

Have your Say!

Shaping our future

Who should we work with to simplify local government?

As we think about our place and our future, we're keen to hear about the options you prefer.

We're accepting feedback until Sunday 5 July

Learn more and share your thoughts at

ItsOurPlace.nz

Ashburton DISTRICT COUNCIL



Ashburton District Councillors (from left) Cr Phill Hooper, Cr Julie Moffett, Cr Phill Everest, Cr Jeanette Maxwell, Deputy Mayor Richard Wilson, Mayor Liz McMillan, Cr Carolyn Cameron, Cr Deb Gilkison, Cr Tony Todd and Cr Russell Ellis.

Kia ora,

The face of local government in New Zealand is changing, and it's important that our community's voice is front and centre as we discuss what the future of our district could look like.

The Government is looking to simplify local government, by encouraging New Zealand's councils to merge or amalgamate to form a reduced number of unitary authorities.

A unitary authority is a single council that combines the responsibilities of regional, and city or district councils.

Through the Government's Head Start pathway, councils can work together to design a structure that works for their communities. We have until 9 August to come up with an Outline Proposal with one or more neighbouring territorial authorities.

In this document, we're asking for your feedback on five potential scenarios for merging with other Councils. These are not set in stone; our neighbours will have their own priorities and scenarios, and any final decision will ultimately be made by the Government.

However, the scenarios are a way that we can capture our community's thoughts on a range of possible futures. For our community, this is about having a say in where we're heading. If councils don't take part, the Government has said it will step in later through a compulsory process, which could mean less local influence over the outcome.

We also need to be upfront, there's still a lot we don't know, including impacts on rates, and what would happen to ownership of our local assets. We don't know how the people of Mid Canterbury will be represented and which regional council responsibilities we'd be required to take on.

We know these details matter. We will investigate them thoroughly and share updates with the community as more information becomes available.

Any proposal must also meet the Government's Head Start criteria, including being achievable, improving coordination, using shared resources well, supporting the new planning system, and ensuring local communities continue to have a strong voice.

While there's much still unknown, our top priority is to find the best possible outcome for the Ashburton District and our people. We urge you to have your say and look forward to hearing your thoughts.

How can you get involved?

We'd really value your input:

- Read the information and think about what feels right
- Talk it over with your family and community
- Share your views at *itsourplace.nz*
- Ask questions at *itsourplace.nz*
- Join a Talk it Up Tuesday session 5pm-6pm each Tuesday until 17 July, Ashburton Library.

What has the community said so far?

We ran a short survey from 14 May to 2 June to understand what's most important to our community when considering our options. From the 371 responses, some clear community priorities emerged. These have helped guide our discussions with neighbouring councils up to this point and include:

- A strong local voice and representation
- Continuing to deliver reliable core services
- Ensuring financial sustainability
- Local control of assets

This is about our place and our future, your feedback will help guide the direction we take.

What are the five options?

Option A Standalone Ashburton District Unitary Council

Option B Rangitata/Rakitata – Rural Selwyn Unitary Council

Option C Ashburton District & Selwyn District Unitary Council

Option D Ashburton District & South Canterbury Unitary Council (join with Timaru, Mackenzie and Waimate Districts, with or without Waitaki District)

Option E Provincial Mid-North Canterbury Unitary Council (join with rural Selwyn, rural Waimakariri, and Hurunui District, with or without Kaikōura District)

Survey closes Sunday 5 July

Head Start v Back Stop?

The Government is forging ahead with local government reform and expects Councils will form unitary authorities, bringing district/city and regional functions together. The voluntary Head Start pathway is for councils to propose their own arrangements. The Back Stop process is for regions that don't take part in Head Start with the Government choosing to amalgamate existing Councils into unitary authorities after the 2028 Local Elections.

What are our options?

We have explored eight possible scenarios and have worked through these to identify what is most viable. This has been narrowed to five options, based on initial analysis of what could realistically work across the region, early community feedback, and Government criteria. If none of these options feel right to you, we want to hear that too. This document is just a summary. If you want to read more about these options, please go to itsourplace.nz

What do we need to do?

We need to work with other councils to prepare proposals that meet the Government's Head Start requirements. The Government will then assess these joint proposals using the criteria below:

- **Is the proposal deliverable?** The proposed unitary authority arrangements are realistic and can be implemented in a timely manner before the 2028 local elections.
- **Does the proposal support the new planning system?** The transition must align with and support new spatial and natural environmental planning rules.
- **Does the proposal simplify local governance?** Proposals must reduce duplication and consolidate decision-making.
- **Does the proposal demonstrate economies of scale?** Demonstrate effective delivery of major regional functions (like transport and catchment management).
- **Does the proposal maintain strong local voice?** Ensure communities are fairly represented and local decision-making is preserved.

What happens next?

We've started looking at possible options and working with others across the region, including through the Canterbury Mayoral Forum, which is encouraging a coordinated Canterbury approach.

5 May 2026	**Government announcement**
4 May - 2 June	**Early community engagement**
19 June - 5 July	**Second engagement**
July	**Outline Proposal Development**
5 August	**Council adopts or endorses an Outline Proposal**
9 August	**Outline Proposal submitted to Department of Internal Affairs (DIA)**

Option A

Standalone Ashburton District Unitary Council

Description

A single unitary authority covering existing Ashburton District boundaries.



Government's Requirements

Head Start Eligibility: Yes, but only if submitted by two or more territorial authorities

Head Start Government Criteria: Estimated rating 2.5/5

- ✗ Deliverable
- ? Support for the new planning system
- ✓ Simplify local governance
- ✗ Economies of scale
- ✓ Maintain strong local voice

This is an early assessment against the Government's criteria. All final decisions will be made by Cabinet.

Fit with Community Priorities

Maintaining local voice and control of assets, reliable core services and financial sustainability.

Based on priorities the community told us in an earlier survey, this option would be excellent for strong local voice and local control of assets, but weakest on long-term financial and service resilience.

Estimated Population

37,400

Pros

- ✓ Strong productive economy and established service delivery base provides a credible foundation for a standalone unitary model.
- ✓ A single authority could better align land use, infrastructure, and environmental planning across the district.

Cons

- ✗ Small population and ratepayer base limit long term resilience, specialist capability, and efficiency.
- ✗ Rising environmental compliance obligations and debt pressures could strain affordability and delivery capability.

Option B

Rangitata/Rakitata South - Rural Selwyn Unitary Council

Description

A single unitary authority covering Ashburton District, the Rangitata South area including Geraldine, and rural Selwyn areas excluding major urban centres such as Rolleston, Lincoln and Tai Tapu (based on the assumption that there is a Greater Christchurch Unitary Council established).



Government's Requirements

Head Start Eligibility: Yes, but only if submitted by two or more territorial authorities

Head Start Government Criteria: Estimated overall rating 4.5/5

- ? Deliverable
- ✓ Support for the new planning system
- ✓ Simplify local governance
- ✓ Economies of scale
- ✓ Maintain strong local

This is an early assessment against the Government's criteria. All final decisions will be made by Cabinet.

Fit with Community Priorities

Maintaining local voice and control of assets, reliable core services and financial sustainability.

This option offers a strong balance between local voice, river catchment-based planning, and future resilience, while still keeping a mostly rural focus.

Estimated Population

58,430

Pros

- ✓ Balanced rural system combining scale, productivity and growth, with no single dominant centre.
- ✓ Ability to leverage river catchment-scale planning and combined growth and production strengths to improve efficiency and resilience.

Cons

- ✗ Economic concentration and uneven social and demographic outcomes create internal complexity.
- ✗ Exposure to agricultural risk and competing priorities across growth, ageing and service needs.

Option C

Ashburton District & Selwyn District Unitary Council

Description

A single unitary authority covering Ashburton District and Selwyn District within existing boundaries.



Government's Requirements

Head Start Eligibility: Yes, but only if submitted by two or more territorial authorities

Head Start Government Criteria: Estimated overall rating 4/5

- ? Deliverable
- ✓ Support for the new planning system
- ✓ Simplify local governance
- ✓ Economies of scale
- ? Maintain strong local voice

This is an early assessment against the Government's criteria. All final decisions will be made by Cabinet.

Fit with Community Priorities

Maintaining local voice and control of assets, reliable core services and financial sustainability.

This option would provide greater scale, stronger long-term service resilience and access to Selwyn's growth and capability and resources. It may, however, reduce Ashburton's relative influence within a larger and faster-growing combined area.

Estimated Population

125,000

Pros

- ✓ High-productivity rural economy and stable population base that strengthens overall regional balance.
- ✓ Leverages Selwyn's growth, scale and capital capacity to improve services and investment outcomes.

Cons

- ✗ Smaller scale and slower growth may reduce Ashburton's influence in a combined entity.
- ✗ Risk of investment and decision-making shifting toward faster-growing urban areas, limiting Ashburton outcomes.

Option D

Ashburton District & South Canterbury Unitary Council (with or without Waitaki District)

Description

A single unitary authority covering Ashburton District and South Canterbury districts including Timaru, Waimate and Mackenzie Districts, with the possibility of also including Waitaki District.



Government's Requirements

Head Start Eligibility: Yes, but only if submitted by two or more territorial authorities

Head Start Government Criteria: Estimated overall rating 4.5/5

- ✓ Deliverable
- ✓ Support for the new planning system
- ✓ Simplify local governance
- ✓ Economies of scale
- ? Maintain strong local voice

This is an early assessment against the Government's criteria. All final decisions will be made by Cabinet.

Fit with Community Priorities

Maintaining local voice and control of assets, reliable core services and financial sustainability.

This option provides regional scale, capability and a broader economic base, which could support stronger long-term services and investment. It may come with a risk of reduced local voice and influence in a larger South Canterbury-focused structure.

Estimated Population

without Waitaki District

100,750

with Waitaki District

125,470

Pros

- ✓ Strong, productive regional economy with a diversified base and solid financial and operational capability.
- ✓ Ability to leverage regional scale, capability and growth to strengthen investment, services and strategic influence.

Cons

- ✗ Ashburton may have a smaller voice within a larger regional entity, particularly if decision-making is centralised around bigger centres.
- ✗ With Waitaki included, varied district characteristics and competing priorities could reduce cohesion and complicate investment decisions.

Option E

Provincial Mid-North Canterbury Unitary Council (with or without Kaikōura District)

Description

A single unitary authority covering Ashburton District, Hurunui District, and rural areas of Waimakariri and Selwyn Districts, with the possibility of also including Kaikōura District (based on the assumption that there is a Greater Christchurch Unitary Council established).



Government's Requirements

Head Start Eligibility: Yes, but only if submitted by two or more territorial authorities

Head Start Government Criteria: Estimated overall rating 4.5/5

- ? Deliverable
- ✓ Support for the new planning system
- ✓ Simplify local governance
- ✓ Economies of scale
- ✓ Maintain strong local voice

This is an early assessment against the Government's criteria. All final decisions will be made by Cabinet.

Fit with Community Priorities

Maintaining local voice and control of assets, reliable core services and financial sustainability.

This option supports a strong rural voice and shared provincial identity, while creating enough scale to improve planning and service delivery. It may be more complex because of its dispersed geography and the differing needs of communities across the area.

Estimated Population

without Kaikōura District

100,750

with Kaikōura District

105,090

Pros

- ✓ Large, productive rural system with a strong economic base and shared identity, supporting coordinated planning and service delivery.
- ✓ Ability to integrate land use, infrastructure and environmental management at unitary scale, improving long-term outcomes and efficiency.

Cons

- ✗ Dispersed geography and uneven financial positions increase complexity and may limit efficiency and integration gains.
- ✗ Risk of imbalance and reduced cohesion due to uneven growth, agricultural dependence and shifting influence across the system.

Have your Say!

Simplifying Local Government

Please note that responses are public documents and will be made available on Council's website, including names of submitters (but not contact details). Find out more at ***ashburtondc.govt.nz/privacy***

1 How would you rank the options below?

Please number all the options below with 1 being your ***most preferred*** and 6 your ***least preferred***.

If you are not suggesting an alternative option, please rank Option F as 6.

- ☐ **Option A** – Standalone Ashburton District Unitary Council
- ☐ **Option B** – Rangitata/Rakitata – Rural Selwyn Unitary Council
- ☐ **Option C** – Ashburton District & Selwyn District Unitary Council
- ☐ **Option D** – Ashburton District & South Canterbury Unitary Council (join with Timaru, Mackenzie and Waimate Districts, with or without Waitaki District)
- ☐ **Option E** – Provincial Mid-North Canterbury Unitary Council (join with rural Selwyn, rural Waimakariri, and Hurunui District, with or without Kaikōura District)
- ☐ **Option F** – Other, please describe below

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2 For Option D, which would you prefer?

◯ Include Waitaki District ◯ Do not include Waitaki District ◯ No preference

3 For Option E, which would you prefer?

◯ Include Kaikōura District ◯ Do not include Kaikōura District ◯ No preference

Have more to say? Feel free to attach additional pages to your response.
You can also provide your feedback online at ***itsourplace.nz***

4 Why do you think your preferred option will work best for our communities?

Please add your comments below

_____

_____

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_____

5 Submitter information

First name:

Last name:

Email:

Age:

- ◯ Under 18
- ◯ 18-34
- ◯ 35-49
- ◯ 50-64
- ◯ 65+

Gender:

- ◯ Male
- ◯ Female
- ◯ Gender diverse
- ◯ Prefer not to say
- ◯ Other (please specify)

Ethnicity:

- ◯ NZ European
- ◯ Māori
- ◯ Asian
- ◯ Pacific peoples
- ◯ Middle Eastern/Latin America/African
- ◯ Other (please specify)

Which area is your property in?

- ◯ Ashburton
- ◯ Tinwald
- ◯ Lake Hood
- ◯ Rural
- ◯ Methven
- ◯ Hinds
- ◯ Mayfield
- ◯ Mt Somers
- ◯ Chertsey
- ◯ Rakaia
- ◯ Not in Ashburton District

Survey closes Sunday 5 July

Learn more and share
your thoughts at

ItsOurPlace.nz

Ashburton
DISTRICT COUNCIL