

New Arrangements for Petitions

Summary

1. This report provides details of the new arrangements agreed by Council in October 2014 for dealing with petitions received by the Authority. It sets out the role of this Committee in those arrangements and specifically asks Members to consider those petitions received since the new arrangements were put in place.

Background

2. At a reconvened meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee on 2 October 2014, the Committee agreed and recommended to Council some new arrangements for dealing with petitions received. Those arrangements were approved by Council on 9 October 2014. In order to ensure some scrutiny of the actions taken in relation to petitions received either by Members or Officers, it has now been agreed for details of and actions relating to those petitions to be considered by this Committee.
3. Full Council also agreed to amend this Committee's terms of reference to enable it to consider petitions in accordance with the new arrangements. Details of the Committee's terms of reference as now revised are attached at Annex A for information.

3. The Process

Details of the new arrangements and process for responding to petitions are set out in Annex B to this report, together with a range of potential options available to the Committee in considering petitions. Those options are not meant to be exhaustive and the key message to scrutiny being that Audit & Governance Committee considered those to be a starting point and by way of suggestion only.

Schedule of Petitions Received

4. Attached at Annex C is a schedule of petitions received to which the new arrangements apply. Ultimately, this schedule will become a database into which staff across the Council can enter the appropriate receipt and action details. That will ensure much more accurate coverage of petitions received within the Council. Discussions are taking place with our IT (Information Technology) Department about the best way to achieve this. Naturally, there has not been time since the Council Meeting in October to bring that together. So, the attached schedule provides details of petitions received to date made known to Democratic Services at this stage. It includes details of any actions taken by officers or Members since the petitions have been received.
5. This Committee will receive a schedule of petitions received and any action taken in this way at future meetings, as and when petitions are received.
6. Members are asked to note that some petitioners will wish to attend the meeting to speak and present their petition.

Next Steps

7. The Committee now needs to consider the petitions and actions taken, where applicable and consider what it might like to do or recommend next, if anything. If Members feel that appropriate action has already been taken or is planned, then no further consideration by scrutiny may be necessary. As highlighted in Annex B, some of the possible options for Members in relation to the petition details give in Annex C are:
 - Request a fuller report in particular cases and might be expected to do so when a petition has received substantial support.
 - Note receipt of the petition and the proposed action.
 - Request a more detailed report on the matter.
 - Ask the relevant decision maker or the appropriate Cabinet member to attend the Committee to answer questions in relation to it.
 - Undertake a detailed scrutiny review, gathering evidence and making recommendations to the decision maker.

- Put the matter forward to be considered as a potential topic for a future scrutiny review.
 - Refer the matter to Full Council where its significance requires a debate in that forum.
8. Following this meeting, the lead petitioner will be kept informed of this Committee's consideration of their petition, including any further action Members may decide to take.

Consultation

9. All Groups have been consulted throughout the process of considering more appropriate ways in which for the Council to deal with and respond to petitions. That consultation resulted in consideration of a report by Audit & Governance Committee, which, in turn, made recommendations to Full Council to bring about this change.

Options

10. Members have a range of options before them in relation to their consideration of these petitions. These are set out above in paragraph 7.

Implications

11. There are no known legal, financial, human resource or other implications directly associated with the recommendations in this report. However, depending upon what, if any, further actions Members agree to there may, of course, be specific implications for resources which would need to be addressed.

Risk Management

12. There are no known risk implications associated with the recommendations in this report. Members should, however, assess the reputational risk by ensuring appropriate and detailed consideration is given to petitions from the public.

Recommendations

13. Members are asked to:

(i) note the change in the Committee's terms of reference to enable it to consider petitions received by the Council;

(ii) consider the petitions received so far as set out in Annex C and agree an appropriate course of action in each case;

(iii) report its actions and findings in relation to these petitions to Full Council as required by the new arrangements

Reason: To ensure the Committee carries out its new requirements in relation to petitions.

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Wards Affected:

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All



Background Papers: None

Annexes:

Annex A – Committee's Terms of Reference, as amended

Annex B - New arrangements and process for responding to petitions

Annex C - Schedule of petitions received to which new arrangements apply