



18/8/2025

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Submission

Waimate District Council and the Timaru District Council welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Canterbury District Review 2025. We understand and appreciate the review's goal to modernise police services and adapt to population growth. However, we must voice our profound concern about the proposal to remove police presence from South Canterbury rural communities outside of Timaru and close police stations or remove front office staff, effectively closing access to the public to their local police station.

Executive Summary of Submission

This submission from the two councils is a formal objection to the Canterbury District Review 2025. The combined councils' primary concern is the proposed removal of local police presence and the effect this would have on the smaller outlying rural townships in South Canterbury outside of Timaru. This includes sizeable towns such as Waimate (8,500+), Temuka (4,000+ residents) and Geraldine (2,000+ residents).

The combined councils argue that these changes will severely impact community safety, very likely increase emergency response times, and erode public trust. Local officers provide essential services, possess critical local knowledge, and have built vital relationships within their local communities, all of which would be lost under the new model. This submission also points out the danger this poses to vulnerable populations and the increased risk for council staff across the various districts who handle after-hours enforcement activities.

The key point of contention is the belief that frontline service cuts will undermine community safety by reducing the crucial support and assistance that locally based officers provide. The combined councils urge decision-makers to reconsider the proposal and explore alternative models, such as maintaining minimal but permanent police presence in South Canterbury rural towns, to ensure equitable policing for all communities across the region.

A restructure driven by an insufficient budget allocation in other areas of the organisation rather than an assessment of actual community need, threatens to shift the gaps in service from one area to another, creating new vulnerabilities.

History has shown that when police presence is removed from rural areas, low level crime increases and general safety within small rural townships begins to decrease. Just as importantly, the public's *perception* of their own safety begins to decrease as well. This is not something that the South Canterbury district councils want to see happen to their townships.

Submission in General

We would like to express our strong opposition to the proposed changes in the Canterbury District Review 2025. The concern is the reduction of police presence from the rural communities and the loss of station support officers, which will likely result in a significant reduction in community safety and trust.

Key concerns:

- **Erosion of Community Safety:** Centralising police response to Timaru will increase response times for emergencies and weaken the effected community's sense of safety.
- **Loss of Local Knowledge:** Local police officers – residing in and deeply embedded at all levels of local communities – are essential for effective, proactive policing because of the deep understanding of their communities and their unique challenges.
- **Impact on Vulnerable Populations:** The proposed cuts will disproportionately affect vulnerable people, such as the elderly, youth, those with poor mental health, and victims of family harm, especially with the reduction of Family Harm Constables and School Community Officers. We note there is a relative lack of mental health support services in our provincial and rural communities which are certainly not sufficient to fill the gap created by Police retreating from this space; this will create worse mental health outcomes for our residents.
- **Support for Council Staff:** The councils are concerned that police will not be able to provide timely assistance for council staff who deal with high-risk enforcement activities, such as dangerous animal callouts and noise control complaints.
- **Role in Civil Defence and Emergency Response:** New Zealand Police is a key partner agency in civil defence emergencies, working alongside councils, fire emergency volunteers and health providers, including St. John volunteers, to protect life and property. Locally based officers are critical in this role as they can respond rapidly in providing essential on the ground coordination during crises such as floods, earthquakes, and severe weather events. An over reliance on centralised deployment would risk delays and reduce the effectiveness of emergency operations and potentially increase the threat to people and property in time critical situations. Police officers represent a wealth of knowledge, including procedures, local understanding, and when necessary, the face of authority. Losing these key individuals from expansive rural districts would be a significant blow to various councils' civil defence capacities.

South Canterbury's districts are geographically large, and – while their populations may be smaller than that of bigger centres – a visible, responsive police presence is critical to be afforded the same level of service as larger centres. Local officers are often the first to respond to emergencies and they know their areas which are large with many rural back areas. They respond to road safety incidents, mental health crises, and other community safety issues. The relationships they build with residents in their local areas are vital for preventing crime and ensuring community well-being.

In Timaru, Police currently partner with Council and other entities as part of the Safer Communities Subcommittee, which was established 31 years ago. The Subcommittee strongly believes that rurally based officers are trusted community champions deeply embedded in the social fabric of their communities, and that removing these officers' risks eroding trust, reducing response effectiveness, and increasing vulnerability.

Waimate District Council has a very close relationship with its local officers and though no formal connection via a subcommittee, is equally engaged in discussions regarding local and rural matters for the district.

The proposed cuts are particularly troubling given the lack of good in-depth discussion outside of the current consultation with local affected areas, we would have respectfully worked with you to find other solutions. It is difficult for the public to accept that frontline services – which communities rely on for immediate services – will be cut and then left to be serviced by outside support which lacks a nuanced understanding of the outlying districts to Timaru. This approach risks undermining public trust and directly impacts the safety and resilience of rural areas.

Implementing these staffing cuts will inevitably increase emergency response times, weaken proactive policing efforts, and place added strain on the remaining officers. Rural communities already face challenges in accessing essential services, and stripping away frontline policing will only make these issues worse.

This restructure appears to be driven by an insufficient budget allocation rather than by an assessment of actual community need. Relocating officers instead of increasing overall police presence simply shifts the gap in service from one area to another, creating new vulnerabilities. In rural districts like the ones in the South Canterbury Region, where resources are already stretched, reducing locally based officers will have a direct and negative effect on the very types of crime the restructure is seeking to address in larger cities.

Furthermore, we are deeply concerned about the safety of our council staff who must conduct enforcement activities that can pose significant personal risks. Our staff, who handle after-hours incidents like dangerous animal complaints, wandering stock on roads, and noise control issues with aggressive individuals, depend on timely and efficient police support. We seek demonstrable reassurance that the police will be able to respond quickly to protect our collective staff in the South Canterbury districts.

Finally, we urge that any changes made are subject to a detailed review at a set-time, such as after 12 months. The review should utilise a clear set of performance measures – including for example the average response time to emergency incidents in each township - to identify its success or otherwise. As a key partner to Police, the councils expect to be a part of – and would proactively and constructively engage in – such a review.

In Conclusion

We urge the decision-makers to reconsider this proposal and discuss alternative solutions before making any changes. We ask that you work with the affected South Canterbury councils, community leaders, and frontline officers to find solutions that protect essential policing in our rural communities.

South Canterbury rural areas deserve the same level of safety and commitment to policing as any other more densely populated area of New Zealand. We recommend the following alternative models:

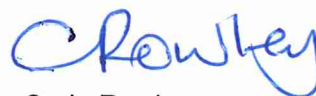
- **Maintain a permanent presence** – Keep the frontline officers in the rural districts and look to partner with other agencies for joint operational efficiencies.
- **Rural Police and Liaison Officers reside locally** rather than deploying them from central hubs.

We believe that the goals outlined in the Canterbury District Review can be achieved without sacrificing existing rurally based frontline staff and compromising the safety and security of rural communities.

Yours sincerely



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