

Petition Scheme

1. Petitions

The Council welcomes petitions and recognizes that petitions are one way in which people can let us know their concerns. Any petition containing a minimum of 10 signatures, presented in either hard copy format or electronically to the Council, will receive an acknowledgement from the Council within 10 working days of receipt and will include details of the timescale for the matter to be determined/considered further by the Council.

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. A petition should however contain a clear statement of the persons concerns and what the person wants the authority todo.

Paper petitions can be sent to:

Assistant Director of Administration,
Democratic & Electoral Services
Stockton on Tees Borough Council
Municipal Buildings
Church Road
Stockton on Tees
TS18 1LD

Alternatively, they may be created, signed and submitted online by following this link www.egenda.stockton.gov.uk/elps

If your petition has however received 1000 signatures or more, it will automatically be referred to a meeting of full Council for a full and proper debate and if this is the case, we will let you know when this will happen.

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 any 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 signatories to the petition to agree who should 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?

An acknowledgement will be sent to the petition organiser within 10 working days of receiving the petition and such an acknowledgement will include details of 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.

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.

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. Please contact the relevant department for more details of each procedure.

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). When you sign an e-petition (see Section 7 for details) you can elect to receive this information by email. We will not send you anything which is not relevant to the e-petition you have signed, unless you choose to receive other emails from us.

4. How will the Council respond to petitions?

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:

- 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 petitioners
- calling a referendum
- writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition

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.

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 1,000 signatures it will be considered for debate by the full Council. 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. 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 30 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 is one on which Cabinet* are required to make the final decision, the Council will decide whether to make recommendations to inform that decision. Details of the dates and times of these meetings can be found on the Council's website.

The petition organiser will receive written confirmation of the decision reached. This confirmation will also be published on our website.

* Cabinet is the executive decision making body of the Council. It has responsibility for implementing the agreed policies of the Council by making decisions within that framework. These policies and decisions can affect, and ultimately benefit, all areas of the Borough. The cabinet can also seek to recommend changes that it wishes the full Council to make to its existing policy framework or its budget/financial arrangements (Medium Term Financial Plan).

6. E-petitions

The Council welcomes e-petitions which are created and submitted through our website www.egenda.stockton.gov.uk/elps

E-petitions must follow the same guidelines as paper petitions [link to guidelines]. The petition organiser will need to provide us with their name,

postal address and email address. You will also need to decide how long you would like your petition to be open for signatures. Most petitions run for six months, but you can choose a shorter or longer timeframe, up to a maximum of 12 months.

When you create an e-petition, it may take ten working days (to be confirmed) before it is published online. This is because we have to check that the content of your petition is suitable before it is made available for signature. If we feel we cannot publish your petition for some reason, we will contact you within this time to explain. You will be able to change and resubmit your petition if you wish. If you do not do this within 10 working days, a summary of the petition and the reason why it has not been accepted will be published under the 'rejected petitions' section of the website.

When an e-petition has closed for signature, it will automatically be submitted to the Assistant Director of Administration, Democratic & Electoral Services. In the same way as a paper petition, you will receive an acknowledgement within 10 working days of receipt of the closed petition.

A petition acknowledgement and response will be emailed to everyone who has signed the e-petition and elected to receive this information. The acknowledgment and response will also be published on this website.

7. How do I 'sign' an e-petition?

You can see all the e-petitions currently available for signature on the Council's website. When you sign an e-petition you will be asked to provide your name, your postcode and a valid e mail address. When you have submitted this information you will be sent an email to the email address you have provided. This email will include a link which you must click on in order to confirm the email address is valid. Once this step is complete your 'signature' will be added to the petition. People visiting the e- petition will be able to see your name in the list of those who have signed it but your contact details will not be visible.

For further information on any of the above provisions, please contact Nigel Hart, Team Leader-Democratic & Member Services, tel. 01642 526193, e-mail nigel.hart@stockton.gov.uk