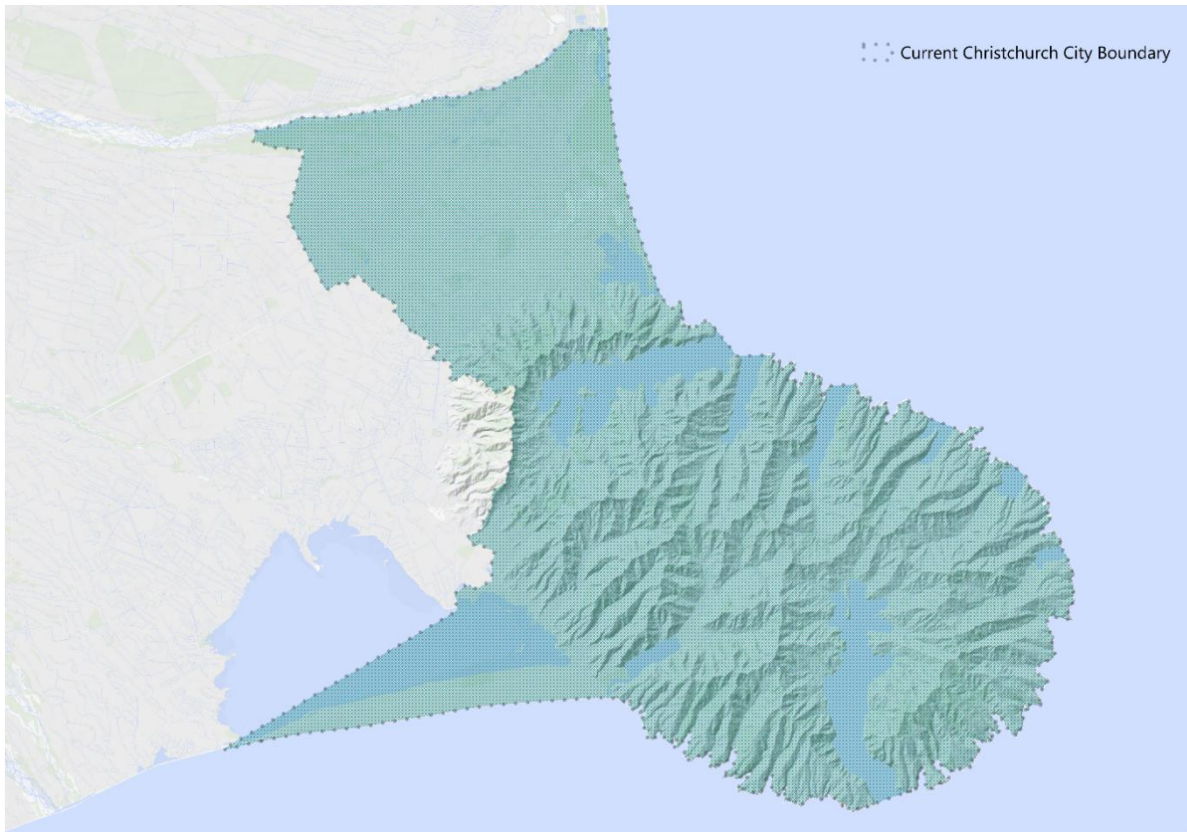


Head Start Proposal

Christchurch City Unitary Council



Proposal Overview

Christchurch City Council would become a unitary authority within its existing boundary by taking on Environment Canterbury's regional functions for the city.

Two councils would become one within Christchurch. Neighbouring districts would remain intact and determine their own future arrangements.

The option preserves the existing urban council while requiring cross-unitary arrangements for catchments, public transport and other regional functions extending beyond the city.

Proposal Rationale

Keeping a functioning council together

Christchurch City Council is functioning effectively and has a track record of infrastructure and project delivery, population and housing growth, tourism and major events.

Retaining the current boundary protects continuity and momentum while the Council takes on significant new unitary responsibilities.

This gives the new authority the strongest prospect of operating sustainably and confidently from the outset.

Respecting the urban and rural distinction

Christchurch has a predominantly urban, service-sector economy that is distinct from Canterbury's rural economy.

The option respects neighbouring districts' preference not to be split or absorbed and gives them the same opportunity to determine their own future.

A strong Christchurch economy continues to support employment, services, freight and wider regional prosperity.

Stability and continuity

This option has the lowest transition cost, greatest organisational continuity and least disruption of the scenarios considered by the Council.

It uses boundaries and community governance arrangements that residents and neighbouring councils already understand.

Its principal trade-off is continued reliance on cooperation with other unitary councils for regional systems that do not follow the city boundary.

Head Start Criteria

Simplifies Local Governance

Two councils become one

Christchurch City Council and Environment Canterbury currently have separate elected bodies, chief executives, corporate services, rating systems, planning systems and long-term plans within the city.

One unitary council would remove duplication, improve alignment and give residents one organisation for consenting, regulation, planning, services and infrastructure.

The city would have one set of representatives and a single urban voice.

Governance structure

A directly elected governing body and mayor would decide city-wide strategy, budgets, debt and accountability documents.

Committees could support functions such as environment and transport, and preserve separation between consenting and compliance.

Local or Community Boards would decide delegated local matters. An indicative model based on current arrangements in Christchurch would be about 16 governing members plus a mayor, and 6-9 members on each Board. We expect arrangements would be subject to a representation review.

Board representation would connect local and strategic decision-makers, drawing on Christchurch's existing Community Board model where governance body members are on the Boards as well.

Functions requiring cross-unitary arrangements

Christchurch depends on rivers and catchments outside its boundary, especially the Waimakariri River, which recharges about 75 per cent of the city's drinking water.

Catchment-wide arrangements would be needed for environmental monitoring, flood protection, river management, hazard information and source-water protection.

The city would run most public transport services, but agreements with neighbouring councils would be needed for services to Rolleston, Lincoln, Kaiapoi and Rangiora.

Regional transport planning, state highways, rail and NZTA matters would require a Regional Transport Committee or joint regional structure.

The Council would participate in wider coordination models for catchments, civil defence, biosecurity, science and specialist services.

Maintains Local Voice

Established local structures

Existing communities and Community Board arrangements are well understood and can continue as the basis for local representation.

Subsidiarity would guide delegations: the governing body would decide strategic city-wide matters and boards would decide matters meaningful to their communities.

Board size and boundaries would be confirmed through detailed design and a representation review.

Māori participation

Ngāi Tahu and Papatipu Rūnanga have enduring statutory, cultural and Te Tiriti relationships that require more than ordinary stakeholder consultation.

Would build on established relationships with the six local Papatipu Rūnanga and provide mechanisms for mana whenua to influence decisions of priority to them.

Mana whenua have initiated a Mana Whakahono ā Rohe under section 58O(1) of the RMA. With future resource management reform and proposed changes to iwi participation agreements, council will work with mana whenua on planning, resource management, freshwater, catchments, environmental monitoring and iwi participation.

Recognises mana whenua rangatiratanga across their takiwā on environmental matters, while enabling mātaa waka participation in ways that support and complement mana whenua leadership.

Economies of Scale

Shared services and capability

Combining Christchurch City Council and Environment Canterbury functions would consolidate duplicated corporate services and provide a one-stop shop.

The streamlining and reduction of duplication should lead to cost savings and efficiencies. The size and timing of savings would only become clear after implementation.

Planning and consenting

One planning unit could coordinate spatial, land-use and environmental planning and reduce conflict between city and regional objectives.

Long-Term Plans, Annual Plans and reporting would be prepared once rather than twice for the same area.

Building and resource consenting would sit within one organisation.

Financial impacts

Rates and financial-sustainability effects remain unknown and require due diligence.

Efficiencies may be initially offset by new unitary responsibilities and significant IT, staffing, legal and finance transition costs.

Central government funding will be required so transition costs do not fall solely on Christchurch ratepayers or reduce infrastructure and service investment.

Supports the New Planning System

Planning alignment

The option can operate alongside Canterbury's Regional Spatial Plan, which is already being developed jointly by councils, with mana whenua and central government involvement.

Christchurch would contribute the city's objectives, responsibilities and growth pressures while continuing to work with regional partners.

Planning would still require effective cross-unitary arrangements because some functions and key natural systems extend beyond the city.

Key risks

Regional spatial plans are expected to be published around late-2028/early 2029, while new council structures may not be established until October 2028.

Work underway to develop a regional spatial plan must occur at the same time local government is being reorganised, which could create transition complexity or possibly the need to reconsider plans.

Under this proposal we would have no direct control over our key water catchment which would become the responsibility of new neighbouring unitary authorities.

Deliverability

Lowest-risk transition

This is the least complex and disruptive option because it combines two organisations within the existing city boundary.

Implementation would be staged: establish governance for the 2028 elections; progressively integrate regional functions, funding and obligations; align systems and organisational structures; then review policies and bylaws over time.

Management and service arrangements could continue during transition until each function is ready to move.

Government assistance

Financial support is required for unitary functions and amalgamation costs.

Under a rates-cap environment, reform at this scale is not deliverable without Crown support or additional rates.

IT and technology alignment is likely to be a major cost, as demonstrated by the Auckland reorganisation.

Further Considerations

Te Tiriti settlements and relationships

Existing settlement arrangements, agreements and obligations will transfer with equivalent or stronger effect.

The Council has committed to working as partners with mana whenua throughout local government reorganisation.

Ngāi Tahu's position is that rangatiratanga must be recognised and that the Crown should involve Ngāi Tahu in negotiations requiring new legislation.

Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu principles for local government reform are: Boundaries aligned with the takiwā; Catchments as the primary determinant; A takiwā-wide shared services entity; and Genuine cooperation with Papatipu Rūnanga.

Impact for Canterbury

Creates an urban-focused unitary council at Canterbury's economic centre.

Allows the remaining mainly rural districts to form unitary councils with a distinct rural voice, which leads to having a valuable rural and urban council voice in Canterbury.

Christchurch could consider hosting regional coordination or specialist services for smaller councils once established.

The key trade-off is that the simplest transition retains the greatest need for cross-boundary governance.