

# **GATESHEAD COUNCIL**

## **PETITION SCHEME**

### **1. Petitions**

The Council welcomes petitions and recognises that they 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 also say as much as we can at that stage about what we have done, or plan to do, with the petition.

For the purposes of this scheme 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 if it is signed by ten or more persons who live, work or study in Gateshead, and who are not all resident at the same address.

Paper petitions can be sent to any of the Council's relevant senior officers at the following address:

Civic Centre, Regent Street, Gateshead, NE8 1HH

If you are uncertain about which senior officer to send a petition to, it can be addressed to the Strategic Director, Legal and Corporate Services.

Petitions can also be presented to an ordinary meeting of the Council. These meetings usually take place in Gateshead Civic Centre and the dates and time can be found here [\[insert link\]](#). If you would like to present your petition to the Council, or would like your councillor or someone else to present it on your behalf, please contact the Council's Democratic Services Manager or one of his staff on (0191) 433 2128 at least 10 working days before the meeting and they will talk you through the process. If your petition has received 2,000 signatures or more it will also be scheduled for a council debate 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. 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 each 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 who appear to be the first few signatories to the petition to clarify and agree who is to 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?**

We will first ensure the petition is passed to the appropriate chief officer. An acknowledgement will then be sent to the petition organiser within 10 working days of the Council 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.

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 (see section 5 below), or to require a senior officer to attend before and give evidence to an overview and scrutiny committee (see section 6 below), then the acknowledgment or subsequent notification 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, or is a statutory petition (for example requesting a referendum on having an elected mayor), or concerns a matter where there is already an existing statutory right of appeal or review, such as council tax banding and non-domestic rates, other procedures apply.

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).

### **4. How will the Council respond to petitions?**

Our response to a petition (except an excluded petition) will depend on what it asks for and how many people have signed it, but will 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 the petitioners
- referring the petition for consideration by one of the Council's overview and scrutiny committees\*
- referring the petition for consideration by one of the Council's area forums
- writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition

\*Overview and scrutiny committees are committees of councillors who are responsible for scrutinising the work of the Council – in other words, an overview and scrutiny committee has the power to hold the Council's decision makers to account.

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 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 [\[insert link\]](#).

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 (see section 6 below). 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 ordinary meeting, although on some occasions this may not be possible and consideration will then take place at the following ordinary 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 15 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 concerns an executive function on which the Council Executive 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.

## **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 asks for this and contains at least 1,000 signatures, the relevant senior officer will give evidence at a public meeting of the council's overview and scrutiny panel. 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 overview and 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 chair of the committee by contacting the Democratic Services Manager up to three working days before the meeting.

## **7. What can I do if I feel my petition has not been dealt with properly?**

If, after receiving our final response to the petition, you feel that we have not dealt with your petition properly, the petition organiser has the right to request that one of the Council's overview and scrutiny committees review the steps that the council has taken in response to your petition. Any such request should be made in writing to the Democratic Services Manager, within 28 days of that final notification being received. 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 relevant overview and scrutiny 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 decide 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 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 result within 5 working days. The results of the review will also be published on our website.

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***For further information about the Council's Petition Scheme please contact our Democratic Services Manager on telephone number (0191) 433 2128***