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Submission

Waimate 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 rural communities and close several rural police stations.

Executive Summary of Submission

This submission from Waimate District Council is a formal objection to the Canterbury District Review 2025. Council's primary concern is the proposed removal of local police presence and the effect this would have on our township and rural areas within the district.

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

A key point of contention is the belief that frontline services cuts will undermine community safety by reducing the crucial support and assistance that locally based officers provide. Council urges decision-makers to reconsider the proposal and explore alternative models, such as maintaining a minimal but permanent police presence in rural towns, to ensure equitable policing for all communities in the district.

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

Submission in General

Waimate District Council would like to express its strong opposition to the proposed changes in the Canterbury District Review 2025. Council's concern is the reduction of police presence from rural communities and the loss of our station support officer, 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 community's sense of safety.
- **Loss of Local Knowledge:** Local police officers are essential for effective, proactive policing because of their deep understanding of the community and its unique challenges.
- **Impact on Vulnerable Populations:** The proposed cuts will disproportionately affect vulnerable people, such as the elderly, youth, and victims of family harm, especially with the reduction of Family Harm Constables and School Community Officers.
- **Support for Council Staff:** The council is 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 such as ours would be a significant blow to our civil defence capacity.

Our district is geographically large, and while our population is smaller than that of bigger centres, a visible, responsive police presence is absolutely critical to be afforded the same level of service as larger centres. Our local officers are often the first to respond to emergencies, they know our area which is 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 are vital for preventing crime and ensuring community well-being.

The proposed cuts are particularly troubling given the lack of discussion outside of the current consultation with local affected areas, we would have respectfully worked with you to find other solutions. It's 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 district. 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 Waimate, 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 require reassurance that the police will be able to respond quickly to protect our staff.

In Conclusion

We urge the decision-makers to reconsider this proposal and discuss alternative solutions with us. We ask that you work with local councils, community leaders, and frontline officers to find solutions that protect essential policing in our rural communities.

Local residents deserve the same level of safety and commitment to policing as any other part of New Zealand. We recommend the following alternative models:

- **Maintain a permanent presence**, with at least three full-time Constables and a full time Frontline Station Support Officer based in Waimate.
- **Rural Liaison Officers reside locally** rather than deploying them from central hubs.

We believe that the goals outlined in the Canterbury District Review 2025 can be achieved without sacrificing frontline staff and further compromising the safety and security of rural communities.

Yours sincerely

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Mayor Waimate District Council