

West Sussex County Council Petitions Scheme

Guidance on Petitioning the County Council

The Petitions Scheme

1. West Sussex County Council wishes to enable all people resident, working or studying in the county to be able to petition the Council and to obtain a response that meets the expectations of the petition or provides a reasoned explanation for why those expectations cannot be met.
2. The County Council provides a number of ways in which petitions may be considered - depending on the subject, the actions sought, and the number of signatories.
3. Before considering whether or not to raise a petition to West Sussex County Council, you may want to discuss your issue with your local county councillor (member) who may be able to help you with it or explain how to make representations on a particular subject to the right person at the County Council.

How to submit a petition

4. If you do wish to proceed with a petition, there are a several ways in which you can do this:
 - **Paper petition** –signed by hand.
 - **Online petition on external website** – there are a number of websites that host petitions facilities. The County Council does not endorse any particular site, nor does it monitor the content of external websites. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the petition organiser to ensure that the on-line petition is submitted to the County Council for consideration. Most external websites use algorithms to promote petitions to people who have signed similar petitions in the past. It is important to understand that the council will only accept signatories as valid where they meet the Council's criteria for signing a petition – see section 8., below. Most websites allow you to download petition pages and signatory details or produce them in an electronic format, e.g. a Excel spreadsheet (this is the format preferred by the County Council).
 - **Online petition on the County Council's website.** The County Council has its own online petitions webpage. Anyone is welcome to submit a petition on our site, as long as it meets the criteria in this guidance. Council officers oversee these online petitions. The Council's site does not use any technology to promote your petition. It would be down to you to do this.
 - **A combination of both** – The County Council will accept a combination of on-line and paper petitions. Please ensure the topic is the same.

5. When completed petitions should be sent for verification to:

Director of Law and Assurance
FAO: Tracey Guinea
Democratic Services
West Sussex County Council
County Hall
Chichester
PO19 1RQ

Email: tracey.guinea@westsussex.gov.uk

6. All petitions sent or presented to the County Council will receive an acknowledgement within 10 working days of receipt. This acknowledgement will set out what we plan to do with the petition.

7. Petitions submitted to the County Council **must** include:

- A clear and concise statement of the subject of the petition
- A statement about what action the petitioners wish the council to take
- The name, address (or postcode as a minimum) and signature of any person supporting the petition.

8. Valid signatories will be people who live, work or study in West Sussex – a West Sussex postcode must be given. Signatures from adjoining areas may be included at the discretion of the Director of Law and Assurance if the petition concerns a matter or service close to the county border.

9. 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. 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.

10. If you wish to present your petition in person to a committee, member or officer, please contact Charles Gauntlett, Senior Advisor, Democratic Services (033022 22524) who will be able to advise you and make the appropriate arrangements.

11. We place details of petitions to the County Council on the [West Sussex County Council website](#). Details are anonymised, and the contact details of the petition organiser will not be placed on the website. We will update the website with details of each stage of the petition.

12. A petition **will not be accepted** where:

- It is considered vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate. If a petition does not follow the guidelines set out above, the County Council may decide not to do anything further with it. In that case, we will write to you to explain the reasons.
- It refers to a development plan, specific planning or right of way matter – see section 16., below.

- It refers to a decision for which there is an existing right of appeal, for example, school admissions – see section 16., below
- It is a statutory petition (for example requesting a referendum on having an elected mayor).
- It is the same as, or very similar to, a petition that is being considered or has been considered by the County Council within the last two years.

13. If your petition is not clear enough you may be asked to provide further information or, in the case of petitions on the County Council's online petitions webpage, you may be asked to amend your petition before it can be made live.

14. The petition must refer to a matter that is relevant to the functions of the County Council. If your petition is about something over which the Council has no direct control (for example the local railway or hospital) we will consider whether we can still deal with the matter. The County Council works with a large number of local partner organisations and, where possible, will work with these partners to respond to your petition. If we are not able to do this for any reason then we will set out the reasons for this to you. You can find more information on the County Council's services on its website.

15. 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. It 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.

16. Further information on the County Council's procedures and how you can express your views are available on the County Council's website:

- [Rights of Way](#)
- [County Planning Applications](#)
- [School Admission Appeals](#)
- [Get involved in the Council's public consultations and engagement in various current matters](#)

What will the County Council do with your petition?

17. An acknowledgement will be sent to the petition organiser within 10 working days of receipt. It will let them know 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.

18. If we can do what your petition asks for, the acknowledgement may confirm that we have taken, or will take, the action requested and the petition will be closed. If the petition has enough signatures to trigger a Council debate, or other consideration by members, 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.

19. Once the petition has been published we will let people know what we are doing in response by publishing responses to petitions raised via our electronic system on our website. Whenever possible we will also publish all correspondence relating to the petition (all personal details will be removed). When you sign an e-

petition you can elect to receive this information by email. We will not send you anything that is not relevant to the e-petition you have signed, unless you choose to receive other emails from us. It is the responsibility of the lead petitioner to keep other petitioners informed about the outcome.

How will the County Council respond to petitions?

20. 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,
- consulting residents about the matter,
- holding a meeting with petitioners,
- referring the petition to a Cabinet Member,
- referring the petition for consideration by one or more of the scrutiny committees (scrutiny committees are committees of members who are responsible for scrutinising the work of the Council),
- referring the petition for consideration by any non-Executive committee; or/and
- writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition.

21. Where the petition does not have the prescribed number of signatures to trigger a debate or consideration at member level (see below) the Director of Law and Assurance will determine the most appropriate course of action following discussion with the relevant cabinet member and the senior officer responsible for the service which is the subject of the petition.

Over 3,000 Signatures

22. If a petition contains a minimum of 3,000 signatures the County Council will consider debating the matter unless the request can be quickly accepted or the petitioner wishes to negotiate its consideration by another member forum or the Council's Monitoring Officer rules that the petition cannot be accepted or should be considered in another manner.

23. Where a petition is to be debated at a full meeting of the County Council, we will endeavour to consider the petition at its next meeting (as long as the petition is completed at least 15 working days before the meeting to allow verification of signatures), although on some occasions this may not be possible and, if the Chairman feels that this is the case then consideration will then take place at the following meeting.

24. The petition organiser (or nominated substitute) has the option of submitting a written statement of no more than 500 words, which should be sent to Democratic

Services (preferably by e-mail) to arrive at least nine working days before the County Council meeting. The relevant Directorate should also submit a brief position statement/briefing note by the same deadline.

25. If you would like to present your petition to the Council, or would like your local member to present it on your behalf, please contact the Director of Law and Assurance at least 13 working days before the meeting and an officer will talk you through the process. The petition organiser will be given five minutes maximum to present the petition at the meeting: the making of any special arrangements (including those to accommodate the needs of a speaker) will be at the full discretion of the Chairman, and so the petition organiser should make any request (with reasons) for particular arrangements to be made at the earliest possible opportunity.

26. The relevant cabinet member(s) will be given five minutes (maximum) for a right of reply before members discuss the petition for no more than 30 minutes with each member allowed to speak for a maximum of three minutes: it will be at the Chairman's discretion as to how this discussion is handled to ensure the most effective debate. At the end of the debate and before any proposition is voted on the petitioner and the relevant cabinet member(s) will be given three minutes (maximum) each to make a closing statement. The Council will not vote on the wording of the petition.

27. The County Council will debate how to respond to the petition at this meeting. It will not usually vote on the petition itself but any elected member may present a relevant proposition on which the Council will be invited to vote. It may for example recommend a relevant cabinet member 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. Where the issue is one on which a cabinet member is required to make the final decision, the County Council may decide whether to make recommendations to inform that decision. Please note that in these instances any vote by the Council is not binding on the cabinet member. The petition organiser will receive written confirmation of this decision. This confirmation will also be published on our website.

28. Dates and times of County Council meetings can be found on the website.

500 to 2,999 Signatures

29. If your petition contains a minimum of 500 signatures, and your petition clearly states the specific issue you want to raise, the petition be considered by the relevant councillor or committee.

30. If considered by a committee, e.g. a scrutiny committee or non-Executive committee, a relevant senior officer(s) will give evidence. The relevant committee will endeavour to consider the petition at its next meeting (as long as the petition is completed at least 15 working days before the meeting to allow verification of signatures), although on some occasions this may not be possible and consideration will then take place at the following meeting.

31. The petition organiser (or nominated substitute) has the option of submitting a written statement of no more than 500 words, which should be sent to the Democratic Services Unit (preferably by e-mail) to arrive at least nine working days

before the committee meeting. The relevant Directorate should also submit a brief position statement/briefing note by the same deadline.

32. If you would like to present your petition to the committee, or would like your local member to present it on your behalf, please contact the Director of Law and Assurance at least 13 working days before the meeting and an officer will talk you through the process.

33. The petition organiser will be given five minutes maximum to present the petition at the meeting. The relevant senior officer(s) will then address the committee for a maximum of five minutes. At the end of the debate and before the committee decides how to respond to the petition, the petitioner and the relevant senior officer(s) will be given three minutes (maximum) each to make a closing statement.

34. The senior officers that can be called to give evidence are the Chief Executive, Directors and officers from Senior Management. You should be aware that the 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 cabinet member(s) or another member to attend the meeting.

35. The committee members will ask the questions at this meeting, but you will be able to suggest questions to the Chairman of the committee by contacting the County Council's designated Democratic Services Support Officer up to five working days before the meeting. Details will be given to you to assist with this process. The committee will consider the petition and decide how to respond. It may, for example, recommend a relevant cabinet member to take action arising from the debate. The petition organiser will receive the relevant minute of the committee's deliberations and recommendations, which will also be published on the County Council's website.

36. It may be that the Council considers that it would be more appropriate for the petition to be considered directly by the relevant cabinet member. In this case the matter would be referred to the cabinet member and senior officers and a may involve the local county councillor. You may be offered a meeting with the cabinet member to discuss the matter you have raised. You will be involved in agreeing a date to meet and keep informed of any outcome.

Under 500 Signatures

37. Where a petition receives under 500 signatures, it is usual for the relevant Council Department to be asked to consider the petition and respond. A response will usually be sent to you by a senior officer or expert in the field. In most cases, the relevant county councillor and cabinet member will be informed of the petition and in some cases they may wish to respond instead of an officer.

38. If a petition attracts very few signatures, it may be possible that the Council will not consider it if it feels that there is insufficient representation from the community to support the petitions objectives. If this occurs you will be informed. On these occasions, it is usual practice to pass on the petition details to the relevant department to make them aware that a concern has been raised.

What can I do if I feel my petition has not been dealt with properly?

33 If you feel that we have not dealt with your petition properly, the petition organiser has the right to request that the relevant scrutiny committee reviews the steps that the Council has taken in response to your petition. 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.

34. The committee will endeavour to consider the 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 determine 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 and making recommendations to the relevant cabinet member.

35. Once the appeal has been considered the petition organiser will be informed of the results within five working days. The results of the review will also be published on our website. There is no further right of appeal through the County Council.

February 2024