

## **1. SCHEME**

- 1.1 This Scheme is the Petitions Scheme adopted by Suffolk Coastal District Council on 28 May 2010. It will be reviewed every year by the Council's Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.2 Petitions with 50 or more signatures will be "active" petitions for the purposes of this scheme. Petitions which contain 1,200 signatures will be debated by the Full Council and petitions which call for evidence from a senior officer, and have 600 signatures, will trigger that response.
- 1.3 The authority operates executive arrangements. The authority holds a [Full Council meeting](#) on a monthly basis.

## **2. PETITIONS**

- 2.1 The Council welcomes petitions and recognises that petitions are one way in which people can let us know their concerns. All petitions sent to the Council will receive an acknowledgement according to Council procedures.
- 2.2 Petitions with 50 or more signatures will be treated as "active" petitions under the Council's petitions scheme. They will be acknowledged and the acknowledgement will set out what we plan to do with the petition.
- 2.3 Petitions with less than 50 signatures will be treated in accordance with the Council's compliments and complaints procedure. Petitions with below 50 signatures that relate to specific ward issues may also be passed to the relevant ward members and town/parish council for their consideration. 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.
- 2.4 Paper petitions can be sent to: Democratic Services, Suffolk Coastal District Council, Melton Hill, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 1AU.
- 2.5 Or be created, signed and submitted online from 15 December 2010.
- 2.6 If your petition has received 1,200 signatures or more it will also be scheduled for a council debate as set out in [section 4 of the Constitution](#) and if this is the case we will let you know whether this will happen at the same meeting or a later meeting of the Council.
- 2.7 **What are the guidelines for submitting a petition?**
- 2.8 Active 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.
- 2.9 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.

- 2.10 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.
- 2.11 **What will the Council do when it receives my petition?**
- 2.12 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.
- 2.13 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.
- 2.14 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, for example:
- [Rateable value for Business Rates](#)
  - [Council Tax banding](#)
  - [Licensing applications](#)
  - [Planning and enforcement appeals](#)
- 2.15 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.
- 2.16 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).
- 2.17 **How will the Council respond to active petitions?**
- 2.18 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:
- Giving effect to the request in the petition.
  - Considering the petition at a meeting of the Council.
  - Holding an inquiry.
  - Holding a public meeting.
  - Commissioning research.
  - Giving a written response to the petition organiser setting out the Council's views about the request in the petition.
  - Referring the petition to a scrutiny committee.
- 2.19 \*Scrutiny committees are committees of councillors who are responsible for scrutinising the work of the Council - in other words, the scrutiny committee has the power to hold the Council's decision makers to account.

2.20 In addition to these steps, the Council will consider all the specific actions it can potentially take on the issues highlighted in a petition. The table below gives some examples.

**Petition subject      Appropriate steps**

Alcohol related crime and disorder	If your petition is about crime or disorder linked to alcohol consumption, the Council will, among other measures, consider the case for placing restrictions on public drinking in the area by establishing a designated public place order or, as a last resort, imposing an alcohol disorder zone. When an alcohol disorder zone is established the licensed premises in the area where alcohol related trouble is being caused are required to contribute to the costs of extra policing in that area. The Council's response to your petition will set out the steps we intend to take and the reasons for taking this approach.
Anti-social behaviour (ASB)	As the elected representatives of your local area, and a licensing authority, the Council plays a significant role in tackling anti-social behaviour. The Council, in conjunction with our partners in the local crime and disorder partnership have set out <a href="#">minimum service standards</a> for responding to issues of anti-social behaviour.  When responding to petitions on ASB, we will consider in consultation with our local partners, all the options available to us including the wide range of powers and mechanisms we have to intervene as part of our role as licensing authority. For example, we will work with the neighbourhood policing team in the affected area to identify what action might be taken. Consider identifying a dedicated contact within the Council to liaise with the community and neighbourhood partners on issues of ASB in the area in question and, where appropriate, we will alert the community safety partnership and crime to the issues highlighted in the petition.

2.21 If your petition is not about one of the things that the Council is responsible (for example the local railway or hospital), or is about something that a different Council is responsible for, we will consider how we can best respond to it. This might consist of simply forwarding the petition to the other organisation. In any event, we will always notify you of the action we have taken.

**3. COUNCIL DEBATES**

3.1 If a petition contains more than 1,200 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 meeting of the Council's relevant Scrutiny Committee. 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.

3.2 The petition organiser will be given five minutes to present the petition at the meeting and the petition will then be discussed by Councillors. 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 Council's 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.

#### **4. OFFICER EVIDENCE**

- 4.1 Your petition may ask for a senior officer of the Council to give evidence at a meeting of the Council's relevant Scrutiny Committee about something for which the officer is responsible as part of their job. For example, your petition may ask a senior officer to explain progress on an issue, or to explain the advice given to elected members to enable them to make a particular decision.
- 4.2 If your petition contains at least 600 signatures, the relevant senior officer will give evidence at a meeting of the Council's relevant Scrutiny committee. A [list of the senior staff](#) that can be called to give evidence can be found on our website. You should be aware that the relevant 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 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 Head of Legal Services up to three working days before the meeting.

#### **5. E PETITIONS (DUE TO BE OPERATIONAL BY 15 DECEMBER 2010)**

#### **6. WHAT CAN I DO IF I FEEL THAT THE STEPS TAKEN IN RESPONSE TO MY PETITION ARE NOT ADEQUATE?**

- 6.1 If you feel that the steps taken in response to your petition are not adequate, the petition organiser has the right to request that the Council's relevant Scrutiny Committee reviews 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.
- 6.2 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's Cabinet and arranging for the matter to be considered at a meeting of the full Council.
- 6.3 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.

#### **7. POLICY GROUNDS FOR REFUSAL OF A PETITION**

- 7.1 The Council has delegated authority to either the Chief Executive or the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to refuse a petition if it is vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate. This policy sets out the grounds on which the Chief Executive/Head of Legal and Democratic Services will exercise that power for the sake of openness and transparency.
- 7.2 The petition will be considered vexatious if it is likely to cause distress, disruption or irritation without any proper or justified cause.
- 7.3 The petition will be considered abusive if it may cause the Authority to breach any of the equality enactments (as defined in 33 of the Quality Act 2006) or is insulting, cruel, unjust, or contemptuous.

- 7.4 The petition will be considered otherwise inappropriate where it does not relate to an officer's roles in delivering public services but to his personality or private life; where it amounts to harassment or bullying; where it is connected to or otherwise associated with legal proceedings and where it will target individual community members.

**Links to the source documents:**

The Act:

[www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2009/ukpga\\_20090020\\_en\\_1](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2009/ukpga_20090020_en_1)

The Order:

[www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2010/uksi\\_20100898\\_en\\_1#f00001](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2010/uksi_20100898_en_1#f00001)

The Guidance:

[www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/1524975.pdf](http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/1524975.pdf)