

Part 5 Petition Scheme

The Council welcomes petitions and recognises that petitions are an important way in which people can let us know their concerns. 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.

What can my petition relate to?

A petition to the Council should relate to:

- a matter which the Council has responsibility for; or
- anything relating to the economic, social or environmental well being of the borough, as long as the Council has a degree of influence over the issue.

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), we will write to you explaining the reasons for this.

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.

What should I include in my 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, 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 Council 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.

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.

Who can submit a petition?

Anyone who lives, works or studies in North Tyneside, including under 18's, can sign or organise a petition.

How do I submit a petition?

Petitions can be sent to:

Head of Legal, Governance and Commercial Services
North Tyneside Council
Quadrant (East)
Silverlink North
Cobalt Business Park
NE27 0BY

The Council is in the process of acquiring an e-petitions system which will allow you to submit a petition on-line, via the Council website. This facility will be in place in December 2010.

What will the Council do when it receives my petition?

When the Council receives a petition, a receipt confirming it has been received will be passed immediately to the petition organiser. An acknowledgement will be sent to the petition organiser within 10 working days of receiving the petition. It will let them know what we plan to do with the petition and when they can expect to hear from us again.

If the petition relates 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 and therefore will not be considered under this scheme.

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. A petition may be considered inappropriate if the matter relates to ongoing legal proceedings or targets individual members of a community. The Council's Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chief Executive, will be responsible for determining the appropriateness of petitions.

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.

How will the Council respond to my petition?

The Council will respond to all petitions. There are thresholds which need to be met to trigger certain responses (detailed below). 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).

All petitions received will fall into one of the following 3 categories:

‘Ordinary’ petitions

Petitions which have less signatures than the set thresholds or do not request the action triggered by reaching the set thresholds will be classed as ‘ordinary petitions’. In this instance one or more of the following actions may be taken:

- taking the action requested in the petition
- holding an inquiry into the matter
- undertaking research into the matter
- holding a public meeting
- writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition
- referring the petition to an overview and scrutiny committee

In addition to these steps, the Council will consider all the specific actions it can potentially take on the issues highlighted in a petition.

A petition organiser can request that a petition be presented to a meeting of Full Council. This right applies regardless of the number of signatures; however, there will be no debate on the issue. The petition organiser can request to present a petition at Council by contacting Democratic Services on 0191 643 5358 at least 10 working days before the day of the Council meeting.

Full Council debates

Full Council can debate a petition if it has received 2000 or more signatures. This means that the issue raised in the petition will be discussed at a meeting which all Councillors can attend. If a petition has enough signatures to trigger this action, a letter to the petition organiser will confirm this, informing when and where the meeting will take place.

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 15 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 the Council executive are required to make the final decision, the Council will decide whether to make recommendations to inform that decision. The petition organiser will receive written confirmation of this decision. This confirmation will also be published on our website.

Officer evidence

A petition can request that a senior officer give evidence at a public meeting in relation to the subject issue of the petition. This response will occur if such action has been requested in the petition and the petition has 1000 or more signatures. The public meeting will be a meeting of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. If a petition has met the requirements to trigger this response, this will be confirmed in writing, informing the petition organiser when and where the meeting will take place. A petition which is requesting a senior officer to give evidence at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will not be debated by Full Council.

Your petition may ask for a senior council officer to give evidence about something for which the officer is responsible as part of their job. For example, your petition may ask a senior council officer to explain progress on an issue, or to explain the advice given to elected members to enable them to make a particular decision. The Chief Executive, Strategic Directors and Heads of Service can be requested to attend a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. A list of the relevant senior officers and their job titles can be found in Part 10 – Management Structure.

You should be aware that the Overview and Scrutiny 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 Councillor to attend the meeting. Committee members will ask the questions at this meeting, but you will be able to suggest questions to the Chair of the committee by contacting Democratic Services on 0191 643 5359 up to three working days before the meeting.

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

If you feel that we have not dealt with your petition properly, the petition organiser has the right to request that the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee review 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.

The committee will endeavour to consider your 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, making recommendations to the Council executive and arranging for the matter to be considered at a meeting of the Full Council.

Once the appeal has been considered the petition organiser will be informed of the results within 5 working days. The results of the review will also be published on our website.