

# THE WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL PETITION SCHEME

Anyone who lives, works or studies in the City of Westminster can organise and sign a petition and trigger a response. This includes under 18s. The council welcomes petitions and recognises that petitions are one way in which people can let us know their concerns.

Petitions should be about a service which the council provides either by itself or which it shares the responsibility for with a partner organisation.

The Council welcomes e-petitions which are created and submitted through its website. Alternatively, you can submit a petition in hardcopy and, if requested, they can be presented to an ordinary meeting of the council by a Councillor on the petitioners' behalf. Ordinary Council Meetings take place at least four times a year.

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.

## **41.1** What to include in a petition

- a brief title.
- a short statement covering the subject matter of the petition and stating what action you wish the council to take.
- the contact details of the petition organisers, including an address, so the council can respond to the petition once it has been formally submitted (the contact details will not be displayed on the website).
- the name and address of everyone who has signed the petition.
- the address of either place of study or work (if home address is not in Westminster).

Petitions which are considered to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate will not be accepted. 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.

## **41.2** Signatures

There is no minimum or maximum number of names needed for a petition. Once it has been submitted to the council, the signatures will be public documents which any member of the public can see.

Signatures can be collected in online or hard copy format (or both), though once someone has signed a petition in one format, they cannot sign it in another.

If you are signing an online petition, you will need to provide your name, postcode of your home or workplace in Westminster, indicate whether you live, work or study in Westminster and give an email address. This will enable the council to determine that the signatures are genuine and to write a response to the petition. Due to the possibility of fake signatures being added we only allow one signature per email account.

### **500+ signatures**

If a petition receives more than 500 signatures, it will be debated by a meeting of the Cabinet. The petition may also be presented as part of the public item at the next Ordinary Full Council meeting after the petition closes.

### **100+ signatures**

If a petition reaches over 100 signatures it is eligible to be presented as part of the public participation item at the next Ordinary Full Council meeting after the petition closes.

## **41.3 Steps after petition has been submitted.**

Once your petition has been submitted to the council it will be passed to the relevant Head of Service for consideration. The form of the council's response will depend on how many people have signed the petition and whether it has been presented formally by a councillor, but could include:

- considering the petition at a Cabinet meeting.
- considering the petition at an Ordinary Full Council
- writing to the petition organiser setting out the council's views about the request in the petition
- submitting a formal report to the Executive/Executive Member for decision
- taking the action requested in the petition
- holding an inquiry into the matter
- undertaking research into the matter
- holding a public meeting
- holding a consultation
- holding a meeting with petitioners
- referring the petition for consideration by one of the council's Policy and Scrutiny Committees\*
- in all cases where a petition has been presented by a councillor to an ordinary council meeting the relevant Chief Officer shall, within 28 days of the date of the meeting, (sooner if possible) report to the relevant Cabinet Member or Committee setting out proposals for the formal response to the petition and also advise the petition organiser.
- petitions, which do not trigger a debate at a Cabinet meeting or have not been presented by a councillor to an ordinary council meeting, shall be acknowledged by the Governance and Councillor Liaison Team and referred to the relevant Chief Officer who shall advise the petition organiser, within 28

days, but sooner if possible, of the council's response, including the relevant Cabinet Member(s) and Ward Members. The Head of Governance and Councillor Liaison will inform the relevant Cabinet Member(s) and Ward Members that the petition has been received.

\*Policy and Scrutiny committees are committees of councillors who are responsible for scrutinising the work of the council - in other words, the policy and scrutiny committee has the power to hold the council's decision makers to account. Every person who signs an e-petition will receive an email detailing the response to the issues raised after the period for collecting signatures has closed. In the case of a hardcopy petition, the response will be forwarded to the petitioner organiser. The Governance and Councillor Liaison will also contact the petitioner to advise if their Petition has met any of the threshold.

Other procedures apply if the petition is one of the following:

- planning or license application
- statutory petition (for example requesting a referendum on having an elected Mayor)
- a matter where there is already an existing right of appeal, such as council tax banding and non-domestic rates

Further information on the procedures for planning and licensing and how you can express your views is available on the planning and licensing pages.

For information on any other procedures please contact Governance and Councillor Liaison on 07870548348 or email [governanceandcouncillorliaison@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:governanceandcouncillorliaison@westminster.gov.uk)

To ensure people know what we are doing in response to the petitions we receive the subject details of all the petitions submitted to us will be published on our website, except in cases where this is considered to be inappropriate. It should be noted that petitions presented to the council are public documents and any member of the public can ask to see a copy.

#### **41.4 Cabinet Debates**

If a petition contains more than 500 signatures it will be debated by a meeting of the Cabinet. It will be placed on the agenda of the next suitable Cabinet meeting.

Following receipt of such a petition the relevant chief officer will be asked to prepare a report on the subject of the petition which shall be circulated with the agenda of the Cabinet meeting, together with a copy of the petition.

The Cabinet 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. The petition organiser will receive

written confirmation of this decision. This confirmation will also be published on our website.

The option to present the petition at Full Council will also be available. In this case after the Cabinet discussion, either before or after the Full Council meeting, depending on dates.

#### **41.5 Officer Evidence**

Your petition may ask for a senior council officer to give evidence at a public meeting 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. 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 Governance and Councillor Liaison on 07870 548 348 up to five working days before the meeting.

#### **41.6 Petitions at an Ordinary Full Council**

Any petition presented at an Ordinary Full Council meeting will get an oral response, on the night, from the relevant Cabinet Member or Committee Chair, followed by a written response setting out what was said at the meeting and serving as the official response. If a petitioner does not want to present it publicly it will be sent to the relevant Cabinet Member for a written response. The procedure for hearing a petition at an Ordinary Full Council meeting can be found in the Public Participation Protocol on the Council's website and in Appendix 1.

#### **41.7 E-petitions**

The council welcomes e-petitions which are created and submitted through its website. E-petitions must follow the same guidelines as paper petitions. The petition organiser will need to provide us with their name, postal address and email address and indicate whether they live, work or study in the City.

E-petitions presented to the Council which are hosted on alternative websites and not that of the Council's will be rejected so that signees can be verified as living, working or studying in the City. E-petitions can run for a maximum of 6 weeks but you can choose a shorter timeframe. You can run an online petition at the same time as a paper petition, combining the two before submitting them to the council, although repeat names should be omitted by the petition organiser. Some people prefer this option as they find it easier to have one they can hand around to friends and family. Two versions of the same e-petitions will not be publicised by the council at the same time.

When you create an e-petition, it may take five working days 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 why. You will be able to change and resubmit your petition if you wish.

When an e-petition has closed for signature, in the same way as a paper petition, we will write to you within ten working days to let you know what we plan to do with it. If you would like a Councillor to present your e-petition to a meeting of the Council please contact Committee and Governance Services via the contact details above five working days before the petition closes.

### **How do I 'sign' an e-petition?**

You can see all the e-petitions currently available for signature here ([Current E-Petitions](#))

When you sign an e-petition you will be asked to provide your name, your postcode and a valid email address and indicate whether you live, work or study in Westminster. 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.

### **41.7 Hard copy petitions**

These can be sent to The Head of Governance and Councillor Liaison, Westminster City Council, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP. Lead petitioners can also ask one of their local Councillors to submit the petition on their behalf to a meeting of Full Council.

### **41.8 Appealing the council's response**

If you feel that we have not dealt with your petition properly, the petition organiser has the right to request that the council's relevant Policy 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 or making recommendations to the council executive.

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.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **PROCEDURE FOR HEARING PETITIONS AT MEETINGS OF THE ORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING**

The Petitions Team will contact the petitioner once the petition closes to advise if it has met the threshold, of over 100 signatures, and explain the process if they would like to present this at an Ordinary Full Council meeting.

Any petition presented at an Ordinary Full Council meeting will get an oral response, on the night, from the relevant Cabinet Member or Committee Chair, followed by a written response setting out what was said at the meeting and serving as the official response.

If a petitioner does not want to present the petition publicly it will be sent to the relevant Cabinet Member for a written response

All requests to present a petition which has reached the threshold must be submitted via the online form available on the Council's website.

If there are any questions about the process or attendance at the Council meetings these can be sent to [public.speaking@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:public.speaking@westminster.gov.uk). However, a request for presenting a petition will only be accepted for presentation at Full Council if submitted via the form.

Petitions may only be submitted if they meet the threshold of over 100 signatures and close within a set window in advance of an Ordinary Full Council meeting. This window opens 21 days before the meeting takes place and closes seven days before the meeting takes place.

#### **How questions or petitions will be heard at the Ordinary Full Council meeting**

All participants must be able to attend the Full Council meeting, in person or (where unavoidable circumstances dictate) virtually, to present their petition, slots are not able to be passed to others, but can be moved to a later meeting if reasonable.

Ordinary Full Council meetings take place at Old Marylebone Town Hall, 97-113 Marylebone Road, NW1 5PT; with the meeting commencing at 7pm.

Attendees will be asked to arrive at the location by 6.40pm at the latest so that they can be met, briefed and seated.

30 minutes will be made available for the item, towards the start of the meeting.

Each petitioner will have up to two minutes to present their petition and the relevant Cabinet Member or Committee Chair will have up to two minutes to respond. The two minutes should be used to explain the subject of the petition only, nothing else, even if it is considered a related matter. The Lord Mayor has the right to stop any speech on a topic which is not considered relative to the petition presented.

Petitioners will be able to stay, after the item, for the remainder of the Council meeting, if they so wish, but they will be asked to move to the public gallery.