

## STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL PETITION SCHEME

1. 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. Paper petitions can be sent to:

The Constitutional Services Manager  
Daneshill House  
Danestrete  
Stevenage  
Herts,  
SG1 1HN

*Or be created, signed and submitted online by following this link [link]\*  
\* with effect from December 2010*

### **What are the guidelines for submitting a petition?**

2. 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.
3. 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.
4. The contact details of the petition organiser will not be published or included on the website.
5. 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.
6. Petitions which are considered to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate will not be accepted.
7. 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 contact you to explain the reasons.

## **What will the Council do when it receives my petition?**

8. 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.
9. Petitions received will be forwarded to the relevant Strategic Director who will consult with the Executive Member who has responsibility for the matter concerned to establish what action should be taken.
10. 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.
11. If the petition has enough signatures to trigger a council debate, or a senior officer giving evidence, then the acknowledgment will confirm this and tell you when and where the meeting will take place.
12. If the petition needs more investigation, we will tell you the steps we plan to take.
13. If the petition concerns a planning or licensing application, is a statutory petition (for example requesting a referendum on having an elected mayor), or concerns a matter where there is already an existing right of appeal, such as council tax banding and non-domestic rates, other procedures apply. Your petition will be acknowledged and you will be informed why your petition will not be dealt with and what other steps you may wish to take.
14. 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.
15. 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.
16. 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?

17. 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
- Referring the petition for consideration/debate at a meeting of the Council, Executive, Scrutiny Overview Committee or other Committee of the Council
- Referring the matter to the relevant Portfolio Holder
- Referring the matter to the SoStevenage, the Local Strategic Partnership
- Undertaking research into the matter
- Holding an inquiry into the matter
- Holding a public meeting
- Holding a consultation
- Holding a meeting with petitioners
- Calling a referendum
- Writing to the petition organiser setting out the Authority's views about the request in the petition

OR if it is considered that there is a course of action open to us that is specific to the subject of the petition, this would be a further option.

18. If your petition is about something over which the Council has no direct control (for example the local railway or hospital) we will aim to make representations on behalf of the community to the relevant body. The Council works with a large number of local partners [*link to list of LAA 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 to you. You can find more information on the services for which the council is responsible here [*link*].

19. 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.

## Council debates

20. If it considered appropriate, or it contains 1000 signatures or more, a petition will be debated at Council (unless it is a petition asking for a senior council officer to give evidence at a public meeting). This means that the issue raised in the petition will be discussed at a meeting which all Councillors attend. 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. The petition organiser will receive written confirmation of this decision. This confirmation will also be published on our website.

### **Officer evidence**

21. 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.
22. If your petition contains at least 500 signatures, the relevant senior officer will give evidence at a meeting of the Council's Scrutiny Overview Committee. A list of the senior staff that can be called to give evidence can be found here (*insert link – this list to show CE,SDs and each HoS*).
23. Scrutiny Overview Committee may decide that it would be more appropriate for another officer to give evidence instead of an officer named in the petition – for instance if the named officer has changed jobs. 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 the Constitutional Services Manager up to three working days before the meeting. You can do this by e-mail at [committees@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:committees@stevenage.gov.uk) or 01438-242992.

### **E-petitions (From December 2010)**

24. The Council welcomes e-petitions which are created and submitted through our website [*link*]. E-petitions must follow the same guidelines as paper petitions. The petition organiser will need to provide us with her/his name, postal address and email address. You will also need to decide how long you would like your petition to be open for signatures. We will hold petitions open run for three months, but you can choose a shorter or longer timeframe, up to a maximum of 6 months.
25. 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.
26. 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.

27. When an e-petition has closed for signature, it will automatically be submitted to the Constitutional Services Manager. In the same way as a paper petition, you will receive an acknowledgement within 10 working days.
28. 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?**

29. You can see all the e-petitions currently available for signature here *[From December 2010 - insert link]*. 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?**

30. If you feel that we have not dealt with your petition properly, the petition organiser has the right to request that the Council's Scrutiny Overview Committee review the steps that the Council has taken in response to your petition. It would be helpful if the petition organiser gives a short explanation of the reasons why the Council's response is not considered to be adequate.
31. 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.
32. 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 Executive and arranging for the matter to be considered at a meeting of the Council.
33. 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.