

## **Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction (LDEDC) Bill – Proposals on Petitions**

The LDEDC Bill currently in Parliament (incorporating issues from the Empowerment White Paper published on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2008, elements from the sub-national review, and outstanding issues from the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007), place duties on principal local authorities in relation to both paper and electronic petitions, and states that there must be a system for dealing with both. It also requires local authorities to respond to petitions that meet certain criteria and make that response publicly available i.e. local authorities must make, publicise and comply with a scheme for petitions and provide a facility for people to make electronic petitions. The scheme for all petitions must be published. The new measures do not apply for existing statutory arrangements such as the petition for a referendum on executive arrangements.

There are a number of duties about time to respond and form of response. Councils must also take steps to respond to petitions related to improvements in the economic, social and environmental well being of the area. There is mention of calling officers to account e.g. chief executive and senior officers required to attend overview and scrutiny when required to do so by a petition with a specified number of signatures. The petition organiser can ask for a petitions response to be referred to overview and scrutiny committee in order to review the council's response to any petition.

The LDEDC Bill also allows Local authorities to set their own threshold number of signatures which would be required to trigger a debate at full council, but must not set this too high. In line with this particular requirement, the Council's Constitution has already been revised to allow for a debate at Council on any petitions with excess of 1,000 signatures.

Following a number of discussions and minor amendments around the petitions elements of the Bill as it passed through the Committee stage in the House of Lords, it is expected that no major amendments in regard to petitions are expected that will materially affect the Bill, which is due to get Royal Assent in Autumn 2009, and is expected to come into force as of 1 April 2010.