

Petitions Scheme

City of York Council is committed to involving local people in its decision making. For some years, it has been operating a public participation scheme enabling members of the public to attend meetings and speak on an issue. It has also responded to petitions from the public, received in an number of ways e.g. through a ward Councillor submitting a petition on behalf of a constituent or by a resident submitting one direct to a council office by post/hand. As part of this petitions scheme, the Council is now introducing an ePetitions facility, providing another way in which a particular issue can be brought to attention of Councillors.

Through this Petitions Scheme, the Council is making a commitment to:

- enable anyone who lives, work or studies in the local authority area to organise and submit a petition either on paper or electronically
- Respond to the concerns raised within a petition
- Review its handling of a petition where a lead petitioner believes it has not been dealt with in accordance with this scheme

To support the scheme, the Council has:

- Set a low threshold on the number of petitioners to enable as many valid local opinions to be heard as possible
- Provided an ePetitions facility to enable those who want to, to create their petition on line and allow others to sign it electronically

Petitions Not Covered By This Scheme

if a petition relates to a planning or licensing application, is a statutory petition e.g. 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. If this is the case, the petition organiser will be informed and provided with information on the relevant procedure.

Petitions which are considered to be vexatious¹, abusive or otherwise inappropriate by the council's Monitoring Officer will not be accepted.

Understanding the Scheme

Through a few simple questions which follow, you will find out:

- How to submit a petition
- How to sign an ePetition
- Ways in which the Council may respond to your petition
- How to get involved when your petition is being considered
- What happens next

¹ Definition of 'Vexatious' - persistent and/or not reasonable i.e. where the request is likely to cause distress, disruption or irritation without any proper or justified cause

Submitting A Petition

Paper Petitions

Paper petitions can be submitted via a number of routes e.g. via a ward councillor, by post or hand delivered to one of the Council office buildings.

Paper petitions handed in to a ward councillor are presented at Full Council and then delegated to a senior officer within the relevant Directorate. Those that come directly into a council office building are also delegated to the appropriate senior officer.

EPetitions

All ePetitions submitted to the Council must:

- Include a clear and concise statement covering the subject of the petition
- State what action the petitioners wish the council to take

The petition organiser will need to provide us with their name, postal address including postcode, email address and contact telephone number. They will also need to decide how long their petition will be open for signatures. Most petitions run for six months, but it can be a shorter or longer timeframe, up to a maximum of 12 months.

When an ePetition is created, it may take up to five working days before it is published online. This is because we have to check that the content of the petition meets the guidelines before it is made available for signature.

If a petition does not follow the guidelines set out above, or if we need clarification on any issues raised within an ePetition, we will contact the ePetition organiser within 5 working days of receipt to explain. We will also contact the ePetition organiser if we feel we cannot publish an ePetition for any reason, and where possible, we will offer assistance to change and resubmit it. Initial contact will be made by email, but as the deadline approaches, we will attempt to contact the ePetition organiser by telephone. It is therefore important that the petition organiser provides their full contact details as listed above.

If the required clarification is not provided, or if an ePetition that we cannot publish is not re-submitted within 14 days, a summary of the ePetition and the reason why it has not been accepted will be published under the 'rejected petitions' section of the Council's ePetitions facility.

How To 'sign' an ePetition

An individual wanting to sign an ePetition, will be asked to provide their name, address and postcode, plus a valid email address. They will then receive an email containing a link which they must click on in order to confirm their email address is valid. Once this step is completed their 'signature' will be added to the ePetition.

NB: Anyone viewing an e-petition will only be able to see the names of those who have signed - **no contact details will be visible**.

All ePetitions currently available for signature on the Council's website can be viewed at <http://democracy.york.gov.uk/mgePetitionListDisplay.aspx?bcr=1>

How will the council respond ?

Within 14 days of a petition being received or of an ePetition being closed to signatories, we will send acknowledgement to the petition organiser, providing information on when they can expect to hear from us again and how we plan to respond to the petition.

Our response will depend on what the 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 meeting of Full Council
- holding an inquiry into the matter
- undertaking research into the matter
- holding a public meeting
- holding a consultation event
- holding a meeting with petitioners
- calling a referendum
- writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition
- referring the petition for consideration by a council committee or body

If the petition is about something over which the council has no direct control e.g. the local railway or hospital, we *may* refer it to the council's relevant partner organisation, and where appropriate, may work with them to respond to the petition.

Securing a Full Council Debate

Where a petition contains more than 750 signatures it will be debated by the full council. This means that the issue raised in the petition will be discussed at a meeting at which all Councillors can attend *and vote*.

The council will decide how to respond to the petition at this meeting. For example, 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 e.g. requesting an officer report be produced for consideration by the relevant Overview & Scrutiny Committee;
- forward the petition to a meeting of the Executive for a decision

Calling An Officer To Account

If your petition contains at least 500 signatures, you 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. The following senior staff can be called to account:

- Chief Executive
- Chief Finance Officer
- Monitoring Officer
- Directors of Service

You should be aware that the committee may decide that it would be more appropriate for another officer to give evidence instead of the officer named in the petition.

Getting Involved When Your Petition Is Considered

A petitioner may choose to attend any meeting where their petition is to be considered to listen to the debate, or register to speak at the meeting via the Council's [Public Participation Scheme](#). This scheme enables participants to address Councillors before they debate the issues raised.

What happens next?

The petition organiser will receive written notification of the outcome of their petition. Where a petition has been considered at a public meeting, information on the decisions taken in relation to the petitions will be made available electronically via the meeting Minutes published online. It will also be possible to track the implementation of any actions arising from them, via the online committee management system.

What if I feel your petition has not been dealt with properly?

If a petition organiser feels that we have not dealt with their petition properly, they have the right to request that the Council's Scrutiny Management Committee review the steps that the Council has taken in response to your petition. The committee will consider a request within 30 days of receiving it.

Should the Committee determine we have not dealt with a 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 Executive
- arranging for the matter to be considered at a meeting of the Full Council.

Once the review has been considered the petition organiser will be informed of the results within 5 working days, and the results of the review will also be published on our website via the Minutes of the meeting.