

Cheshire West & Chester Council

PETITIONS SCHEME

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Cheshire West
and Chester

Petitions Scheme

Updated 9 June 2015

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 from the Council 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.

Paper petitions can be sent to:

Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Floor 4, HQ,
Nicholas Street,
Chester,
CH1 2NP

Or be created, signed and submitted online

Petitions can also be presented to a meeting of the Council. These meetings take place 6 times a year and, dates and times can be found here

<http://cmttpublic.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeeld=448>

If you would like to present your petition to the Council, or would like your councillor or someone else to present it on your behalf, please contact Democratic Services on 01244 975970 or email democraticservices@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk at least 10 working days before the meeting and they will talk you through the process.

If your petition has received signatures of 1% of the Borough population it can be scheduled, should you wish it to be, for a full Council or Cabinet debate (decided by the Chief Executive and Leader) providing all the signatures are submitted at the same time and that the subject is appropriate e.g. does not relate to a planning or licensing application).

If your petition has received signatures of 1% of the Borough population it can be scheduled, should you wish it to be, for consideration at an appropriate Scrutiny Committee.

The Council's Privacy Policy applies to all Petitions.

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 (e.g. relates to a planning or licensing application) 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.

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. 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.
- 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 (if asked for), 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 current or future planning or licensing application, is a statutory petition (for example requesting a referendum), 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. For instance, Planning Committee, Strategic Planning Committee and Licensing Committee have to make decisions based on the evidence put before them and the planning/licensing merits, as defined by law, so such matters cannot be debated in full council as it would leave the Council exposed to legal challenge. For further information on these procedures and how you can express your views please use our online contact page or call the Contact Centre on 0300 123 8123.
- 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 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.

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
- referring the petition for consideration by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee*
- calling a referendum
- writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition

*The Overview and Scrutiny Committees is a committee of councillors who are responsible for scrutinising the work of the council – in other words, the overview and scrutiny committee has the power to hold the council's decision makers to account.

In addition to these steps, the council will consider all the specific actions it can potentially take on the issues highlighted in a petition. The list below gives some examples.

Petition subject - appropriate steps

Alcohol related crime and disorder

If your petition is about crime or disorder linked to alcohol consumption, the council will, among other measures, consider the case for placing restrictions on public drinking in the area by establishing a designated public place order or, as a last resort, imposing an alcohol disorder zone. When an alcohol disorder zone is established the licensed premises in the area where alcohol related trouble is being caused are required to contribute to the costs of extra policing in that area. The council's response to your petition will set out the steps we intend to take and the reasons for taking this approach.

Anti-social behaviour (ASB)

As the elected representatives of your local area, as social landlord and licensing authority, the council plays a significant role to play in tackling anti-social behaviour. The council, in conjunction with our partners in the local crime and disorder partnership have set out minimum service standards for responding to issues of anti-social behaviour, you can find more details about these standards here [http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/housing/council_tenants/our_performance/service_standards/anti_social_behaviour.aspx].

When responding to petitions on ASB, we will consider in consultation with our local partners, all the options available to us including the wide range of powers and mechanisms we have to intervene as part of our role as social landlord and licensing authority. For example, we will work with the neighbourhood policing team in the affected area to identify what action might be taken including what role CCTV might play, consider identifying a dedicated contact within the council to liaise with the

community and neighbourhood partners on issues of ASB in the area in question and, where appropriate, we will alert the crime and disorder reduction partnership and the scrutiny panel that deals with crime and disorder to the issues highlighted in the petition.

Under-performing schools

We will consider, in consultation with local partners, all the options available to us when working with schools to secure their improvement. For example, on our behalf, the school improvement partner will play a pivotal role, challenging and brokering support for poorly performing schools. Where a school is under performing we will consider whether it is appropriate in the circumstances to issue a warning notice outlining expectations and a timeframe for the school to improve its performance standards. Other measures available to us, where schools fail to comply with a warning notice or are in an Ofsted category of notice to improve (requiring significant improvement) or special measures including; appointing additional governors, establishing an interim executive board, removal of the school's delegated budgets, requiring the school to enter into a formal contract or partnership or, only if the school is in special measures, closure.

Under-performing health services

We will work with local health partners to consider the matter raised in the petition including, where appropriate, exploring what role the Local Involvement Network (LINK) might have in reviewing and feeding back on the issue. The scrutiny panel that deals with health will also be alerted to the petition and where the matter is sufficiently or potentially serious, the issue will be referred to them to consider for review.

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 <http://www.westcheshiretogether.org.uk/> 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. You can find more information on the services for which the council is responsible here www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

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.

Full Council or cabinet debates

If a petition contains signatures of at least 1% of the Borough population submitted at the same time (approximately 3,300 in 2015 but the precise figure can be obtained from the Democracy and Election Team) it can be debated by the full Council or by the Cabinet, if the Lead Petitioner wishes, unless it is a petition asking for a senior council officer to give evidence at a public meeting. The Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council will determine which meeting debates the petition.

This means that the issue raised in the petition will be discussed at a meeting. 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's Executive is 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

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.

If your petition contains at least 750 signatures, the relevant senior officer will give evidence at a public meeting of one of the Council's Committees. The senior staff that can be called to give evidence are the Council's Chief Executive, Directors and Heads of Service.

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 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 scrutiny@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk or telephone 01244 975972 up to three working days before the meeting.

E-petitions

The Council welcomes e-petitions which with effect from 15 October 2010 may be created and submitted through our 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. 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 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. 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 Democratic Services. In the same way as a paper petition, you will receive an acknowledgement within 10 working days. If you would like to present your e-petition to a meeting of the council, please contact Democratic Services on 01244 975970 or email democraticservices@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk within 10 working days of receipt of the acknowledgement.

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.

How do I 'sign' an e-petition?

With effect from 15 October 2010 you will be able to see all the e-petitions currently available for signature on the council's web site.

When you sign an e-petition you will be asked to provide your name, your postcode and a valid email 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.

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 one of the Council's Scrutiny Committees 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's 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.