

Petition Scheme

1. Petitions

The Council welcomes petitions and recognises that petitions are one way in which people can let us know their concerns. Any petition containing a minimum of 50 signatures, presented in either hard copy format or electronically to the Council, will receive an acknowledgement from the Council within 10 working days of receipt and will include details of the timescale for the matter to be determined/considered further by the Council.

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. A petition should however contain a clear statement of the persons concerns and what the person wants the authority to do.

Paper petitions can be sent to:

Head of Democratic Services
Stockton on Tees Borough Council
Municipal Buildings
Church Road
Stockton on Tees
TS18 1LD

Alternatively, they may be created, signed and submitted online by following this link [link available December 2010]

If your petition has however received 2000 signatures or more, it will automatically be referred to a meeting of full Council for a full and proper debate and if this is the case, we will let you know when this will happen.

2. 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.

Petitions should be accompanied by contact details, including an 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 website. If the petition does not identify a petition organiser, we will contact signatories to the petition to agree who should act as the petition organiser.

Petitions which are considered to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate will not be accepted. 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 discuss the revised timescale which will apply. If a petition does not follow the guidelines set out above, the Council may decide not to do anything further with it. In that case, we will write to you to explain the reasons.

3. What will the Council do when it receives my petition?

An acknowledgement will be sent to the petition organiser within 10 working days of receiving the petition and such an acknowledgement will include details of 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 do what your petition asks for, 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 acknowledgment will confirm this and tell you when and where the meeting will take place. If the petition needs more investigation, we will tell you the steps we plan to take.

If the petition applies 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 all these procedures and how you can express your views is available here [insert links to Council's website].

We will not take action on any petition which we consider to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate and will explain the reasons for this in our acknowledgement of the petition.

To ensure that people know what we are doing in response to the petitions we receive the details of all the petitions submitted to us will be published on our website, except in cases where this would be inappropriate. Whenever possible we will also publish all correspondence relating to the petition (all personal details will be removed). When you sign an e-petition (see Section 7 for details) you can elect to receive this information by email. We will not send you anything which is not relevant to the e-petition you have signed, unless you choose to receive other emails from us.

4. 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 the Council's Executive Scrutiny Committee, (or other Scrutiny Select Committee if the matter has already been considered by the Executive Scrutiny Committee) *
- calling a referendum
- writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition

*The Executive Scrutiny and other Scrutiny Select Committees are committees of councillors who are responsible for scrutinising the work of the council—in other words, these scrutiny committees have the power to hold the council's decision makers to account. Details of the dates and times of these meetings can be found at (INSERT LINK to Council's website)

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

If your 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 [link to list of LAA partners] and where possible will work with these partners to respond to your 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 to you. You can find more information on the services for which the Council is responsible here [link to Council's website].

If your 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 you of the action we have taken.

5. Full Council debates

If a petition contains more than 2,000 signatures it will be debated by the full Council unless it is a petition asking for a senior council officer to give evidence at a public meeting. 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 five minutes to present the petition at the meeting and the petition will then be discussed by councillors for a maximum of 30 minutes. 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 Cabinet* are required to make the final decision, the Council will decide whether to make recommendations to inform that decision. Details of the dates and times of these meetings can be found at [INSERT LINK to Council's website](#))

The petition organiser will receive written confirmation of the decision reached. This confirmation will also be published on our website.

* Cabinet is the executive decision making body of the Council. It has responsibility for implementing the agreed policies of the Council by making decisions within that framework. These policies and decisions can affect, and ultimately benefit, all areas of the Borough. The cabinet can also seek to recommend changes that it wishes the full Council to make to its existing policy framework or its budget/financial arrangements (Medium Term Financial Plan).

6. Officer evidence

Your 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, your 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 your petition contains at least 1000 signatures, the relevant senior officer will give evidence at a public meeting of the Council's Executive Scrutiny Committee. A list of the senior staff that can be called to give evidence can be found here [insert link]. You should be aware that the Executive Scrutiny Committee 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 has changed jobs. The Committee may also decide to call the relevant Cabinet Member to attend the meeting. Committee members will ask the questions at this meeting, but you will be able to suggest questions to the chair of the committee by contacting [insert details of Scrutiny staff on website] up to three working days before the meeting.

7. E-petitions

The Council welcomes e-petitions which are created and submitted through our website [link available from December 2010]. E-petitions must follow the same guidelines as paper petitions [link to guidelines]. The petition organiser will need to provide us with their name, postal address and email address. You will also need to decide how long you would like your petition to be open for signatures. Most petitions run for six months, but you can choose a shorter or longer timeframe, up to a maximum of 12 months.

When you create an e-petition, it may take ten working days (to be confirmed) before it is published online. This is because we have to check that the content of your petition is suitable before it is made available for signature. If we feel we cannot publish your petition for some reason, we will contact you within this time to explain. You will be able to change and resubmit your petition if you wish. If you do not do this within 10 working days, a summary of the petition and the reason why it has not been accepted will be published under the 'rejected petitions' section of the website.

When an e-petition has closed for signature, it will automatically be submitted to the Head of Democratic Services. In the same way as a paper petition, you will receive an acknowledgement within 10 working days of receipt of the closed petition.

A petition acknowledgement and response will be emailed to everyone who has signed the e-petition and elected to receive this information. The acknowledgment and response will also be published on this website.

For e-petitions containing 2,000 or more signatures, the provisions set aside in Section 5 above apply.

8. How do I 'sign' an e-petition?

You can see all the e-petitions currently available for signature here [insert link to website-available from December 2010]. When you sign an e-petition you will be asked to provide your name, your postcode and a valid e mail address. When you have submitted this information you will be sent an email to the email address you have provided. This email will include a link which you must click on in order to confirm the email address is valid. Once this step is complete your 'signature' will be added to the petition. People visiting the e-petition will be able to see your name in the list of those who have signed it but your contact details will not be visible.

9. 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 the Council's Executive Scrutiny Committee (or other most appropriate Select Committee if it had already been involved in consideration of the petition) 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. 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 Cabinet 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 10 working days. The results of the review will also be published on our website.

For further information on any of the above provisions, please contact Nigel Hart, Team Leader-Democratic & Member Services, tel. 01642 526193, e-mail nigel.hart@stockton.gov.uk