



RUAPEHU DISTRICT COUNCIL

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To: Ohakune Justice Facility Consultation
Ministry of Justice
C/- Georgia Crandall
Via email: Georgia.Crandall@justice.govt.nz

Subject: **Ohakune Justice Facility**

Submission from: Ruapehu District Council
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Council does wish to speak in support of its submission.

The Ruapehu District ... where adventure begins!



Ruapehu District Council (RDC) thanks the Ministry of Justice for the opportunity to submit on the future of the Ohakune Justice Facility.

The Ruapehu District (the District) covers an area of approximately 6,734km². It is one of Aotearoa New Zealand's largest districts by land area, made up of many small, diverse, and geographically spread-out rural communities, yet there are only two Justice Facilities in the District. If the Ohakune Justice Facility closes, the only other Justice Facility in the District is in Taumarunui, which is a drive of approximately 78.1 kilometers, taking around 57 minutes. RDC notes that Taihape also has a Justice Facility, which is a drive of approximately 55.6 kilometers, taking around 39 minutes, and that court cases have been diverted there since September.

The District is a low socio-economic District. Many residents are struggling financially, so providing court services *in* the District's communities is of huge importance. As of June 2022, the District has a Deprivation Index Level of 9 (1 represents the least deprived areas, 10 the most). The District's national deprivation ranking is 7 of 68 (a rank of 1 represents the district with the highest level of deprivation). If the Ohakune Justice Facility closes, the southern part of the District will have a major access to justice issue, which is an area that has some of the highest deprivation levels in the country.

Many of the residents of Ohakune and the surrounding areas will find it difficult to attend their court dates if they must travel to Taihape. The cost of petrol or diesel and the fact that there is no public transport available between Ohakune and Taihape are significant barriers. It is important to note that it is not just offenders that will be adversely affected, but victims, witnesses, whānau and other support people, as well as legal staff, court staff and the Police.

It is RDC's view that it is essential that court services remain available in Ohakune. The facility should be upgraded or relocated to an alternative venue in Ohakune, so it remains a permanent facility for the residents of Ohakune and the surrounding areas. In the meantime, RDC would like to see a service provided so that people can attend their court dates online, if they are unable to travel. RDC appreciates that an arrangement like this would be on a case-by-case basis, however this would assist with promoting cost effective and equitable access to justice for the residents of Ohakune and the surrounding areas, and that should be a priority for the Ministry of Justice.

If the decision is made to close the facility, RDC would like the Ministry to advise how they plan to resolve the resulting access to justice issue for the residents of Ohakune and the surrounding areas. Some ideas that have been suggested by community members include a mobile service, or a court hub similar to the banking hubs that are being trialled around the country.

RDC urges the Ministry of Justice to look beyond short-term financial considerations to the long term community wellbeing of Ohakune and the surrounding areas.

