteria and doesn't lead to the fragmentation of service delivery for key regional functions where collaboration or integration is required.

Developing your outline proposal

What level of detail is expected?

- Provide a high-level, strategic outline of your proposal only. Focus on the core ideas, key trade-offs, and what still needs to be worked through.
- Make the case for change, setting out your evidence base. We don't expect you to generate new evidence for the proposal or undertake detailed modelling but rely on information you already have available.
- For each criterion, tell us: how does the proposal meet the criteria, why it is better than the current state, what are the trade-offs and risks, and what still needs work.
- Detailed design will occur in the next phase (see Finalising Proposals section). Signpost in your outline proposal what are your priorities for further work against each criterion.
- Provide the best information you have available that makes the strongest case for your proposal being accepted into the detailed phase.

We are testing whether your proposal is workable in practice – not whether it is fully designed.

Subregional proposals

The Government is open to considering subregional outline proposals that improve outcomes for the region as a whole.

Officials will consider the merits of a subregional proposal within the context of the broader region when assessing it against the assessment criteria.

For subregional proposals, we are looking for information on the following questions:

How does the proposal benefit the region as a whole?

- Will the governance and delivery of regional services be improved?
- How will unitary authorities created through the Head Start process work with the rest of the region to deliver regional planning outcomes and regional services, such as catchment management?
- Does the proposal provide better outcomes for particular communities of interest or labour market areas?
- How else does a subregional approach make sense for your region in contrast to a single regional unitary authority?

What is the impact on councils not included in the proposal?

- How do you propose regional functions and services will continue to be delivered for councils not included in your proposal?
- Are there any communities that are likely to be negatively impacted by the proposal through things like changes in regional service provision or higher rates burden to meet the costs of existing regional functions (eg, flood protection infrastructure such as stopbanks, nationwide biosecurity, etc.)?
- Does the outline proposal leave the door open for other councils to join at a later stage?

Any subregional unitary authorities formed through Head Start must continue with spatial planning at the regional level at the time of enactment of the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill. The Bills, as introduced, allow for subregional plans to feed into the broader regional spatial plan where this is necessary.

What do we expect outline proposals to cover

How does the proposal meet the eligibility criteria?

Confirm your proposal is eligible to be considered. Specifically:

- identify how the proposal meets the eligibility criteria covered in the previous section
- identify the territorial authorities and/or unitary authorities directly affected by the proposal in the regional or cross boundary area
- confirm which territorial authorities and/or unitary authorities support the proposal
- explain what role affected territorial authorities or the regional council have played in the development of the proposal; and
- highlight the position of directly affected territorial authorities that are yet to decide on or don't support the proposal, or if a

regional council supports the proposal.

What is the proposed structure and governance arrangements?

We are looking for a high-level description of your proposed local governance structure and arrangements. This should focus on how local governance structures within your region will be consolidated and the division of roles and responsibilities. For example:

- a regional unitary authority
- a region consisting of more than one (two or three) subregional unitary authorities
- a subregional proposal
- any territorial or unitary council being combined
 - local representative and decision-making bodies, such as local boards, community boards, or any new models for local representation and decision-making
 - intended regional spatial plan governance arrangements; or
 - for subregional proposals, how the authorities will work together to govern and deliver key regional services (eg, transport and catchment management, etc.) through joint committees, council-controlled organisations, or other options for regional collaboration.

Assessment Criteria

Supports the new planning system



What we're asking for

To assess outline proposals against this criterion, officials will consider how proposals show clear support for implementing the new planning system – including progress on spatial and natural environment plan development – and avoid or minimise disruption to that work.

At a high level – how will your proposal make the new planning system easier to deliver and operate – not harder - and how you will ensure continuity throughout the process through the arrangements you are putting in place?

How does this structure help the new system work in practice?

What we need to know

We are looking for information on the following questions:

How does this help the new planning system work better?

- How does it support delivery of a stable regional spatial planning process?
- Does it make coordination easier (eg, fewer plans, fewer layers of governance)?

What are the trade-offs and risks?

- Could this disrupt or complicate delivery of the new planning system?
- How will these risks be managed?
- Explain how your proposal reflects integrated catchment management. If an existing catchment is split, in your proposal describe the implications, risks, and potential mitigations.

What still needs to be worked through?

- What still needs to be resolved in your detailed design phase?

What does 'good' look like?

- Focus on practical impacts for the planning system.
- Steps or processes that could be applied to support the planning reforms. Focus on setting out the initial steps needed to support the development of a stable regional spatial plan process.
- Clear, simple explanation of why this helps.

What we don't expect in an outline proposal

- Detailed plan or process design (natural environment plans, land use plans - detailed committee structures, formalised delegations or formed governance arrangements for plan making, etc).
- Overly technical planning detail, 'process agreements' for regional spatial plans, or detailed programmes for plan delivery. You may, however, indicate that these – along with any specific governance arrangements – will be developed in a later step and may require more detailed provision in the detailed design phase.

For an outline proposal, any reference to a 'region' in the Planning Bill or Natural Environment Bill applies to the region that applied at the time those Bills were introduced (not any new regional boundary proposed through an outline proposal).

Irrespective of Head Start outcomes, councils must move at pace following enactment of the Bills to prepare regional spatial plans upon current boundaries.

System Shifts for local government in the Planning Reforms

Councils will have statutory functions in the new planning system to:

- **jointly make and maintain a spatial plan for the region**
- **make and maintain a regulatory plan (a regional council makes a natural environment plan, each territorial authority makes a land use plan, and a unitary authority prepares both); and**
- **administer and implement their regulatory plans including consenting/permitting, monitoring and enforcing compliance, and regulating and managing effects.**

Regional entities will also set environmental limits for the region and undertake state of the environment monitoring. The spatial plan, natural environment plan and land use plans are proposed to be brought together into a combined regional plan.

Assessment Criteria

Simplifies local governance



What we're asking for

To assess proposals against this criterion, officials will consider how proposed governance arrangements will reduce complexity, improve accountability, and support effective decision-making.

At a high level - Does your proposal simplify things? Will it reduce duplication and make decision-making clearer and more efficient? Does it reduce complexity and make the system easier to understand and run?

What we need to know

We are looking for information on the following questions:

How does your proposal simplify local government?

Will your proposal reduce complexity, improve accountability, and support effective decision-making? For example:

- how does the proposal demonstrate simpler governance arrangements compared to the status quo (ie, how will the proposal reduce duplication and remove any unnecessary governance layers)?
- is there a clear distinction of roles and responsibilities allocated or delegated to local representative bodies, including local boards and community boards?
- are there innovative approaches to new forms of local representative bodies (ie, not constrained by current Local Government Act 2002 options)?
- is the proposed governance structure easy to understand for communities? Is it clear to communities who is accountable for what?

- does the proposed governance structure support decision-makers to consider competing objectives and trade-offs and make effective decisions?
- for subregional proposals, how will the proposed governance arrangements for the delivery of key regional services be designed to minimise complexity and duplication?

What are the trade-offs and risks?

In answering the questions above, please outline any identified trade-offs for 'simplifies local governance'. For instance, impacts on local voice and representation or service delivery.

What still needs to be worked through?

Please outline any further work you intend to undertake following the submission of your outline proposal, as part of the detailed design of your final Head Start proposal.

What does 'good' look like?

- In many cases a single unitary authority would be a feasible option.
- In larger more complex regions two or at most three unitary authorities could be considered.
- The roles and responsibilities of local representative bodies are well defined, and it is clear who is accountable for what.
- Simple and effective arrangements for subregional unitary authorities to work with other councils within the region.

What we don't expect in an outline proposal

- Detailed information on all governance arrangements across councils, including committee structures and detailed decision-making delegations.
- Agreement to have been reached with non-submitting councils on regional governance arrangements.

Assessment Criteria

Economies of scale



What we're asking for

To assess outline proposals against this criterion, officials will consider how proposals support regional strategic planning and effective delivery of key regional functions (such as transport and catchment management), and demonstrate responsible and affordable asset management, infrastructure investment, and service delivery.

At a high level – does your proposal support regional strategic planning, including spatial planning, land transport, public transport and economic development? Will it deliver better value? How does it improve efficiency, save money over time, and support better asset management, infrastructure and services?

What we need to know

We are looking for information on the following questions:

How will functions be effectively delivered?

- How does your proposal support the effective delivery of regional and territorial transport functions?
- How will functions that require regional integration be delivered in a more effective way? Specifically, consider how catchment management and transport responsibilities would be managed effectively.

How will increased economies of scale add benefits?

- Explain potential impacts on rates and financial sustainability. For example, through changes in population or businesses paying for services, or geographical coverage.
- Highlight potential for improved service delivery, economic development opportunities, opportunities for innovation, etc.

What are the expected financial impacts of reorganisation?

Set out at a high level whether the reorganisation will promote:

- improvements in asset management/stewardship
- infrastructure investment
- enhanced effectiveness, efficiency, and financial sustainability of services
- assurance that the entities proposed will have the resources necessary to enable them to effectively perform or exercise their responsibilities, duties, and powers
- plans for managing debt for the unitary
- plans for any council-controlled organisations
- projected costs of implementing the proposed reorganisation; and
- improved appetite for risk and innovation.

Where will efficiencies come from?

For example, consider the potential for economies of scale or economies of scope for:

- governance of functions
- planning and regulatory functions
- emergency management
- science, data, systems, and capability
- asset management and infrastructure investment/procurement; and
- service delivery (eg, shared services).

What are the trade-offs and risks?

Outline any identified trade-offs and risks for 'economies of scale'. For instance, impacts on 'maintains local voice', and how they may be managed or mitigated.

What still needs to be worked through?

Outline any further work you intend to undertake following the submission of your outline proposal, as part of the detailed design of your final Head Start proposal.

What does ‘good’ look like?

- Clear shift to fewer, larger councils with stronger financial resilience and capability.
- Practical examples of where scale and efficiency gains are expected.
- Proposals that consider regional services such as transport, planning and catchment management and propose either aligning boundaries, or clear governance and accountability mechanisms to manage these functions effectively.

What we don’t expect in an outline proposal

- Detailed mapping of all regional functions to the unitary.
- Detailed financial modelling.
- Attempts to quantify savings precisely.

Assessment Criteria

Maintains local voice



What we're asking for

For this criterion, officials will consider how proposals demonstrate fair and effective representation for communities of interest, and how decisions will be made at the local level, balancing urban and rural interests.

At a high level - how will communities continue to be represented and heard, and how local voice will be maintained in a larger system?

What we need to know

We are looking for information on the following questions:

How will people elect representatives?

Set out your high-level approach to representation arrangements for new unitary authorities. For example, whether the members of a unitary authority (other than the mayor) are proposed to be elected at-large, by wards, or a mix, and where any wards are likely to be.

We do not expect representation arrangements to be fully agreed by outline proposals. However, there should be sufficient information to assess whether the proposal supports the fair and effective representation of communities of interest, and the good governance of key regional and local functions, if a distinction remains.

How will communities be represented?

At a high-level, explain the approach to local representation and decision-making for the new unitary authorities. For example, whether a unitary authority is proposed to have local or community boards, or a new model for local representation and decision-making—and if so, where these are likely to be and how members will be chosen.

How will iwi/Māori participate in decision-making?

What are the opportunities for Māori to contribute to local government decision-making processes, as required under the Local Government Act 2002? This could involve identifying any existing relationship agreements or arrangements between affected councils and iwi and hapū, as well as any other processes that support Māori to contribute to local decision-making and considering how these may transfer to new unitary authorities.

Arrangements provided through Treaty settlement redress are covered in the 'Treaty settlements' section below.

What are the trade-offs and risks?

Identify any trade-offs and risks for 'maintains local voice'. How will the proposal provide coherent decision making? What are the impacts on representation of the simplification of local governance or economies of scale, and how they may be managed or mitigated? For example:

- loss of local responsiveness addressed through the use of service centres; or
- replacing current representation arrangements with equally or more complex local or community board representation.

What still needs to be worked through?

Outline proposals should set out what issues will be resolved in the detailed design phase of the Head Start pathway. For example, representation arrangements more closely resembling those proposed as part of a routine representation review, including more detailed proposals for local or community boards and any Māori representation.

What does ‘good’ look like?

- An agreed list of principles or a framework for representation that can be worked through in the detailed design phase.
- Clear intent and direction, not detailed structures.
- Shows balance between scale, complexity and local input.
- Considers what level ‘place-making’ decisions are best allocated or delegated to.

What we don’t expect in an outline proposal

- Full representation model design.
- Electoral system detail (ie, ward boundaries and member numbers per ward, etc.).

Assessment Criteria

Deliverability



What we're asking for

For this criterion, officials will consider whether proposals are realistic and provide confidence that new arrangements can be implemented by the 2028 local elections.

At a high level - how this can be implemented? Is it realistic and able to be delivered on time?

What we need to know

We are looking for information on the following questions:

How would you implement the proposal?

Set out your high-level approach to transition and implementation. That means describing generally how you would set this up (eg, transition board or joint committee), who would be involved and how, any key decisions already made, and any major risks or challenges.

How would changes be timed?

Include proposed high-level milestones for the full reorganisation, describing when the new authorities could realistically be established, and any key dependencies or constraints (eg, elections and proposed 'backstop' legislation).

What still needs to be worked through?

Explain what issues you expect to resolve in the detailed design phase. Officials will help refine these if your outline proposal is approved. For example, detailed costs and benefits of amalgamation, transitional arrangements and implementation planning (resembling those proposed as part of a standard reorganisation pathway).

Are there interactions with other local government programmes?

Does your proposal align with the approach to other existing local government programmes, such as Local Water Done Well, City and Regional Deals, or is future alignment planned?

What do you need from the Government?

Describe any barriers to implementation and, if you are seeking reorganisation assistance, the nature and extent of the support you expect from the Government, including any additional changes to the enabling primary legislation, funding, or other specific support.

What does 'good' look like?

- Realistic and practical proposal to deliver new arrangements before the 2028 elections.
- Clear about trade-offs and risks .
- Shows honest assessment of what is known vs unknown.
- Specific and realistic about support needed from Government.

What we don't expect in an outline proposal

- Full transition and implementation plan.
- Drafting instructions for bespoke legislation.

Treaty settlements

What we're asking for

Any Treaty settlement arrangements that councils have with Post-settlement Governance Entities (PSGEs) must be upheld with the same or equivalent effect through the Head Start process. We are interested in your view on how settlement arrangements captured in the scope of your proposal could be transferred to new unitary authorities. This information will be used to inform the Crown's engagement with PSGEs on any changes needed to Treaty settlement redress.

The Crown is responsible for upholding Treaty settlements.

What we need to know

To support the Crown to uphold Treaty settlements, outline proposals must either:

1. explain how existing Treaty settlement arrangements could transfer to new unitary authorities with equivalent effect; or
2. propose a plan to work with affected PSGEs to determine how existing Treaty settlement arrangements can be given equivalent effect in the new unitary authority.

In developing your outline proposal, you may wish to consider:

- what Treaty settlement arrangements will be affected under the proposal
- how could these arrangements transfer to new unitary authorities with equivalent effect; and
- have you engaged with affected PSGEs, or if not, what is your plan to do so.

What does good look like?

- Affected Treaty settlement arrangements are clearly identified.
- Explains outcomes from early engagement with PSGEs.
- Includes provision for working with PSGEs on giving equivalent effect to Treaty settlements in the new unitary authority.

What we don't expect in an outline proposal

- You are not expected to determine or agree any changes to Treaty settlement redress. This will be worked through between the Crown and PSGEs as part of broader engagement on upholding Treaty settlement arrangements in the new planning system.
- You are not expected to have completed a full engagement process with affected PSGEs on how settlement arrangements could be transferred to new unitary authorities. We expect engagement will continue after outline proposals are submitted.
- If you intend to engage with PSGEs after an outline proposal is submitted, we will work with you to ensure alignment with the Crown's process.

Other supporting information

Include in your outline proposal any other supporting information or matters you think are important to support consideration of your regional or subregional proposal by officials and Ministers.

Finalising proposals

As signalled under the assessment criteria above, it is expected that your outline proposal will signpost where you think further work is necessary (ie, distinguishing between what has been agreed and what could be further investigated/developed in the detailed design phase).

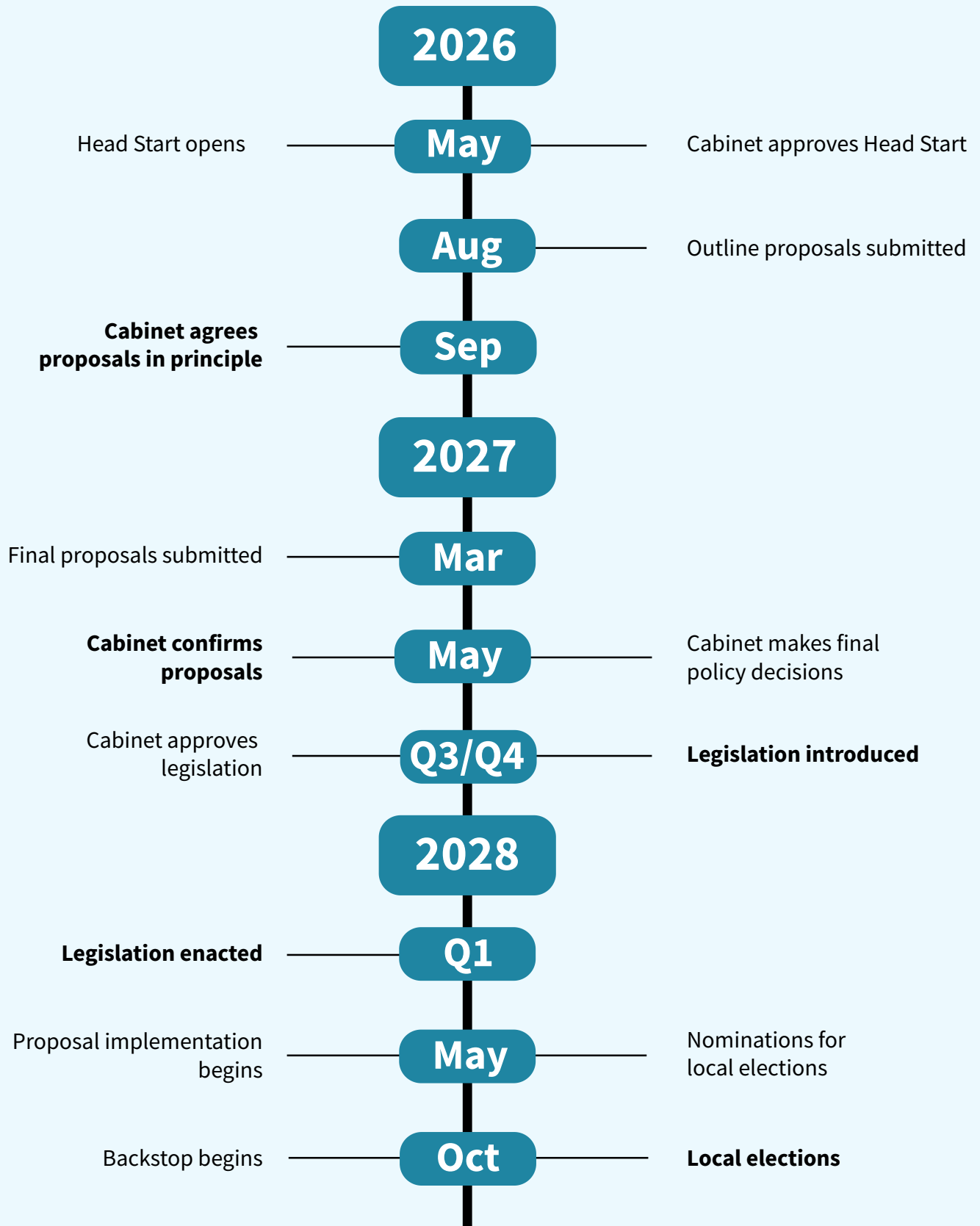
Further information will be provided for submitters accepted into the detailed design phase. It is likely that this phase will involve ensuring the final proposal addresses:

- **cost and benefits** (financial analysis of the impacts of the proposal including projected transition costs and longer-term financial sustainability)
- **representative structures** (detailed design including governing bodies, local boards, community boards, committees or other innovative variations, and Māori representation)
- **transitional arrangements** (a board, body, etc.)
- **implementation planning** (personnel transfers, asset transfers, council-controlled organisations, debt management, etc.)
- **outcomes from any Iwi/Māori engagement for representation and Treaty settlement redress;** and
- **outcomes from any engagement with the community.**

The summary timeline on the next page sets out the current expected timeframes.

- Outline proposals (May to August 2026).
- Cabinet agrees proposals in principle (September 2026).
- Detailed design phase (October 2026 to March 2027).
- Cabinet confirms final proposals and makes final policy decisions (May 2027).
- Legislation enacted to implement Head Start proposals and the backstop (Q1 2028).

Timeline



Contact

There is a rolling FAQ on the [Simplifying Local Government website](#), so please look there for the latest answers.

For further questions, please contact your Department of Affairs (DIA) Partnership Director below or email us at SimplifyingLocalGovernment@dia.govt.nz.

<i>Regions</i>	<i>Partnership Director</i>	<i>Contact</i>
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Nelson City and Tasman / Marlborough / Canterbury / West Coast	Sarah Polaschek	Sarah.polaschek@dia.govt.nz 027 281 5617

Deadline

Final proposals are to be sent to SimplifyingLocalGovernment@dia.govt.nz by 9 August 2026.

Resources

For further information, including guidance and how to engage with officials and access support, see dia.govt.nz/Simplifying-Local-Government

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New Zealand Government
Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa

Community Engagement - Exec Summary – Waimakariri

Waimakariri District Council's Head Start Pathway engagement demonstrates a clear and consistent preference for a North Canterbury-focused governance future.

Before making a submission on the communities preference for amalgamation the Council sought to seek the views of the community. A survey was emailed and delivered through the post to all ratepayers from 3 June, and public submissions were accepted until 22 July.

Nearly 8,000 residents sought more information and just shy of 2,000 residents responded to the survey.

Based on the district's approximate 27,000 households, this provides a statistically robust sample with a 95% confidence level - giving a high degree of confidence in the overall results.

Staff have undertaken analysis of surveys, written submissions, and demographic information which all point to strong support for a unitary council encompassing Waimakariri and Hurunui.

The engagement results provide compelling evidence that a North Canterbury unitary council is supported by the community.

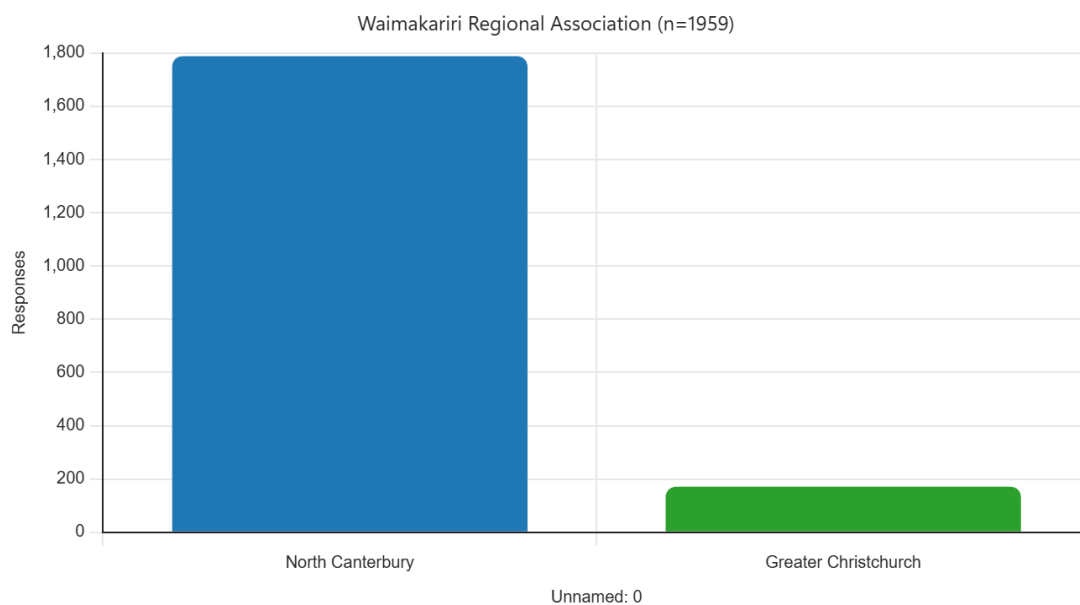
Residents consistently identified local representation, a shared North Canterbury identity, rural advocacy, financial prudence, and local decision-making as priorities for any future governance arrangement.

A strong theme throughout was a desire not to be amalgamated with Greater Christchurch.

A Clear Community Preference

Key findings released by Waimakariri District Council showed:

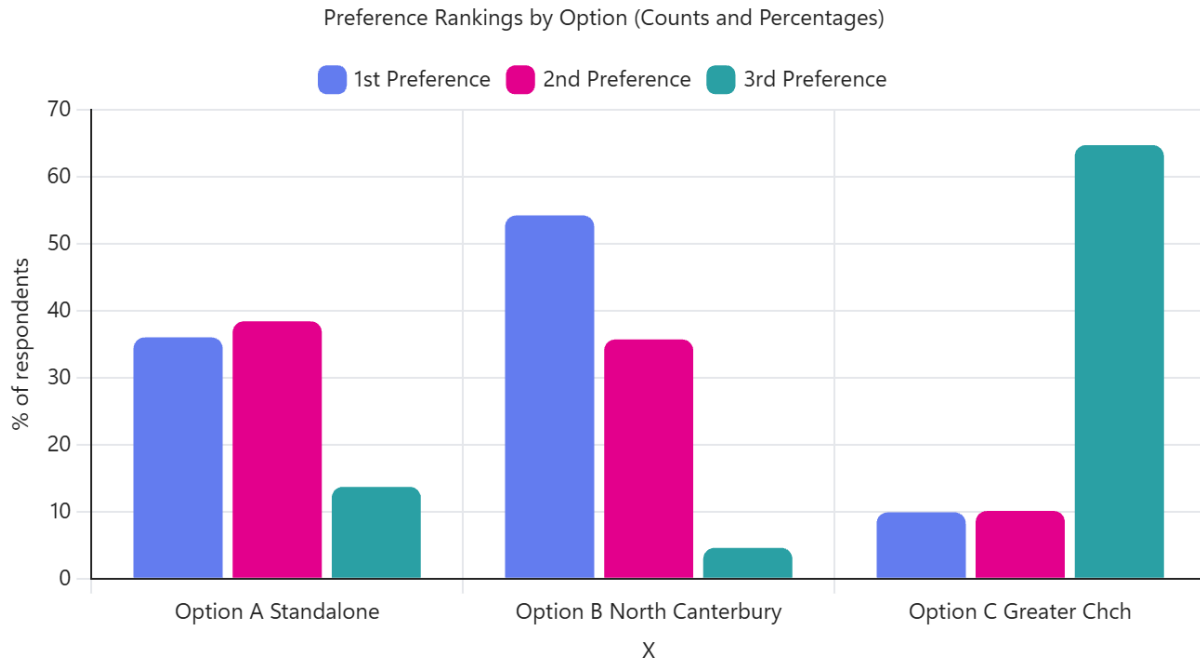
- Waimakariri wrote to all ratepayers seeking their views on the Head Start proposal. 7,700 visited the project page to learn more and Council received submissions from just shy of 2, 000 residents.
- Residents highly value local representation
- When asked about the identity of the District:
 - 91.3% of respondents identified Waimakariri as part of the wider North Canterbury community
 - compared with just 8.7% who aligned with Greater Christchurch.



- When asked about preferred models for amalgamation:
 - 54.2% of respondents selected a North Canterbury Unitary Council as their first preference.
 - 36% wished to remain a unitary authority of only Waimakariri.
 - And only 9.8% selected a Greater Christchurch model as their first preference.

• Option	1st Preference	2nd Preference	3rd Preference
Option A – Standalone Waimakariri unitary council	708 (36.0%)	756 (38.4%)	269 (13.7%)
Option B – North Canterbury unitary council	1,067 (54.2%)	703 (35.7%)	91 (4.6%)
Option C – Greater Christchurch council	194 (9.8%)	198 (10.1%)	1,274 (64.7%)

Note: Not all residents provided a 2nd or 3rd preference



Residents express a strong sense of place and identity centred on North Canterbury and do not support being amalgamated with Greater Christchurch.

The North Canterbury Identity is Already Established by the Community

Written submissions repeatedly emphasised that residents already view Waimakariri as part of a broader North Canterbury community defined by strong social, economic and geographic ties to Hurunui.

Feedback from residents repeatedly showed a desire to:

- Keep decision-making local. Respondents overwhelmingly valued local representation, accountability, and decision-making. Many felt governance should remain close to the communities affected by decisions.
- Strong opposition to a Greater Christchurch council. Many feared North Canterbury would lose its voice within a larger metropolitan council. Common concerns included loss of identity, reduced influence, and urban priorities outweighing semi-rural/rural needs.
- North Canterbury is the preferred model for amalgamation. If change is required, most respondents favoured a North Canterbury Unitary Council with Hurunui, citing shared values, existing relationships, community infrastructure, and common interests.
- Rates, debt and financial management matter. Many responses praised Waimakariri's financial management.
- Protect rural identity and community character. Respondents repeatedly emphasised the importance of preserving North Canterbury's rural character, small-town feel, farming communities, and locally focused infrastructure investment.

Strong Support for Local Representation

Across both survey and written feedback, respondents consistently identified representation as one of the most important outcomes sought from local government reform.

A North Canterbury unitary model was viewed positively because it:

- Retains decision-making within North Canterbury
- Gives semi-rural/rural and provincial communities a stronger collective voice
- Avoids the risk of smaller communities becoming overshadowed within a large metropolitan authority
- Enables councillors to represent communities with similar interests and priorities.

Written comments frequently referred to concerns that a Greater Christchurch model would prioritise metropolitan issues over rural and provincial needs.

Existing Collaboration Provides a Strong Foundation

A significant advantage of a North Canterbury unitary council is that it builds on council relationships, community partnerships and social infrastructure that already exists. This includes:

- Engineering and technical services
- Procurement
- Aspects of water service delivery
- Economic development organisations and opportunities
- Community partnerships and existing organisations – Lines companies, social providers etc
- Regional advocacy and shared initiatives.

Rather than creating entirely new relationships, a North Canterbury unitary authority would formalise and strengthen existing partnerships that have already demonstrated value.