



## EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL PETITIONS SCHEME

### Introduction

The purpose of the Scheme is to explain how petitions submitted to the Council will be handled.

The Council welcomes petitions and recognises that petitions are one way in which people can let us know their concerns. All petitions sent or presented to the Council will receive an acknowledgement within 10 working days of receipt. This acknowledgement will set out what we plan to do with the petition.

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 and it meets the criteria set out in this Scheme.

**Paper petitions** can be sent to:

The Petitions Officer  
Democratic Services Manager, Democratic Services  
East Cambridgeshire District Council  
The Grange  
Nutholt Lane  
Ely  
Cambs CB7 4EE

### Petition Guidelines

Petitions submitted to the Council must include:

- A clear and concise statement of the subject of the petition and what action you want the Council to take.
- The name and contact details of the Petition Organiser who should be a local person\*. This must be a full postal address. This is the person we will contact to explain how we will respond to the petition and to discuss matters of process.
- The name (preferably in block capitals), full address and signature of each local person.\*

- \* A '*local person*' is anyone who lives, owns a business, or works in the area (business address to be recorded where appropriate), or who attends a school or college in the area at the time the petition is submitted.

## **Exclusions**

Certain petitions are not covered by this Scheme and are dealt with under separate processes. These are:

- any matter relating to a Planning decision, including issues about a Development Plan document or the Community Infrastructure Levy.
- any matter relating to an alcohol, gambling, sex establishment, or taxi licensing decision.
- any matter relating to an individual or entity where there is a right of review or appeal under any other enactment (for example, where the petition raises matters of competence or misconduct).
- Statutory petitions (for example requesting a referendum on having an elected mayor).
- Petitions in response to consultation on a specific issue or proposal. These should be sent to the return address detailed in the relevant consultation document.

The Council will not consider:

- Petitions that do not follow the guidelines set out in the Petitions Scheme.
- Petitions disclosing matters that are personal, or confidential.
- Petitions which are in the opinion of the Petitions Officer libellous, offensive, vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate, or which are in breach of the Council's statutory duties in respect of equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Petitions which are a duplicate of, or very similar to, a petition submitted in the past 12 months.

Where any of the above applies, the Council will contact the Petition Organiser to explain the reasons behind its decision.

## **Responding to Petitions**

When a petition is received the Council will consider undertaking one, or more of the following actions:

- Taking action requested in the petition;
- Considering the petition at a Council or Committee meeting;

- Holding an inquiry into the matter;
- Undertaking research into the matter;
- Holding a public meeting or consultation exercise;
- Meeting with petitioners;
- Calling a referendum;
- Consulting local Partners/Stakeholders, e.g. local service providers/statutory partners; voluntary/community sector; commercial or other interests;
- Sending a written response to the Petitions Organiser setting out the Council's views about the request.

Once a petition has been received, the Petition Officer, in consultation with other relevant Officers, will determine the most appropriate manner of dealing with the petition in accordance with the Petitions Scheme, and notify the Petitions Organiser, normally within 10 working days of receipt of a Petition. Where a petition relates to specific Electoral Ward(s), the relevant Ward Councillor(s) will be notified of receipt of the petition.

## **Types of Petition**

### *Ordinary Petitions*

These are petitions not covered by the following specific definitions. In some cases it may be possible to resolve the petitioners' request directly, by proposing one or more of the actions listed above.

Where the Petitions Organiser asks to present their petition in person to the Council or a relevant Committee of the Council, the Petitions Officer will discuss options and detailed arrangements with the Petition Organiser.

If there is an item on the agenda for a meeting, which relates to the subject of the petition, the meeting will take into account the views expressed in the petition when reaching a decision on the issue.

The Petition Organiser, or their nominee, will be able to speak at the meeting for up to 3 minutes to present the petition, providing the following conditions are met:

- The petition must relate to the powers and duties of that body.
- It must be signed by at least 50 'local people' \*\* who have an interest in the subject of the petition - the addresses of the signatories must be included for this purpose.

\*\* A '*local person*' is anyone who lives, owns a business, or works in the area (business address to be recorded where appropriate), or who attends a school or college in the area at the time the petition is submitted.

If there is an item / report on the agenda which relates to the petition, you will usually be asked to make your presentation at the beginning of that item. If there is no item / report on the agenda, representations on petitions will usually be heard at the start of the meeting. Time for presenting a petition will be limited to 3 minutes. The Chairman of the meeting may extend the time allowed, but only in exceptional

circumstances. The person presenting the petition will not be allowed to take part in the debate on the petition. Once they have spoken to the meeting, Councillors may wish to ask them questions about the petition. Where the petition organiser does not attend the meeting, they will receive written confirmation of this decision within ten working days of the meeting.

#### *Petitions for Debate at Council*

If a petition contains more than 2,000 signatures, you can ask for it to be debated at a meeting of full Council. This means that the issue raised in the petition will be discussed at a public 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.

You may speak to a petition presented at the Council meeting provided that the above conditions are met and there is a relevant item on the Council agenda, or the Chairman of the Council decides that it is sufficiently urgent to allow representations to be made at the meeting.

The Petition Organiser, or nominee, will be given 5 minutes to present the petition at the meeting and the petition will then be discussed by Councillors for a maximum of 15 minutes. The Council will decide how to respond to the petition at this meeting. It 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 petition organiser does not attend the meeting, they will receive written confirmation of this decision within ten working days of the meeting.

#### *Other Petitions*

If your petition is about something over which the Council has no direct control 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 in the Council's response 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 be 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.

July 2014