



PETITION SCHEME

Petitions

The Council welcomes petitions and recognises that petitions are one way in which people can let us know their concerns. All petitions sent or presented to the Council will receive an acknowledgement from the Council within 10 working days of receipt. This acknowledgement will set out what we plan to do with the petition. We will treat something as a petition if it is identified as being a petition, or if it seems to us that it is intended to be a petition, and it is signed by **50** or more people who live, work or study in the Borough.

Paper petitions can be sent to:-

Head of Law and Administration
Civic Centre
Riverside
Stafford
ST16 3AQ

What are the guidelines for submitting a petition?

Petitions submitted to the Council **must** include:-

- a clear and concise statement covering the subject of the petition. It should state what action the petitioners wish the Council to take.
- the name and address and signature of any person supporting the petition, and if they do not live in the Borough the address of their place of work or study.

Petitions should be accompanied by contact details, including a full postal address, for the petition organiser. This is the person we will contact to explain how we will respond to the petition. The contact details of the petition organiser will **not** be placed on the Council's website.

Petitions which are considered to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate will not be accepted. If a petition does not follow the guidelines set out above, the Council will not do anything further with it. In either case, we will write to the petition organiser to explain the reasons. In the period immediately before an election or referendum we may need to deal with your petition differently - if this is

the case we will explain the reasons and may give a revised timescale which will apply.

What will the Council do when it receives a petition?

An acknowledgement will be sent to the petition organiser within 10 working days of receiving the petition. It will let them know what we plan to do with the petition and when they can expect to hear from us again. It will also be published on our website.

If we can and are willing to do what the petition asks for without reference to the Cabinet, the acknowledgement may confirm that we have taken the action requested and the petition will be closed. If the petition has enough signatures to trigger a Council debate, or a Senior Officer giving evidence, then the acknowledgement will confirm this and tell you when and where the meeting will take place.

In all other cases, the Cabinet will endeavour to consider the petition at its next meeting, although on some occasions this may not be possible and consideration will then take place at the following meeting. The Cabinet will then make a decision on what further action the Council should take in respect of the petition.

If the petition relates to a planning or licensing application, is a statutory petition (for example requesting a referendum on having an elected mayor), or on a matter where there is already an existing right of appeal, such as council tax banding and non-domestic rates, other procedures apply. Further information on any of these matters is available from Committee Services on 01785 619211.

To ensure that people know what we are doing in response to the petitions we receive, details of all the petitions submitted to us and the action taken will be published on our website, except in cases where this would be inappropriate.

How will the Council respond to petitions?

Our response to a petition will depend on what a petition asks for and how many people have signed it, but may include one or more of the following:-

- taking the action requested in the petition
- considering the petition at a council meeting
- holding an inquiry into the matter
- undertaking research into the matter
- holding a public meeting
- holding a consultation
- holding a meeting with petitioners
- referring the petition for consideration by one of the Council's Scrutiny Committees*
- calling a referendum
- writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition

*Scrutiny Committees are Committees of Councillors who are responsible for scrutinising the work of the Council – they hold the Council’s decision makers to account.

In addition to these steps, the Council will consider what actions it can potentially take on the issues highlighted in a petition.

If the petition is about something over which the Council has no direct control (for example the local railway or hospital) we will consider making representations on behalf of the community to the relevant body. The Council works with a large number of local partners and where possible will work with these partners to respond to the petition. If we are not able to do this for any reason (for example if what the petition calls for conflicts with Council policy), then we will set out the reasons for this. More information on the services for which the Council is responsible is on the Council’s website

If the petition is about something that a different Council is responsible for we will give consideration to what the best method is for responding to it. This might consist of simply forwarding the petition to the other Council, but could involve other steps. In any event we will always notify the petition organiser of the action we have taken.

Report to Cabinet

Petitions that do not have sufficient signatures to require a full Council debate or a Senior Officer giving evidence, and do not contain requests that can be complied with informally by officers, will be reported to the Cabinet. The petition organiser will be given 5 minutes to present the petition at the meeting and the petition will then be discussed by Councillors for a maximum of 10 minutes. The Cabinet will decide how to respond to the petition at this meeting. They may decide to take the action the petition requests, not to take the action requested for reasons put forward in the debate, or to commission further investigation into the matter, for example by a relevant Officer or Scrutiny Committee. Where the issue is one on which the full Council are required to make the final decision, the Cabinet will decide whether to make recommendations to inform that decision. The petition organiser will receive written confirmation of this decision. This confirmation will also be published on the Council’s website.

Full Council debates

If a petition requests that it be debated at a meeting of the full Council and has more than **1250** signatures it will be debated by the full Council. This means that the issue raised in the petition will be discussed at a meeting which all Councillors can attend. The Council will endeavour to consider the petition at its next meeting, although on some occasions this may not be possible and consideration will then take place at the following meeting. The petition organiser will be given 5 minutes to present the petition at the meeting and the petition will then be discussed by Councillors for a maximum of 10 minutes (this may be extended by a vote in the Council). The Council will decide how to respond to the petition at this meeting. They may decide to take the action the petition requests, not to take the action requested for reasons put forward in the debate, or to commission further investigation into the matter, for example by a relevant Committee. Where the issue is one on which the Cabinet are

required to make the final decision, the Council will decide whether to make recommendations to inform that decision. The petition organiser will receive written confirmation of this decision. This confirmation will also be published on our website.

Officer evidence

The petition may ask for a Senior Council Officer to give evidence at a public meeting about something for which the Officer is responsible as part of their job. For example, the petition may ask a Senior Council Officer to explain progress on an issue, or to explain the advice given to elected members to enable them to make a particular decision.

If the petition has at least **600** signatures, the relevant Senior Officer will give evidence at a public meeting of the Council's relevant Scrutiny Committee. The Officers who may be required to give evidence are the Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Heads of Service and Service Managers. If you require information on which Officer has responsibility for the matters which concern you please contact Committee Services on 01785 619211. You should be aware that the Council may decide that it would be more appropriate for another Officer to give evidence instead of any Officer named in the petition - for instance if the named Officer does not have responsibility for the matters raised or has changed jobs. The Committee may also decide to call the relevant Cabinet Member or the Ward Councillor to attend the meeting. Committee Members will ask the questions at this meeting, but you will be able to suggest questions to the chairman of the Committee by contacting the Councils Committee Services Section on 01785 619211 no later than three working days before the meeting.

What can I do if I feel my petition has not been dealt with properly?

If you feel that we have not dealt with your petition properly, the petition organiser has the right to request that a Scrutiny Committee review the steps that the Council has taken in response to your petition. It is helpful to everyone, and can improve the prospects for a review if the petition organiser gives a short explanation of the reasons why the Council's response is not considered to be adequate.

Reviews will be carried out by the Resources Scrutiny Committee, unless the Council's Chief Executive considers that another Scrutiny Committee would be more appropriate.

The Committee will endeavour to consider your request at its next meeting, although on some occasions this may not be possible and consideration will take place at the following meeting. Should the Committee determine we have not dealt with your petition adequately, it may use any of its powers to deal with the matter. These powers include instigating an investigation, making recommendations to the Council Executive and arranging for the matter to be considered at a meeting of the full Council.

Once the appeal has been considered the petition organiser will be informed of the results within 5 working days. The results of the review will also be published on our website.