Review of the Greater Christchurch Partnership

Final Report

MARTIN
JENKINS

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Preface

This report has been prepared for Greater Christchurch Partnership by Sarah Baddeley and Cat Moody from MartinJenkins (Martin, Jenkins & Associates Ltd).

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Executive summary

The Greater Christchurch Partnership (GCP or Partnership) stands at a critical juncture after two decades of collaborative regional governance. This independent review, based on stakeholder engagement including sixteen interviews and group workshop sessions, reveals a partnership that has achieved significant milestones but now faces more fundamental challenges that may warrant considering structural and operational changes.

At the same time the Government is proposing major reforms in key areas that will impact both territorial authority and regional council functions. It is therefore timely to commission this review and to examine lessons learned and future options to better support the greater Christchurch growth potential.

This report responds to the Terms of Reference set out as Appendix One.

Key findings

Strategic achievements

The GCP has demonstrated impressive effectiveness during crisis response and strategic planning phases, particularly earthquake recovery coordination and delivery of the Greater Christchurch Spatial Plan. The Partnership successfully supported Greater Christchurch as New Zealand's second largest urban agglomeration and secured significant transport infrastructure investment that stakeholders agree "wouldn't have existed without the partnership approach".

Current challenges

Political confidence in the Partnership has declined, with decision-making processes becoming slow and consensus-driven rather than strategically focused. Implementation of the spatial plan remains challenging due to regulatory translation gaps, resource constraints, and limited authority for driving delivery. Economic development lacks clear regional coordination, and moving forward on the basis of a positive Treaty of Waitangi partnership requires attention.

Critical issues

The completion of major foundational work has created uncertainty about future strategic direction. Multiple stakeholders questioned the Partnership's current purpose, with changing Government policy environments creating additional uncertainty about collaborative approaches. The Partnership has shifted from strategic leadership to operational coordination, losing the strategic edge that was more characteristic of its most effective periods.

Recommendations

The GCP requires structural and operational changes to maintain relevance and effectiveness in addressing greater Christchurch's evolving strategic challenges. Without clear action, the Partnership risks being a less effective "talking forum" rather than a driver of regional transformation. However, with appropriate changes, the GCP can reclaim its position as a vital mechanism for regional prosperity and resilience.

The review provides the analysis and options necessary for informed decision-making. However, success depends on a collective political leadership commitment to collaborative and partnership models, including with mana whenua and government agencies.

These issues are best examined in the context of the next triennium of Councils and will require a high degree of buy in as to the strategic (and connected) challenges faced in greater Christchurch, and the purpose of value proposition effective governance of those challenges.

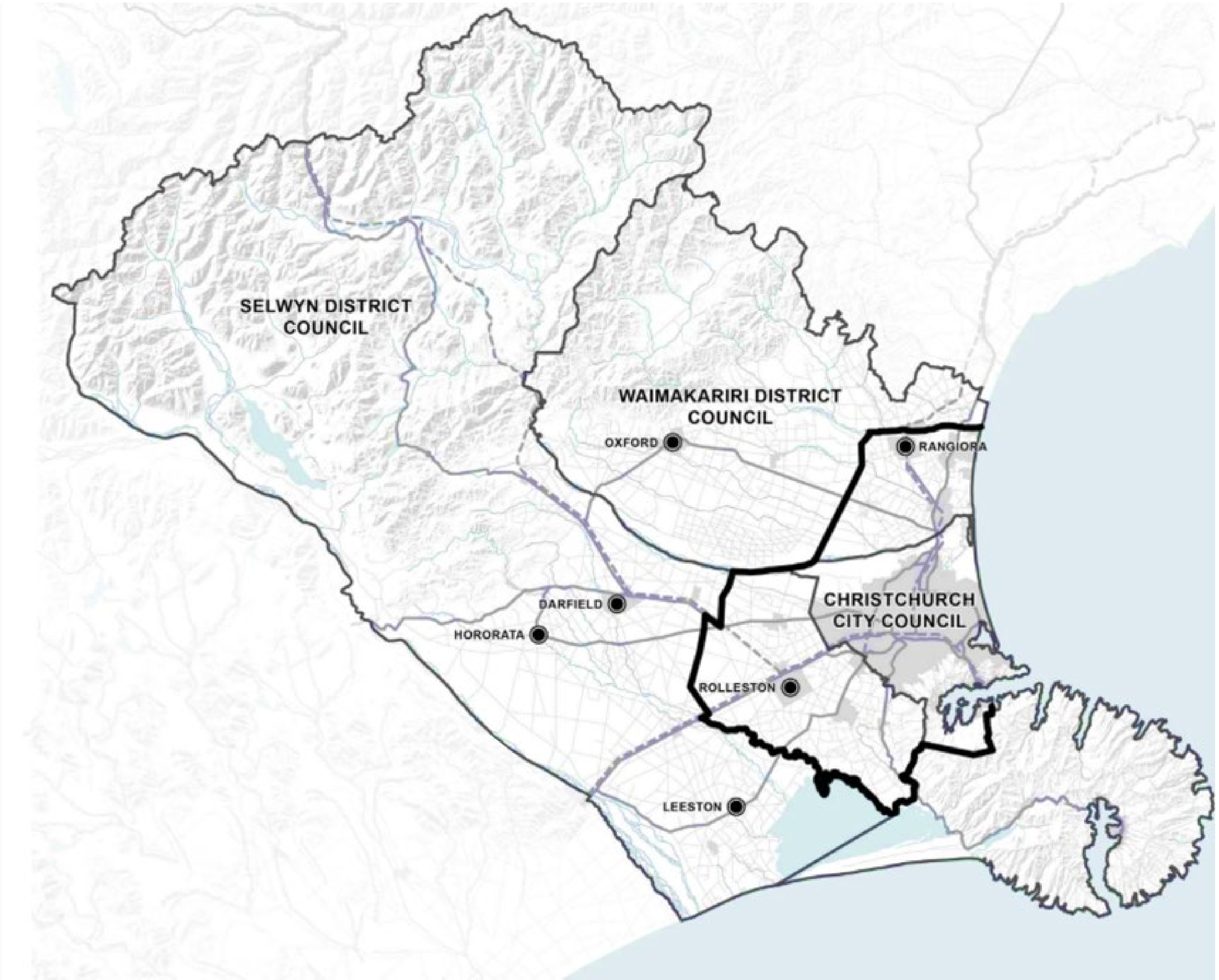
Success requires recognising that effective regional governance is essential for addressing growth related challenges that transcend traditional local government boundaries both functionally and geographically. This approach is in line with international examples of where this has been achieved. The Partnership has the potential to be a leading example of collaborative governance delivering outcomes for communities while respecting the Treaty and democratic accountability.

Boundaries of Greater Christchurch

Greater Christchurch sits at a remarkable confluence where the Canterbury Plains meet the Pacific Ocean, bordered by the ancient volcanic landscapes of Whakaraupō / Lyttelton and Te Pātaka a Rākaihautū / Banks Peninsula.

The region stretches northward to Rangiora and southward to Lincoln, while extending from Rolleston in the west through to Sumner on the eastern coast. This encompasses both the expansive flat lands and the distinctive Port Hill areas that characterize Ōtautahi Christchurch.

The region spans across the traditional territories of three Papatipu Rūnanga: Te Ngāi Tūāhuriri, Taumutu and Te Hapū o Ngāti Wheke (Rāpaki). Within Greater Christchurch itself, the marae of both Te Ngāi Tūāhuriri and Te Hapū o Ngāti Wheke maintain their important presence in the cultural fabric of the area.



Response to the terms of reference

Partnership purpose and strategic effectiveness

Historical context and evolution

The Greater Christchurch Partnership, established in 2007 following earlier collaborative arrangements dating to 2004, emerged from recognition that the region's strategic challenges transcended individual council boundaries. The Partnership evolved from the Greater Christchurch Urban Development Strategy Implementation Committee, formed alongside adoption of the Urban Development Strategy to oversee implementation coordination.

Over its 20-year history, the Partnership has undergone evolution in scope and membership. What began as a relatively focused planning initiative evolved into a comprehensive regional governance and development partnership encompassing transport, housing, environmental challenges, and economic development across the Greater Christchurch metropolitan area.

Strategic achievement assessment

Post-earthquake leadership

The Partnership's most transformative period occurred during earthquake recovery, when existing collaborative relationships enabled coordinated rapid response across multiple jurisdictions. As one elected member observed, the Partnership "stopped squabbling in the courts and enabled unified action", fundamentally changing how councils approached regional coordination. This coordination played a crucial role in Greater Christchurch's recovery and subsequent growth trajectory.

Strategic planning success

The Partnership successfully delivered major strategic documents that have shaped regional development. The Urban Development Strategy 2007 became "the foundation document that led to post-earthquake recovery coordination", while the more recent Greater Christchurch Spatial Plan received widespread praise from central government representatives as "one of the best in New Zealand" for its evidence base, rigorous analysis, and innovative consultation approach involving over 7,000 people during development.

Transport infrastructure coordination

One of the Partnership's most tangible achievements has been securing significant transport investment through coordinated advocacy and planning. The delivery of three major motorways represents infrastructure that stakeholders agree "we wouldn't have had without agreement and a land use strategy".

The Mass Rapid Transit business case completed at $1.5 million and funded by Waka Kotahi, demonstrates the Partnership's capability for complex project coordination, though implementation remains dependent on central government funding decisions.

Cross-boundary problem solving

The Partnership established effective mechanisms for addressing issues that span council boundaries, creating what stakeholders described as a "collegial environment where everyone is quite collegial and collaborative". This approach enabled coordinated responses to regional challenges that individual councils couldn't address effectively independently.

Greater Christchurch Spatial Plan

The Greater Christchurch Spatial Plan is a strategic blueprint for managing growth in the Greater Christchurch region, unanimously endorsed by the Greater Christchurch Partnership Committee on Friday 16 February 2024 and adopted by all Partner Councils in March 2024. The plan addresses projected population growth as its population growth reaches more than 700,000 over the next 30 years and becomes home to possibly more than a million people in the decades that follow. It was praised for its robust evidence base, rigorous analysis, and innovative consultation, involving more than 7,000 people during development. The plan focuses on targeted urban intensification, climate resilience, affordable housing, and coordinated transport planning across council boundaries, building on successful collaboration since the Canterbury earthquakes.

Current strategic purpose challenges

Unclear future direction

Several elected members emphasised uncertainty about the Partnership's future strategic direction following completion of major foundational work. One elected member highlighted concerns: "I start to wonder what is next. Are we the right people to deliver the rest of the programme?" This sentiment reflects broader uncertainty about the Partnership's role in moving from strategic planning to implementation phases.

Advocacy and implementation gaps

Multiple stakeholders noted the Partnership's historical role to advocate to central government has been weakened and has become less clear. As one elected member observed, "it used to be used for advocacy to central government, but shared goals have become unclear". The absence of clear external drivers has left some partners questioning the Partnership's continued strategic value.

Political uncertainty

The changing central government policy environment has also created uncertainty among partners about collaboration and partnership-based approaches generally. Stakeholders noted concerns about Resource Management Act 1991 reform impacts and uncertainty about the current government's commitment to collaborative planning approaches, affecting the Partnership's ability to maintain strategic focus. While these concerns were raised in the context of this review, we note that the recent city and regional deal announcements cited that the successful recipients all had existing Urban Growth Partnerships demonstrating the strength of existing collaboration.[1]

Strategic planning and implementation challenge

The Partnership successfully transitioned from emergency response during the earthquake period to strategic planning but now faces the challenge of moving from strategic planning to implementation. This transition requires different capabilities, approaches, and accountability mechanisms than those that characterised the Partnership's most successful periods.

Central government representatives observed that "the focus hasn't been on implementation of the plan. The work is in front of them, not behind them". This insight highlights the fundamental challenge facing the Partnership: how to maintain strategic relevance while developing implementation capability and accountability.

Current growth pressures

Canterbury continues to experience significant growth pressures that create cross-boundary challenges requiring coordinated responses. The Greater Christchurch Spatial Plan projects population growth from approximately 650,000 to 800,000 by 2050, representing a 23% increase concentrated in urban areas and firmly cement Greater Christchurch as New Zealand's second largest urban agglomeration.

Uneven growth distribution: Growth is not evenly distributed across the partnership area, with major development pressure in the southwest corridor spanning Christchurch and Selwyn boundaries. A key central government agency stakeholder noted that the challenges facing Greater Christchurch growth, just over the border in Selwyn, are similar to the challenges that were faced north of Auckland.

Infrastructure coordination needs: The ongoing challenges of land use, land availability, and managing hazard risk were also identified as justification for continued coordination of infrastructure planning across boundaries to support sustainable development patterns and to prevent developer behaviour driving the outcomes as opposed to communities.

Service delivery implications: This growth pressure also creates demands for coordinated service delivery. As a senior stakeholder noted, the Partnership approach needs to consider the flow on effect from the Greater Christchurch area impacts areas like Oxford and Amberley and the connection to service delivery across the broader Canterbury region.

[1] City and Regional Deals to unlock growth | Beehive.govt.nz

Partnership approach and multi-party engagement

Strengths of collaborative model

Diverse perspective integration

The Partnership's inclusion of central government agencies and mana whenua alongside local government creates opportunities for broader strategic alignment and more informed decision-making. This multi-party approach enables consideration of issues from multiple perspectives and can assist in developing more comprehensive and sustainable solutions to regional challenges.

Regional versus local balance: The Partnership provides a forum for addressing the tension between regional interests and local priorities. As stakeholders noted, it creates space for councils to "hash out cross-boundary issues" in a collegial environment where "everyone wants to be nice to one another", which can facilitate collaborative problem-solving that might be more difficult in bilateral arrangements.

Strategic alignment opportunities: The inclusion of central government agencies enables better alignment between local planning initiatives and national policy directions. This alignment can be particularly valuable for securing central government investment and ensuring regional strategies align with national priorities and funding frameworks.

Lessons from international examples

A future focused and local approach

International examples highlight that strong collaborative arrangements and co-investment deals are not one-size-fits-all. They are often tailored to the specific growth challenges and the functions of the partners. They identify and prioritise specific needs and opportunities such as infrastructure, housing, transport, and climate change. But ultimately, the arrangements are focussed on supporting and enabling growth over long time-horizons (often around 30-years). This means that they also need to be adaptable to the circumstances and incentivise outcomes over outputs.

Strong, accountable, and enduring governance

Clear governance arrangements and accountabilities are critical to the establishment and implementation of such arrangements. This ensures that the "rules" are known and decision-making processes and all parties understand their roles and responsibilities. Taxpayers and ratepayers also need to know who is responsible and can be held accountable for the programme and as such ongoing monitoring is a crucial accountability and transparency tool.

Stakeholder engagement and community participation

Stakeholder engagement and active and authentic community participation are critical throughout such arrangements. Inclusive decision-making processes enable residents, businesses, and interest groups to contribute their perspectives, ensuring that the initiatives truly reflect the needs and aspirations of the region's diverse population while generating buy-in and trust in the institutions responsible for delivery.

Coordinated investment

Investments enabled through such arrangements tend to have a specific investment focus such as transport, housing, or economic growth across the entire functional area. This approach facilitates investment into transformative projects that might otherwise be beyond the capacity of individual councils. This may require a published investment decision framework, promoting transparency around decision making.2

Effective oversight

Internationally such arrangements often include a collection of funding tools. Generally, all partners will commit funding to the partnership for the suite of investments it looks to make, including funding the administrative arrangements. Some partnerships utilise more innovate models or include devolved funding powers that enable the area to realise financial benefits from investment(s) in ways they could not otherwise.

Committed funding pathways

Successful collaborative arrangements are not typically 'set-and-forget.' The partners of a deal must commit to clear targets and performance indicators to promote accountability and transparency. Monitoring and evaluation processes need to be agreed from the outset and integrated into delivery programmes, with clear and measurable outcomes.

Source: Adapted from Collaborative Growth Partnerships, An opportunity for the Future Proof Partnership, RCP, October 2023.

[2] The Greater Manchester Investment framework is often cited as an example of this kind of methodology. However, the Auckland Transport Alignment Project is a more local example of this kind of coordinated investment approach.

Partnership with mana whenua

Current state analysis

The Partnership's relationship with mana whenua represents both a significant opportunity and a critical challenge. For mana whenua representatives, partnership participation reflects Treaty of Waitangi relationship-based principles, enables specific aspects of Treaty settlement legislation to be given effect, and provides practical alignment opportunities for shared aspirations of broader community prosperity.

Value recognition by some stakeholders

Stakeholders who valued mana whenua involvement highlighted shared aspirations, the importance of strengths-based partnerships, and positive movement away from historically litigious relationships. For these stakeholders, mana whenua participation represented a "no brainer" for effective regional governance.

Mismatched Treaty partnership expectations

However, some elected members, predominantly from territorial authorities, expressed challenges in seeing value in direct mana whenua involvement in the Partnership. For these elected members, their preference was for individual council engagement with mana whenua through consultative mechanisms operated under each Council potentially tied to the Mayoral Forum. This approach represents a fundamental misalignment with Treaty partnership expectations and contemporary practice within other urban growth partnerships.

Cultural understanding gaps

Mana whenua representatives expressed concerns about deteriorating relationships, agenda pre-determination, and lack of cultural understanding. The decision to not continue with an independent chair was specifically cited as disappointing, indicating that when structural decisions are made without consultation, they may inadvertently undermine partnership effectiveness.

Resource and mandate limitations

Current arrangements lack appropriate resourcing and mandate for genuine Treaty partnership. As the review insights indicate, achieving effective Treaty partnership requires "appropriate resourcing and mandate that is required for genuine Te Tiriti Partnership, in the most effective, efficient way".

Central Government challenges

Participation constraints

Central government agencies face significant constraints in meaningful Partnership participation due to their own delegations, decision-making processes, and accountability frameworks. Elected members noted increased confidence in direct relationships with central government decision-makers at a personal level, but others emphasised the importance of an enduring systemic relationship, rather than individual relationship-based approaches.

Strategic versus political engagement

Some stakeholders identified the importance of combining strategic coordination capability with political relationship management. The Partnership's most effective approach involves systemic strategic coordination rather than relying solely on individual political relationships, which may not endure through political changes.

Decision-making authority limitations

Central government representatives operate within specific mandates that may limit their ability to make commitments or decisions within Partnership forums. This creates challenges for achieving binding agreements or coordinated implementation commitments across all Partnership participants.

Central Government policy changes

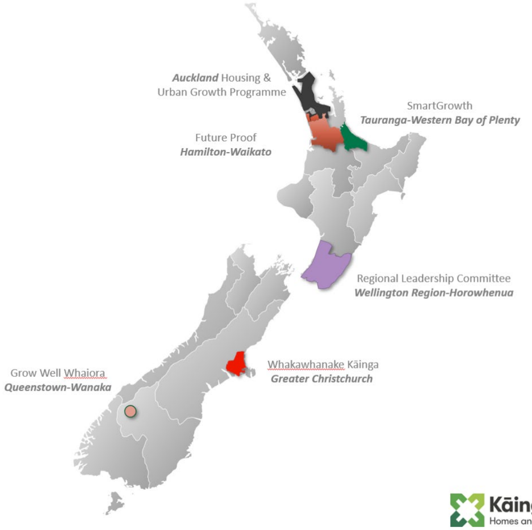
The Government is currently considering a range of proposals related to the delivery of local government services. This includes the reform of the resource management system that will impact the functions that local government delivers, including for greater Christchurch. Of relevance is the *Going for Housing Growth* discussion document (June 2025) that contains a range of proposals including:

- New Housing Growth Targets
  - Councils in our key urban (Tier 1) and provincial (Tier 2) centres will need to allow 30 years of housing growth in their district plans.
- Medium Density Residential Standards (MDRS) optional for councils.
  - The MDRS allows three houses of up to three storeys per site without resource consent. They will become optional for councils, once they show how they will meet their Housing Growth Target.
- Making it easier to build both inside and at the edges of New Zealand's cities.
- Strengthening existing requirements for housing intensification.
  - Urban councils will have to intensify housing along 'strategic transport corridors'. They will also have to offset any reductions in development capacity due to reasons such as 'special character' by providing more capacity in another area.

Rural-urban boundary lines in council plans will be banned to make it easier for new housing to be built on 'greenfields' land (land that's never been built on or developed before). Councils can still have rural zoning, but they will not be able to set hard regulatory lines that constrain growth.

Urban growth partnerships

Care needs to be taken on the future of the GCP and its relationship to urban growth partnerships. Central Government has positioned urban growth partnerships as a key mechanism for achieving coordinated urban development outcomes across New Zealand.



Kāinga Ora Homes and Communities

These partnerships align with Government priorities for collaborative governance, efficient infrastructure delivery, and coordinated spatial planning. The partnership approach enables Central Government to engage with a unified regional voice rather than managing multiple individual council relationships, whilst supporting integrated responses to housing, transport, and economic challenges.

Recent Government decisions related to City and Regional Deals have favoured UGPs, with partnership-based delivery models embedded in key initiatives including Local Water Done Well. Stepping away from this collaborative framework should require careful consideration of implications for ongoing Government relationships, funding eligibility, and alignment with national urban development objectives.

Any structural changes must demonstrate how they maintain or enhance collaborative principles that underpin Central Government's urban growth agenda, ensuring continued access to partnership-based funding whilst delivering improved regional outcomes.

Table 1: Current Urban Growth Partnerships

UCP	Membership
Auckland Joint Housing and & Urban Growth Programme	Crown, Auckland Council with Auckland Transport, Watercare, Tātaki Auckland Unlimited
Hamilton – Waikato Future Proof	Crown, Waikato-Tainui, Tainui Waka Alliance, Waikato Regional Council, Waikato District Council, Hamilton City Council, Waipā District Council, Matamata Piako District Council, and with Auckland Council, Franklin Local Board, and the Tāmaki Makaurau Mana Whenua Forum
Tauranga – Western Bay of Plenty SmartGrowth	Crown, Iwi Representatives (4), Bay of Plenty Regional Council, Western Bay of Plenty District Council, Tauranga City Council and Priority One (EDA)
Wellington – Horowhenua	Crown, Iwi Representatives (6), Wellington Regional Council, Horowhenua District Council, Kapiti District Council, Porirua City Council,

Wellington Regional Leadership Committee	Wellington City Council, Hutt City Council, Upper Hutt City Council, South Wairarapa District Council, Carterton District Council, Masterton District Council, WellingtonNZ (EDA)
Queenstown Lakes Whaiora Grow Well	Crown, Te Runanga o Kāi Tahu, Otago Regional Council, Queenstown Lakes District Council

Source: Kainga Ora (June 2025)

Multi-party decision-making challenges

Consensus-seeking inefficiencies

The Partnership's decision-making processes have evolved to prioritise consensus and conflict avoidance over strategic effectiveness. Multiple stakeholders described lengthy decision-making processes hampered by "a culture of conflict avoidance" that may avoid difficult decisions required for strategic progress.

Risk-averse culture development

The Partnership lacks delegated authority from individual Councils, requiring group consensus for decisions and the socialisation of decisions back with Councils. As one elected member explained, meetings involve lengthy discussions where "everyone wants to be nice to one another", but decisions sometimes don't translate into effective implementation. This consensus-oriented approach may be preventing the Partnership from addressing challenging strategic issues impacting the broader region.

Public meeting constraints

Some stakeholders attributed decision-making challenges partly to public meeting requirements, suggesting these make honest conversation more challenging. However, this factor may also reflect the need for better pre-meeting coordination and clearer decision-making processes rather than fundamental structural limitations.

Leadership, governance, and political sustainability

Declining political confidence

Fundamental sustainability challenge

A large proportion of the elected members across the Partnership have expressed diminished confidence in the Partnership's value and effectiveness. This represents a critical threat to the Partnership's political sustainability and requires immediate attention through structural and operational changes.

Value proposition uncertainty

Themes emerging from stakeholder engagement include elected member scepticism about value for money, confidence in alternative collaborative mechanisms including the Mayoral Forum and Local Government New Zealand zone meetings, and concerns about process inefficiencies that may not justify resource investment.

Relationship quality concerns

The quality of relationships within the Partnership has been affected by various factors including length of involvement, different expectations about outcomes, and varying perspectives on partnership value. Long-term participants emphasised relationship value and collaborative momentum, while newer participants focused primarily on tangible outputs and immediate deliverables.

Role of an independent Chair

Mixed perspectives

Views were significantly divided on the value and necessity of an independent chair role. Some stakeholders, particularly those elected members with longer Partnership tenure, considered an independent chair essential for ensuring all views around the table were heard and preventing undue influence by dominant councils.

Neutral leadership valued

Supporters of an independent chair highlighted the importance of neutral leadership for maintaining Partnership credibility and ensuring balanced perspective consideration. Mana whenua, in particular, held that view.

Alternative leadership models

Others were more focused on leadership characteristics and outcomes rather than independence per se. Central government stakeholders emphasised the importance of strategic coordination for maximising collective influence, particularly when compared to individual council approaches.

Strategic versus facilitative leadership

The independent chair role evaluation revealed tension between facilitative leadership focused on process management and strategic leadership focused on outcomes and regional transformation. The Partnership's most effective periods have been characterised by strategic rather than purely facilitative leadership approaches.

Restoring political confidence

Clear strategic purpose

Restoring political confidence requires articulating clear strategic purpose that demonstrates value beyond what individual councils or alternative collaborative mechanisms can achieve. This purpose must be compelling enough to justify the resource investment and political attention required for effective Partnership operation.

Demonstrable outcomes

Political confidence depends on demonstrating tangible outcomes that matter to elected members' constituents. This requires moving beyond process-focused activities to delivery-focused initiatives that create visible regional improvements and economic opportunities.

Strategic rather than operational focus

The Partnership must reclaim strategic leadership rather than operational coordination focus. As the insights summary indicates, "the Partnership has shifted from strategic leadership to operational coordination, losing the strategic edge that characterised its most effective periods".

Implementation challenges and delivery mechanisms

Spatial plan implementation

Implementation gap

While the Greater Christchurch Spatial Plan is widely regarded as high quality and strategically sound, implementation remains challenging due to several structural factors including the split accountabilities. While the detail is still emerging, this may be overcome, in part, through the proposed changes to the resource management system under way. Central Government representatives described the spatial plan as "one of the best in New Zealand", but stakeholders consistently identified implementation as the critical next challenge including under new reform settings.

Regulatory translation barriers

The spatial plan "hasn't led to a Regional Policy Statement change or to a district plan change", as noted by central government representatives. This regulatory translation gap means the plan lacks formal implementation mechanisms through existing planning frameworks, creating a disconnect between strategic direction and practical planning decisions.

Authority and mandate limitations

The Partnership lacks clear delegated authority for driving implementation beyond advocacy and coordination roles. This is particularly the case recently as some members of the Partnership have asked for a reduced emphasis on the advocacy functions that were previously a strong feature of the GCP. Some stakeholders noted limitations in the Partnership's ability to drive direct implementation without clear authority and accountability, citing this as contributing to the disconnect between strategic planning and delivery.

Resource and investment coordination

Implementation requires significant investment from multiple parties, but as one elected member noted, "GCP is not a delivery body and does not hold a budget, yet many of its strategies and plans require substantial investment". Individual councils must fund and prioritise implementation actions independently, reducing collective accountability and coordinated approach benefits.

Future Proof Implementation Committee

Future Proof is governed by the Future Proof Implementation Committee. The Committee is made up of two elected members from each partner council and three representatives nominated by tangata whenua - one from the Tainui Waka Alliance, one from Waikato-Tainui, and one from Ngā Karu Atua o te Waka.

Clause 3.18 of the National Policy Statement on Urban Development introduces a requirement to have an implementation plan for the future development strategy (FDS) that is updated every year.

The first component is the identification of the critical strategy enablers – those actions or pieces of infrastructure that are essential to the delivery of the strategy.

The second component is essentially the Future Proof work programme. It has been grouped by Transformational Moves and covers a range of work programme areas. It includes the work that Future Proof will need to do for the next iteration of the FDS.

The work programme clearly sets out roles, responsibilities, and actions to ensure and uphold individual and collective accountability.

Source: Future Proof Strategy Implementation Plan

Central Government dependencies

Infrastructure investment coordination

Key spatial plan elements, particularly transport infrastructure, depend on central government investment and funding decisions beyond Partnership control. The Mass Rapid Transit business case demonstrates planning capability, but implementation awaits government funding decisions that may not align with Partnership priorities or timelines.

Policy uncertainty

Changing government policy environments create uncertainty affecting the Partnership's strategic planning and implementation coordination. Resource Management Act reform uncertainty and changing approaches to collaborative planning impact the Partnership's ability to develop and maintain long-term strategic focus.

Regional deal opportunity

Some stakeholders highlighted the Partnership's potential role in advancing regional deal opportunities with Central Government. However, this requires demonstrating collective regional capability and commitment that may not be achievable through current Partnership structures and processes.[3] It is noteworthy that all three of the recent regional deals were in Urban Growth Partnerships and that the Government's criteria for such arrangements include "How strong and effective are the local and central government partnerships, is there collaboration between councils in the region, is there a history of positive collaboration with central government, and is there a commitment to broader government reforms and work programmes".

Accountability and performance framework gaps

Collective and individual accountability

Current arrangements lack mechanisms for collective accountability across Partnership members for implementation outcomes. Chief Executives can play an important role in supporting Councils to meet performance accountability to the collective. While individual councils are accountable for their own implementation actions, there is currently limited accountability for collective regional outcomes or coordinated approach effectiveness.

Performance measurement limitations

The Partnership lacks comprehensive performance measurement frameworks that could demonstrate effectiveness and guide strategic adjustments. Without clear metrics for success, it becomes difficult to evaluate partnership effectiveness or justify continued investment.

Implementation monitoring capability

Current secretariat arrangements lack dedicated capability for implementation monitoring and evaluation. This limits the Partnership's ability to track progress, identify emerging issues, and adapt strategies based on implementation experience.

What will be required of local authorities under the Resource Management System changes?

In addition to setting out core process requirements, the Planning Act will require all local authorities in the region to enter into an agreement to guide the spatial planning process. This will need to cover the roles of each local authority in the spatial planning process, including the allocation of responsibilities between regional councils and territorial authorities, the mechanics of how the local authorities will work together, including meeting procedures and voting rights and what the secretariat arrangements will be.

Cabinet has since set out that spatial plans will need to be jointly prepared by the region's local authorities, working with the Crown, Māori, infrastructure providers, stakeholders, and communities. Work is being done to consider how different groups should be involved in the process, including whether the Crown should have a formal role in the development and confirmation of spatial plans.

[3] We note that some members of the GCP indicated a preference for issues related to regional deals to be progressed through the Mayoral Forum as distinct from the GCP as a constraining factor.

Economic development and regional coordination

Current economic development landscape

Fragmented coordination challenge

Economic development emerged as an area requiring greater strategic attention, with several stakeholders noting the absence of clear economic development strategy for Greater Christchurch.
As a central government official noted, "we don't have an economic plan for Greater Christchurch/ Canterbury", highlighting the coordination gap in this critical area.

Multiple organisation involvement

Current economic development efforts involve multiple organisations including Christchurch NZ, Business Canterbury, Canterbury Mayoral Forum economic development initiatives, and various sectoral agencies. This creates potential for duplication, coordination challenges, and missed opportunities for regional economic advancement.

Limited partnership integration

The Partnership has done limited work with Business Canterbury, and stakeholder feedback suggested the "relationship is better than it was before" but could be significantly enhanced. This represents a missed opportunity for coordinating regional economic development with spatial planning and infrastructure investment priorities.

Regional economic potential

Significant economic opportunity

The Greater Christchurch area represents significant economic potential that requires coordinated approaches to infrastructure, skills development, and investment attraction. One elected official declared that "Canterbury should be the powerhouse of the country", reflecting the economic aspiration that exists but requires coordinated strategic development.

Innovation and university connections

The relationship to university, science, innovation, and broader primary sector opportunities were identified as key regional economic strengths. However, coordinated approaches to leveraging these advantages require strategic coordination that is currently lacking across the Partnership area.

Population growth implications

The significant population inflow represents both economic opportunity and coordination challenge. Managing growth to maximise economic benefit while maintaining liveability and sustainability requires coordinated approaches across councils and economic development agencies.

Business sector engagement gaps

Engagement approach

Current business sector engagement appears to focus on consultation rather than strategic partnership for economic development. Enhanced collaboration with Business Canterbury and economic development agencies represents a significant opportunity for regional economic advancement that requires structural consideration.

Economic development agency coordination

Several stakeholders suggested stronger collaboration possibilities with economic development agencies. This could include formal partnership arrangements, shared strategic planning, and coordinated investment attraction and business support initiatives.

Mana whenua economic partnership

Common economic aspiration exists between Partnership members and mana whenua representatives, but this is "not well understood" and not developed as a source of regional competitive advantage. This represents both an economic opportunity and a Treaty partnership opportunity.

Organisational structure and resource analysis

Current budget and resource assessment

Appropriate resource scale

The Partnership's current budget structure (approximately $755,000 annually supporting three FTE positions and partnership operations) appears consistent with comparable urban growth partnership arrangements. This budget includes provision for meeting costs, staff costs, and mana whenua advisory contributions through agreed funding formulae.

Cost-effectiveness concerns

Some elected members expressed concern that the Partnership was costly compared to alternative mechanisms for achieving similar objectives. However, these concerns appear to reflect questions about strategic value rather than absolute cost levels, suggesting the issue is effectiveness rather than efficiency.

Value for money

As stakeholder feedback indicated, "cost is about more than direct financial costs". The primary concern relates to time committed to Partnership activities by elected members and staff, plus opportunity costs of duplicating similar meetings occurring in other contexts, rather than direct financial expenditure.

Secretariat capability analysis

Current capability limitations

The existing secretariat arrangement focuses primarily on coordination and administration rather than strategic analysis and policy development. This limits the Partnership's ability to provide high-quality strategic insights, regional analysis, and policy advice that could enhance its strategic value and political credibility.

Strategic advisory function gap

Multiple stakeholders identified the lack of strategic advisory capability as limiting the Partnership's effectiveness. We recognise this as a dynamic rather than a specific commentary about the current secretariat. The secretariat lacks capacity for regional analysis, policy development, and strategic advice that could enable the Partnership to provide regional perspective and coordinate responses to future complex challenges and strategic opportunities.

Implementation monitoring limitations

Current arrangements lack dedicated capability for implementation monitoring and evaluation. This prevents the Partnership from tracking spatial plan implementation progress, identifying emerging coordination requirements, and adapting strategies based on implementation experience.

Supporting collective accountability

The review highlights that there are limits on the behaviours and incentives to support collective accountability in the current structure. While there is good discussion that occurs at the GCP table, the processes supporting it are focused on preparing elected members more that driving collective accountability and performance. Under current settings, Chief Executives are focused more specifically on meeting the needs of their individual elected members and Councils than on partnership success.

A shift in more collaborative behaviour would require a focus on dual accountability systems including weighted performance indicators reflecting both local delivery and partnership effectiveness for Councils. This incentive alignment can be further supported with improved transparency and reporting including regular dashboarding of progress against agreed action to support collective ownership and performance visibility.

The key is ensuring collaborative success enhances rather than diminishes individual accountability, creating aligned incentives that make partnership working professionally rewarding for Chief Executives and their staff.

Resource integration opportunities

Canterbury Mayoral Forum integration

Several stakeholders suggested potential efficiency through Canterbury Mayoral Forum secretariat integration. However, this raises questions about maintaining strategic focus specific to Greater Christchurch coordination requirements while achieving administrative efficiency benefits.

Critically mana whenua and central government had a low degree of confidence in this model achieving the progress and focus required for advancing the interests of greater Christchurch.

Greater shared service potential

Opportunities may exist for more efficient resource sharing across regional coordination functions, though this requires careful consideration of maintaining strategic capability and focus specific to Greater Christchurch partnership requirements.

Enhanced strategic capability investment

Rather than reducing costs, the Partnership may benefit from enhanced strategic capability investment that could improve effectiveness and political confidence through higher-quality strategic analysis, regional perspective, and coordination capability. A strategic independent chair with a mandate to undertake this role may perform this function.

Funding model sustainability

Partner contribution

The current funding formula (Regional Council 37.5%, Christchurch City Council 37.5%, Selwyn District Council 12.5%, Waimakariri District Council 12.5%) reflects population and growth distribution across the Partnership area and appears equitable based on benefit distribution.

Multi-year budget planning

Enhanced strategic capability and implementation focus may require multi-year budget planning and funding commitments that enable strategic programme development and continuity beyond annual budget cycles. Future funding arrangements could also incorporate performance indicators and outcome measurements that demonstrate Partnership effectiveness and justify continued investment through tangible regional improvement outcomes.

Future alternative funding tools

The case for alternative growth-related funding tools was not included in our terms of reference. However, alternative tools include gain share mechanisms, value capture arrangements, congestion charging, public private partnership, and different approaches to taxation.

For some growth-related investment there is also significant potential for greater use of bespoke funding and financing mechanism for infrastructure, allowing the use of a long-term levy imposed on benefited properties to create a financeable revenue stream consistent with the Infrastructure Funding and Financing Act 2020.

Pooling and devolution mechanisms are also used overseas particularly the United Kingdom. Such mechanisms could be linked to gain-share arrangements.

Design principles

Given these findings, we have developed a set of design principles to guide the structure and future operation of the Partnership. These principles are intended to ensure that any recommendations contained in the next phase of work support changes to the governance model that best meet the needs and pressures faced by Greater Christchurch.

The design principles reflect a pragmatic approach to regional collaboration – emphasising subsidiarity, aligning authority with responsibility, and ensuring political sustainability. The principles also prioritise tangible delivery, active participation, and simplicity in design, while embedding mechanisms for regular review and evolution. Together, they provide a foundation for a partnership that is fit for purpose, responsive to change, and capable of delivering lasting value.

- **STRATEGIC FOCUS:** Supports effective governance of the key strategic challenges facing Greater Christchurch – this will shape what is on the agenda

- **STEWARDSHIP:** Ensures the parties work collaboratively to ensure Greater Christchurch interests are effectively managed now and into the future – this will shape the system-based approach that is taken to key challenges facing greater Christchurch including relevance to the provision, funding and regulatory levers that impact the wider community

- **PARTNERSHIP:** Recognises that the value of partnership is tangible, increasing the scale, reach, influence, and political and community engagement for the betterment of the wider Greater Christchurch community – this will determine who is at the table and the principles on which partnership is based including open communication and trust with clear and well understood roles and responsibilities.

- **VALUE FOR MONEY:** Delivers best value for money for ratepayers – this will support confidence that public money is being used appropriately

- **RESPONSIVE:** Ensure that the Partnership has effective mechanisms in place to remain relevant and responsive to changing demands being faced by the Greater Christchurch community.

Option assessment

A range of options have been identified for consideration by the GCP. These options have been assessed against the design principles against a five-point ratings scale.

A 5-point qualitative judgment scale:

Poorly fits - Does not align with expectations or requirements	*
Somewhat fits - Limited alignment with notable deficiencies	**
Moderately fits - Acceptable alignment with some concerns	***
Well fits - Strong alignment with minor reservations	****
Strongly fits - Excellent alignment, fully meets or exceeds expectations.	*****

Functional choices

The GCP faces critical decisions about its core functions and governance model as it transitions from spatial planning development to implementation of the Greater Christchurch Spatial Plan 2024. The key choice is whether to evolve into a primarily implementation-focused partnership or expand into broader regional coordination and governance functions.

Considering the case of cumulative reform

For individual Councils, and for the GCP members as a whole, this choice needs to be informed by the wider changes impacting local government and those changes that might be expected in the next 12/18 months.

These changes include changes in:

- Delivery of water services and the impact on the financial sustainability and viability of local authorities across the country under new regulatory arrangements.
- Resource management system including new approaches to spatial planning, management of natural resources, and delivery of improved housing outcomes for communities.
- Building regulatory system including the ability for private provision of some regulatory services and self-certification models.
- Local government performance measurement and benchmarking and the potential for central government restrictions on revenue tools like rate capping and fee and levy setting.

In addition, it is expected that economic recovery will continue to be challenging placing continued pressure on Council accountability to communities in demonstrating value for money.

Current functions

The GCP's current functions include:

- Strategic planning: Development and oversight of regional strategies
- Collaborative leadership: Coordinating between partners on strategic issues
- Implementation oversight: Monitoring delivery of adopted strategies and plans
- Advocacy: representing greater Christchurch interests to Central Government.[4]

International experience

Looking further afield, the international literature on successful urban governance partnerships reveals a spectrum of functions that such arrangements can deliver. For example, in the United Kingdom, arrangements have focused on infrastructure funding, economic development interventions, and governance reform to 'unlock' urban growth.

In Australia, approaches have aimed to align planning, investment, and governance to accelerate growth, stimulate urban renewal and drive economic reforms. Broader European experience shows four main models of metropolitan governance varying by degree of institutionalisation, from informal cooperation to formal metropolitan governments.

OECD analysis identifies three broad approaches: structured fixed-boundary metropolitan government, flexible cooperation in spatial structures, and strategic planning as the key coordination mechanism.

What about back to basics?

The Government wants to refocus local councils on delivering essential services and core infrastructure, spending responsibly, and operating under greater scrutiny. New legislation will require local government to meet community needs for good-quality local infrastructure, public services, and regulatory functions in the most cost-effective way for households.

Of the functions identified through international best practice review, the role of local authorities in direct economic development support seems most at odds with current policy indications. This should be explored further.

[4] Advocacy as a function has previously been undertaken by the GCP but is not currently a priority for some members.

Scope of functions

Broad functional models

Broad models can be distilled:

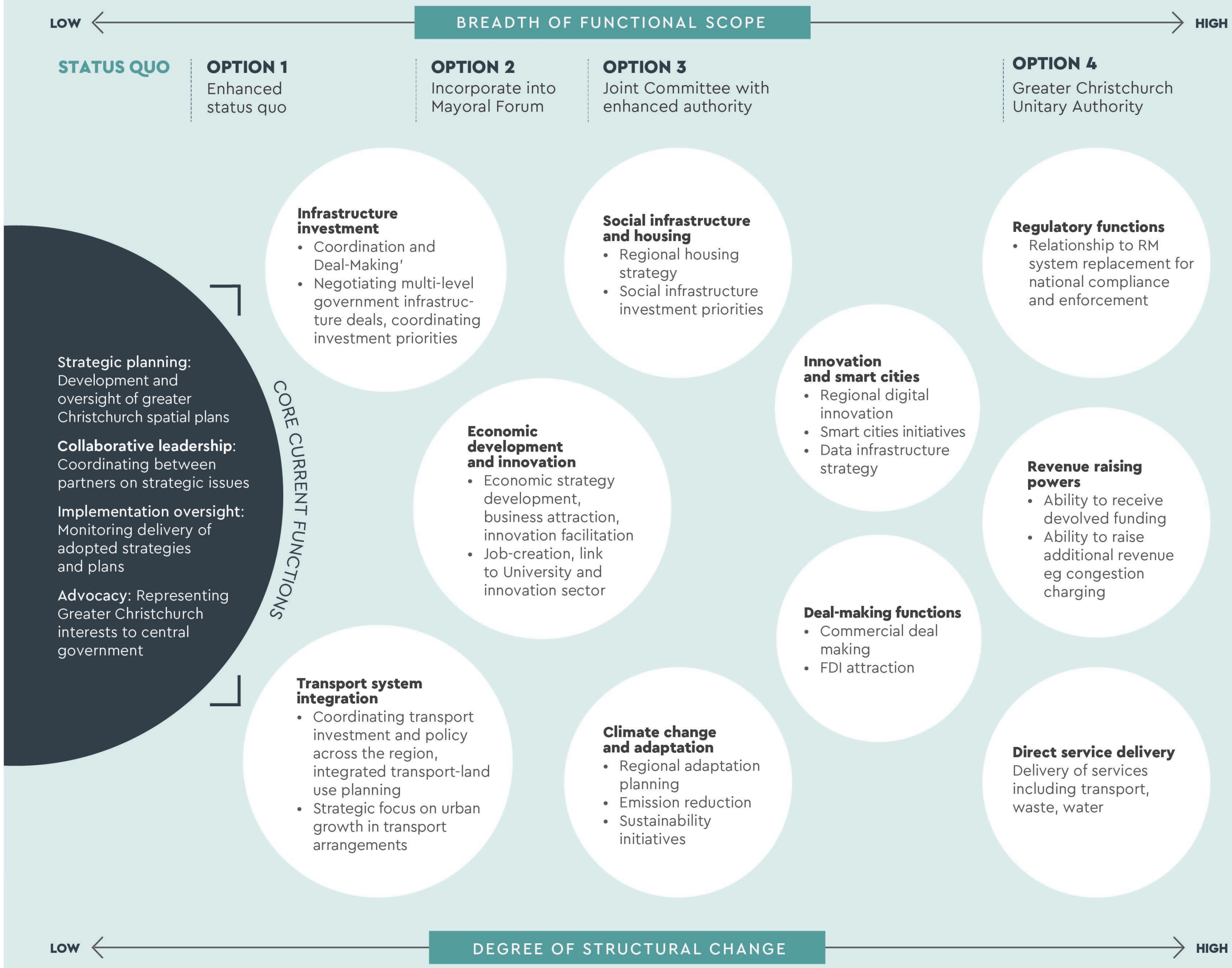
Table 1: Broad functional models

MODEL	FUNCTIONS
Strategic planning coordination	Spatial plan implementation and monitoring Strategic planning as key coordination mechanism Multi-level government alignment Flexible cooperation in spatial structures
Urban partnership deal-making model	Infrastructure funding and financing coordination Economic development interventions Multi-level government deal negotiation Governance reform and institutional innovation
Integrated urban model	All current functions plus climate coordination, social infrastructure Regional service coordination (not always direct delivery) Enhanced economic development and innovation functions Multi-sectoral partnership management

Source: Adapted from OECD Materials

Diagram: Model choices available to GCP members

These strategic choices have been incorporated within our options analysis and are set out in a conceptional diagram below. These options are explored further in the next section and should be examined in more detail at the beginning of the next triennium.



Structural choices for partnership enhancement

Option 1: Enhanced current model (incremental change)

Structural framework

This option retains the existing committee structure while implementing significant process improvements and enhanced strategic capability. The approach builds on established relationships and legal frameworks while addressing identified performance and capability gaps.

Governance enhancements

- Reconfirm political mandate and purpose of the GCP
- Reinstate independent chair with strengthened mandate for strategic leadership rather than purely facilitative coordination
- Implement enhanced secretariat capability including dedicated strategic advisory function with policy analysis and regional perspective development capability
- Establish formal mana whenua protocols within existing structure, including dedicated advisory support and more work focused on joint aspirations and strategic alignment
- Transition to quarterly more future focussed and strategic forums focused on major regional challenges with monthly operational coordination for implementation tracking driving accountability. The latter could be the focus of Chief Executives with by exceptions reporting.

Implementation mechanisms

- Develop formal accountability frameworks linking strategic decisions to implementation outcomes across Partner councils
- Enhanced decision-making processes that balance consensus-seeking with strategic effectiveness through structured debate and clear decision criteria
- Strengthen central government engagement through formal liaison arrangements and strategic alignment mechanisms.

Precedent reference

This approach more closely mirrors successful evolution in Urban Growth Partnerships in Hamilton (Future Proof) and Tauranga (SmartGrowth), and Wellington Regional Growth Framework which enhanced existing structures rather than implementing major governance changes.

Advantages

- Lower implementation risk due to building on established relationships
- Maintains existing legal frameworks and institutional arrangements
- Can be implemented through existing council processes
- Provides foundation for future enhancement if additional reform proves necessary.

Limitations

- May not address fundamental political confidence issues if problems are structural rather than operational
- Limited change may not resolve decision-making inefficiencies
- May not provide sufficient strategic capability enhancement for complex regional challenges.

Assessment of design principles		
	STRATEGIC FOCUS	**
	STEWARDSHIP	**
	PARTNERSHIP	***
	VALUE FOR MONEY	***
	RESPONSIVE	***

Option 2: Incorporate into the Canterbury Mayoral Forum (moderate change)

Structural framework

Establish the Greater Christchurch Partnership as a formal subcommittee of the Canterbury Mayoral Forum, creating a two-tier regional governance structure that maintains Greater Christchurch strategic focus while integrating with broader Canterbury regional coordination with a shared Secretariat.

Governance enhancements

- Delegated authority for Greater Christchurch-specific strategic coordination
- Membership: Christchurch Mayor, Selwyn Mayor, Waimakariri Mayor, ECAN Chair, plus three mana whenua representatives and central government liaison representatives.
- Elect a chair from within the membership.
- Bi-monthly strategic meetings with quarterly reporting to Canterbury Mayoral Forum
- Specific mandate for spatial plan implementation, transport coordination, and potentially Greater Christchurch economic development.

Delegated Greater Christchurch authority

- Spatial plan implementation coordination and monitoring
- Transport infrastructure advocacy specific to Greater Christchurch corridor
- Growth management coordination across Christchurch, Selwyn, and Waimakariri boundaries
- Economic development strategy for Greater Christchurch metropolitan area.

Canterbury Mayoral Forum integration

- Regional policy alignment ensuring Greater Christchurch initiatives align with Canterbury-wide strategies
- Resource coordination opportunities leveraging Canterbury-wide capability and funding
- Central government engagement coordination presenting unified Canterbury voice while maintaining Greater Christchurch focus
- Cross-regional learning and best practice sharing between Canterbury subregions.

Integrated secretariat services

- Unified secretariat serving both Canterbury Mayoral Forum and Greater Christchurch Partnership
- Enhanced strategic capability through larger resource pool and specialised expertise
- Dedicated Greater Christchurch strategic advisor within integrated secretariat structure
- Shared administrative functions reducing duplication while maintaining specialised expertise
- Coordinated policy development ensuring alignment between Greater Christchurch and Canterbury-wide initiatives.

Enhanced mana whenua partnership arrangements

- Three mana whenua representatives on Greater Christchurch Partnership subcommittee ensuring strong Treaty partnership. This may require an independent chair to maintain confidence of mana whenua
- Formal advisory protocols with Canterbury Mayoral Forum ensuring broader regional Treaty partnership coordination
- Dedicated mana whenua advisory support funded through integrated secretariat arrangements.

Implementation pathway

- Canterbury Mayoral Forum already exists with established governance framework
- Greater Christchurch Partnership transition to subcommittee status through formal delegation
- Secretariat integration achievable within 6-month timeframe.

Precedent reference

Similar to successful regional coordination models in Victoria, Australia. The Local Government Advisory Panel for Victoria changes every year and is set up to offer the Minister advice on legislative, regulatory, strategic, and policy issues that affect councils across Victoria. Victoria also has where metropolitan subregional committees operate within broader regional governance frameworks.

Advantages

- Eliminates duplication between Canterbury Mayoral Forum and Greater Christchurch Partnership coordination
- Builds on existing Canterbury Mayoral Forum relationships and trust
- Maintains Greater Christchurch strategic focus within broader regional context
- Simplified governance structure reducing complexity and confusion.

Limitations

- Could undermine mana whenua confidence in approach and participation
- Would remove non-Mayoral elected members from the Partnership potentially weakening mandate of individual Councils
- Risk that Greater Christchurch priorities could be diluted within broader Canterbury context
- Potential for conflicting directions between Canterbury Mayoral Forum and Greater Christchurch Partnership
- Unclear accountability lines between subcommittee and parent body decisions including the role of mana whenua and Central Government members.

Assessment of design principles		
	STRATEGIC FOCUS	**
	STEWARDSHIP	**
	PARTNERSHIP	**
	VALUE FOR MONEY	****
	RESPONSIVE	**

Option 3: Joint Committee with enhanced authority (moderate change)

Structural framework

Establish formal Joint Committee under Schedule 7 Local Government Act 2002 with specific delegated decision-making authority for spatial planning, transport advocacy, and economic development coordination. This option provides legal mandate while enabling enhanced partnership arrangements. Mana whenua could form part of this joint committee.

Governance structure:

- Legal status as formal joint committee with delegated powers for spatial plan implementation, transport infrastructure advocacy, economic development coordination, and resource allocation for regional strategic initiatives
- Elect a chair from within the membership
- Enhanced secretariat with strategic policy unit, implementation monitoring capability, and economic development coordination function
- Formal advisory panels including business sector engagement, community representation, and technical expertise for major strategic initiatives

Financial and resource framework:

- Dedicated implementation fund with multi-year budget allocation enabling strategic programme development and coordinated regional initiative investment
- Enhanced funding model seeking central government contribution for strategic coordination and implementation support
- Performance-based arrangements with clear outcome indicators and regular evaluation requirements.

Decision-making authority:

- Specific delegated authorities for spatial planning implementation coordination, transport infrastructure advocacy and investment prioritisation, economic development strategy coordination, and resource allocation for regional strategic initiatives within defined parameters
- Clear accountability mechanisms linking decisions to implementation outcomes with regular reporting to constituent councils and central government partners

Precedent reference: Former Wellington Regional Strategy Committee enhanced governance model.

Advantages

- Clear legal mandate providing enhanced credibility and authority
- Improved decision-making efficiency through delegated powers
- Stronger accountability mechanisms enabling performance measurement
- Genuine opportunity to address Treaty partnership requirements
- Enhanced strategic capability through dedicated resources.

Limitations

- Requires formal council resolution processes potentially creating political implementation challenges
- Need for consensus on delegated authority scope
- Potential resistance to power delegation from individual councils
- Requires sustained political commitment across electoral cycles.

Assessment of design principles		
	STRATEGIC FOCUS	***
	STEWARDSHIP	***
	PARTNERSHIP	***
	VALUE FOR MONEY	**
	RESPONSIVE	**

Option 4: Greater Christchurch Unitary Authority (transformational change)

Structural framework

Establish a single unitary authority for Greater Christchurch through local government re-organisation under the Local Government Act 2002, consolidating Christchurch City Council, Selwyn District Council, Waimakariri District Council, and relevant Environment Canterbury functions into one comprehensive Unitary council with enhanced democratic representation and strategic capability.

This option should only be contemplated if central government policy settings change and there is strong local appetite for change.

Governance structure

- Single elected council with ward-based representation ensuring geographic and community representation across the Greater Christchurch area, with approximately 15-20 councillors representing distinct ward areas that maintain community connection while enabling regional coordination
- Directly elected mayor with enhanced executive authority for regional strategic leadership, infrastructure coordination, and economic development initiatives similar to Auckland's mayoral model but scaled for Greater Christchurch regional requirements
- Mana Whenua relationship with advisory rights on strategic planning, resource management, and economic development decisions
- Central Government Liaison Committee comprising regional representatives from key central government agencies including Waka Kotahi, Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, and other relevant agencies with formal advisory status and regular coordination protocols to support structured engagement with Government and delegated decision-making including potential for devolution of funding.

Functional integration

- Comprehensive spatial planning authority aligned with new RM requirements eliminating coordination requirements between district and regional planning functions, enabling integrated land use and infrastructure planning across the entire Greater Christchurch area without boundary constraints
- Unified infrastructure planning and delivery encompassing water services, transport planning, waste management, and growth infrastructure coordination currently requiring complex cross-council arrangements and central government coordination
- Economic development authority consolidating various local economic development functions with enhanced capability for regional investment attraction, business development coordination, and strategic economic planning aligned with spatial and infrastructure planning
- Environmental management integration combining district council environmental functions with regional council environmental oversight, enabling comprehensive environmental management from local to regional scale and consistent with the expected national enforcement and compliance model under proposed resource management reforms.

Democratic representation enhancement

- Community board structure maintaining local democratic representation and service delivery accountability for distinct communities within the Greater Christchurch area, ensuring local voices remain strong within regional governance framework
- Enhanced public participation requirements including structured community engagement processes for major strategic decisions, regular public reporting on regional strategy implementation, and formal community input mechanisms for budget and strategic planning processes

Resource and capability consolidation

- Comprehensive strategic planning capability combining current council planning resources with enhanced regional analysis, economic development, and implementation coordination expertise that individual councils cannot maintain independently

- Unified service delivery eliminating duplication and coordination complexities while maintaining service quality and community responsiveness through community board structures and local service delivery arrangements
- Enhanced borrowing and investment capability through larger rating base and improved central government partnership opportunities, enabling major infrastructure investment and strategic development initiatives currently challenging for individual councils.

Implementation pathway

- Local Government Commission reorganisation process under Local Government Act 2002 Part 3, requiring detailed reorganisation proposal development, comprehensive public consultation, and statutory decision-making processes that typically require 3-5 years for completion[5].
  May be assisted by future Government policy and legislative settings
- Transition planning encompassing staff integration, system consolidation, democratic representation arrangements, and service delivery continuity ensuring minimal disruption to community services and regional coordination during transition period
- Constitutional development including governance arrangements, advisory board establishment, community board structures, and central government partnership agreements that ensure effective governance from commencement of unitary authority operations.

Precedent reference

Auckland Council reorganisation experience providing lessons for large-scale local government consolidation, international unitary authority models in Canada, United Kingdom, and Australia demonstrating successful regional governance consolidation, and contemporary collaborative governance theory emphasising democratic accountability within regional coordination frameworks.

Advantages

- Eliminates coordination complexities through unified governance structure; enhanced democratic accountability through direct election and clear regional mandate
- Comprehensive strategic capability through resource consolidation and professional expertise
- Long-term governance sustainability through embedded regional coordination rather than voluntary partnership arrangements
- Potential for efficiency gains through elimination of duplication and enhanced strategic capability.

Limitations

- Major disruption to existing governance arrangements requiring extensive transition management
- Potential loss of local democratic representation and community connection; complex implementation process requiring sustained political commitment across multiple electoral cycles
- Potential resistance from existing councils concerned about autonomy and local representation; uncertain community support requiring extensive consultation and engagement
- Implementation costs and risks associated with major organisational change and system integration
- Potential for reduced innovation and responsiveness through larger organisational scale despite structural mitigation measures.

Assessment of design principles		
	STRATEGIC FOCUS	****
	STEWARDSHIP	****
	PARTNERSHIP	**
	VALUE FOR MONEY	**
	RESPONSIVE	***

[5] Local Government Act 2002, Part 3 (Structure and Reorganisation of Local Government), Subpart 2 (Reorganisation of local authorities) and Schedule 3

Recommendations

Given the proximity of the local body elections and ongoing policy changes affecting council functions, it is challenging to identify a single recommended option at this time. The optimal timing for this decision is at the commencement of the new triennium in early 2026.

There are two primary pathways:

Path 1: Enhanced status quo - If partners wish to minimise structural change, improvements to the current system can be achieved by focusing on collaborative behaviours and shared accountability.

Path 2: Structural reform - If partners consider that policy changes require more substantial reforms, then options that look at wider functions and structures may be warranted including options 3 and 4 or an alternate model informed by wider Government policy settings could be explored.

Overall recommendation: The GCP requires immediate action to improve effectiveness. We recommend implementing immediate improvements, followed by formal consideration of structural options by incoming councils in at the beginning of the next triennium.

Table 2: Summary of implementation considerations

Phases & tasks	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb
Phase 1: Report receipt and immediate actions							
Immediate steps							
Secretariat: Coordinate distribution of report and advice to GCP							
Council Officers: Brief elected members and prepare council consideration papers							
GCP Members: Receive independent review and endorse interim chair continuation							
Committee formation and confidence building							
Secretariat: Transition from bi-monthly operational meetings to quarterly strategic forums							
Council Officers: Develop clear partnership value proposition addressing member concerns and realign focus from individual council interests to collective accountability							
GCP Members: Establish new GCP following formation processes							

Phases & tasks	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb
Phase 2: Electoral transition and preparation (November 2025 - February 2026)							
Maintain operational effectiveness							
Secretariat: Enhance capability to maintain operations during electoral transition			■	■			
Council Officers: Prepare comprehensive briefing materials on review findings and options				■	■		
GCP Members: Ensure continuity of decision-making authority during transition period						■	
Strengthen mana whenua partnerships							
Secretariat: Provide advisory support and coordinate mana whenua engagement working with Whitiroa	■	■	■				■
Council Officers: Meet with mana whenua representatives to discuss review findings and develop enhanced decision-making processes demonstrating genuine partnership commitment			■	■	■		■
GCP Members: Approve formal protocols within current structure					■	■	■
Phase 3: Decision making and implementation (March 2026 - December 2026)							
Decision-making process							
Secretariat: Coordinate structured decision-making processes across partner councils		■	■	■			
Council Officers: Provide comprehensive briefings to elected members and prepare decision papers			■	■			
GCP Members: Participate in formal council workshops and make binding decisions on structural options					■	■	■
Formal option selection							
Secretariat: Coordinate workshops, public consultation processes, and inter-council communications and engagement plan with wider stakeholders			■	■	■		
Council officers: Conduct any Council specific analysis including interactions with other Council functions prepare relevant advice				■	■		
GCP Members: Approve options informed by engagement with Government and pass formal council resolutions with binding commitments					■	■	■

Implementation

Implementation approach

Based on selected structural option, implement accelerated implementation programme:

- *For Options 1-3 (Enhanced Current/Mayoral Forum/Joint Committee):* 6-month implementation including governance framework development, secretariat enhancement, co-governance establishment, and strategic programme launch with first strategic outcomes achieved by mid-2027.

- *For Option 4 (Unitary Authority):* Engage with Central Government and/or initiate Local Government Commission process with 4-5 year implementation timeline including reorganisation proposal development, consultation, and transition planning for implementation by 2030-2031.

Once a new option is in place, focus on continued performance

Focus on demonstrating tangible sub-regional outcomes through selected structural approach including spatial plan implementation progress, economic development initiatives, infrastructure coordination success, and stakeholder satisfaction improvement. Use outcome achievement to consolidate political support and validate structural choices.

Continuous improvement implementation

Establish regular evaluation and improvement processes including annual effectiveness reviews, stakeholder feedback systems, and strategic adjustment mechanisms that enable ongoing partnership development based on performance and emerging regional requirements.

The case for an independent chair

The case for an independent chair depends on the option chosen. Generally collaborative mechanisms benefit from a independent skilled third party whereas more formal structures can reply on clearer lines of accountability. If the option warrants an independent chair, then that person should be appointed at the beginning of each triennium and the individual should possess the following attributes:

- experience in local government or public sector governance
- strong facilitation and consensus-building skills
- political neutrality and credibility with all councils
- understanding of collaborative governance models
- ability to manage conflict and drive decision-making
- strategic thinking and change management experience
- respected reputation across the Partnership

Concluding comment

The Greater Christchurch Partnership stands at a juncture that will determine its future relevance and effectiveness for regional strategic coordination. After two decades of evolution, the Partnership has demonstrated significant capability during crisis response and strategic planning phases but now faces fundamental challenges inviting structural and operational changes.

The review findings clearly political confidence has declined, implementation coordination remains challenging, and genuine Treaty of Waitangi partnership requires improvement to retain the confidence of mana whenua. However, these challenges also represent opportunities for partnership revitalisation that could restore the strategic edge that characterised the Partnership's most effective periods.

Considering risks

The recommendations of this report give rise to several risks that need to be evaluated against the risk of doing nothing. Electoral transitions present significant considerations as new elected members need comprehensive briefings to maintain collaborative support, whilst evolving political priorities may affect established positions. Partnership momentum could be impacted if progress is slower than anticipated, making early consideration of the issue in the new triennium essential. Central Government policy shifts pose material risks including in the value placed on collaboration and these forms of urban growth partnership. Maintaining credibility with mana whenua requires focus at all levels. Implementation complexity and coordination effectiveness remain core challenges requiring clear accountability mechanisms.

Appendix 1

Terms of Reference – Greater Christchurch Partnership Review

1. **Background – Greater Christchurch Partnership**
Vision: One Group, Standing Together for Greater Christchurch **Purpose**: To take a collaborative approach to address strategic challenges and opportunities for Greater Christchurch. The Partnership is built on a strong foundation of mutual respect and trust, transparency, and a strong commitment to achieving best for community, now and into the future. Since 2004 the Greater Christchurch Partnership has been a voluntary coalition of local government, mana whenua and government agencies that has successful worked collaboratively to address strategic challenges and opportunities for Greater Christchurch. Members are: • Environment Canterbury • Mana whenua • Christchurch City Council • Selwyn District Council • Waimakariri District Council • Te Whatu Ora - Waitaha • Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency *(Non-voting member)* The Partnership has effectively been in place for 20 years. There have been significant changes over that period and with the endorsement and adoption of the Greater Christchurch Spatial Plan the Committee has agreed that it is timely and healthy to review the Partnership to see if it is set up to succeed into the future.
2. **Purpose of the Review**
a. Assess the effectiveness of the Greater Christchurch Partnership in achieving its purpose, role and functions. b. Evaluate the efficiency of the partnership's operations and decision-making processes.

c. Identify areas for improvement and provide recommendations for enhancing the partnership's performance including alternate organisational models, if appropriate.

3. Scope of the Review

a. Analyse the alignment, outcomes and impacts of key focus areas and work programme initiatives undertaken over the past three years.

b. Identify the best model(s) to advance Greater Christchurch's strategic priorities with government, iwi, Canterbury local authorities and the community.

c. Consider whether the GCP's governance, operational arrangements and funding are fit for purpose, and if not recommend suitable alternatives.

d. Consider if the role of Independent Chair is still required, and if not recommend a suitable alternative.

e. Assess the effectiveness of collaboration and communication among partner organisations.

4. Methodology

a. Conduct interviews[1] with each of the member organisations (governance committee members, chief executive and senior officer levels, mana whenua advisor) the former Independent Chair, Secretariat Director and staff and observer organisations (ie government agencies).

b. Review strategic plans, agendas/minutes and the joint work programme in the context of the Memorandum of Agreement.

c. Analyze quantitative and qualitative data to assess the partnership's effectiveness against its stated purpose, role and functions.

d. Consider comparison with other similar joint committees, mayoral forums and best practice examples from within New Zealand and if appropriate internationally.

5. Key Questions

a. What have been the key outcomes achieved for mana whenua by the partnership?

b. What improvements can be made to the partnerships governance and operational structures that would enable greater outcomes for mana whenua?

c. What can the partnership do to reflect the appropriate resourcing and mandate that is required for genuine Te Tiriti Partnership, in the most effective, efficient way?

d. How effectively has the partnership achieved its strategic goals?

e. What should the partnerships focus areas be going forward?

f. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the partnership's governance and operational structures?

g. How well does the partnership engage with key stakeholders?

h. What opportunities are there and what improvements can be made to enhance the partnership's efficiency and effectiveness?

i. What opportunities are there to enhance the combined work of the GCP and CMF to advance Canterbury's diverse interests?

6. **Deliverables**

a. A comprehensive report detailing the findings of the review.

b. Specific recommendations for improving the partnership's efficiency and effectiveness.

c. An action plan outlining steps to implement the recommendations.

d. Supporting presentation to the Chief Executives Advisory Group and the Greater Christchurch Partnership Committee.

7. **Timeline**

a. Terms of Reference to be approved by the GCP Committee on 7 March 2025

b. Independent reviewer confirmed as soon as possible.

c. Draft report to be provided to Chief Executives Advisory Group meeting on 29 July 2025 *(agenda circulated 24 July 2025)*.

d. Final report and presentation to the GCP Committee on 8 August 2025. (*agenda circulated on 31 July 2025)*

8. **Reviewer**

Independent reviewer to be confirmed.

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