

WILTSHIRE COUNCIL

COUNCIL
18 MAY 2010

DUTY TO RESPOND TO PETITIONS

1. Introduction

1.1 The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 imposes a duty on local authorities to respond to petitions and to tell local people what action is going to be taken.

1.2 This duty comes into effect on 15 June 2010.

2. Background

2.1 The Act aims to reinvigorate local democracy – putting local authorities at the forefront of the drive to reconnect people with public and political decision-making.

2.2 The duty to respond to petitions is regarded as an important step towards addressing the perception in communities that people have little influence over decisions that affect their local area.

2.3 The Council has always welcomed and received all petitions in the past without the need to specify a minimum number of signatures. The Council will continue with the principle of responding to all petitions but where required by the Act to set thresholds it will do so but these will be set at a reasonably low level.

2.4 As with many other local authorities, Wiltshire Council already has general provisions within its Constitution in relation to the presentation of petitions and these will be updated to reflect the new statutory provisions of the Act.

2.5 Wiltshire Council has been liaising with other local authorities both directly and via the Association of Democratic Services Officers. However in view of the tight deadlines involved in the introduction of this new duty many local authorities are, like Wiltshire Council, still in the process of developing their petition schemes.

3. Key Principles

3.1 The key principles of the duty are

- **ensuring that local people know how to express their views**
- **local authorities will take action to respond to petitions**
- **local people know that their views have been listened to**
- **keeping prescribed requirements on councils to a minimum, and**

- **building on local authority best practice**

3.2 The intention is that everyone, no matter where they live, will be easily able to find information about how to petition their local authority and they will know what to expect from their local authority in response.

4. Duties Imposed

4.1 The Act requires local authorities in England to establish a scheme for handling petitions made to the authority.

4.2 The scheme

- must be approved by a meeting of the full council before it comes into force;
- must be published on the website and by any other method appropriate for bringing it to the attention of those who live, work or study in its area;
- can be revised at any time but the revised scheme must be approved and publicised as detailed above; and
- the authority must comply with its petition scheme.

4.3 The Act requires petition schemes to meet certain minimum standards in order to ensure minimum entitlements which all citizens can expect. Beyond these requirements local authorities have some flexibility about how they approach the duty – leaving some scope for local determination.

4.4 The minimum requirements are:

- anyone who lives, works or studies in the local authority area, including under 18's, can sign or organise a petition and trigger a response
- a facility for making electronic petitions is provided by the local authority
- petitions must be acknowledged within a time period specified by the local authority
- among the many possible steps that the principal local authority may choose to take in response to a petition, the following steps must be included amongst the options listed in the scheme:
 - taking the action requested in the petition
 - considering the petition at a meeting of the authority
 - holding an inquiry
 - holding a public meeting
 - commissioning research
 - a written response to the petition organiser setting out the authority's views on the request in the petition
 - referring the petition to an overview and scrutiny committee
- petitions with a significant level of support trigger a debate of the full council. Councils will determine this threshold locally but it must be no higher than 5 per cent of the local population

- petitions with a requisite level of support, set by the local authority, trigger a senior local government officer to give evidence at a meeting of the authority's overview and scrutiny committee
- petition organisers can prompt a review of the local authority's response if the response is felt to be inadequate.

5. Definition of a Petition

5.1 The legislation does not define what constitutes a petition. The guidance however states that it is important to make sensible judgements about whether to deal with an item of correspondence under the petition scheme or under some other procedure, such as the internal complaints procedure. The Government's view is that authorities should treat as petitions for the purposes of their scheme anything which identifies itself as a petition, or which a reasonable person would regard as a petition.

6. The scheme

6.1 The guidance states that the scheme should

- take into account local circumstances to ensure that the scheme is locally appropriate, ie that thresholds reflect the nature of the area;
- ensure that the scheme is accessible to all; and
- ensure that the process is easy for citizens to use.

6.2 A suggested petition scheme is attached as an Annexe to this report. The scheme, whilst reflecting where necessary the statutory requirements (see paragraph 4.4), emphasises the need for local discretion and flexibility in the handling of petitions. Petitions that trigger the thresholds will be referred to council, to one of the council's select committees, or to an area board. All other petitions will be responded to but there will be local discretion and flexibility in dealing with them.

6.3 The minimum statutory requirements set the threshold for a council debate at a maximum of 5% however local authorities are encouraged to adopt lower thresholds if possible. For Wiltshire setting a 5% threshold would mean that only petitions with more than 22,775 signatures would trigger a council debate. This seems excessive and therefore the suggested scheme sets the trigger threshold for a full council debate at 2.5% of the total local authority population, approximately 11,500 signatures, and 1.25% for petitions requiring an officer to attend a meeting of the appropriate select committee to answer questions about their work, approximately 5,750 signatures.

6.4 Local authorities are asked to consider whether variable thresholds would be appropriate to their local circumstances. The Government expects local authorities' petition schemes to ensure that petitions on very local issues will receive a response from the council. Setting no threshold, or thresholds which vary depending on the issue or geographic location affected, might be one method of achieving this.

6.5 In terms of local issues it would seem more logical if the scheme provided for petitions to be considered by the appropriate area board. The current scheme of delegation to area boards, as set out in the Constitution, provides for decisions to be made by area boards on condition that the decision does not :-

- have a significant impact outside of the area concerned
- have a significant impact on the overall resources of the council
- contradict any policy or service standard set by the council
- involve the taking of regulatory or quasi-judicial decisions
- relate to the exercise of functions in respect of any particular person, including any individual member of staff.

6.6 In terms of consistency it would seem appropriate therefore for petitions that fall within the delegated powers of the area boards are considered by the appropriate board. However petitions that meet the trigger thresholds referred to in 6.3 above have to be referred to the appropriate meeting of the council or overview and scrutiny.

6.7 The views of the Council are sought on whether an appropriate threshold should be set for petitions to trigger a full debate at an area board or whether all petitions on local issues regardless of size should be reported to the boards. The current area board handbook, which was drafted in advance of the introduction of the formal duty to respond to petitions, refers to public debates being triggered at area boards by petitions of at most 5% of the population. To be consistent therefore with the thresholds set out at paragraph 6.3 above, the suggested scheme provides for a threshold of 2.5% of the local population to trigger a full debate at an area board.

6.8 All petitions received that do not reach the appropriate threshold will still be acknowledged and responded to in accordance with the Council's usual administrative practices. Officers will take advice from the relevant Cabinet Member or Area Board chairman for a local issue, as to the appropriate course of action and response. In all cases the petitioners will be kept informed of how it is proposed to deal with their petition. Local councillors will also be kept informed of this process.

6.9 The minimum requirements mean that anyone who lives, works or studies in the local authority area can submit a petition. Experience has shown in local authorities who have trialled these provisions in advance of the legislative requirements that this eligibility should be extended to include those people who use the services provided by the council. This could include visitors to the area or simply people who live outside the area and use our services.

6.10 The statutory guidance recognises that whilst debates can be required at the full council, final decisions on many issues may have to be referred to the Cabinet. The suggested scheme attached therefore reflects this and that petition organisers can if they wish request that petitions that do not trigger a

full council debate can be referred to the appropriate decision maker for consideration.

7. Verification

7.1 Local authorities can choose to verify the signatures given on a petition should they wish. Authorities must take account of the signatures of people who provide valid addresses where they live, work or study within the local authority area; but authorities may take account of signatures of people who do not supply such information, or supply information which shows that they do not live, work or study in the area.

7.2 In the case of e-petitions (see paragraph 10 below) the local authority must decide what counts as an authentic signature, for example it might decide that a valid email address is sufficient, a valid postcode or both.

8. Relevant Matters

8.1 The petition scheme must provide for the public to lodge a petition in relation to any function of the authority.

8.2 However the Government also believe that petitions are a valuable opportunity for local authorities to demonstrate strong leadership on issues of concern to the community. Local authorities have a key interest in issues which, although wider than their functions, affect the local area. In view of this, and their role in the local area agreement process, the Act requires top tier authorities to respond to petitions which relate to an improvement in the economic, social or environmental well-being of the authority's area to which any of its partner authorities could contribute. This means that these local authorities must deal with petitions which relate to the functions of partner authorities as well as petitions which relate to their own functions, including petitions on matters which are sub-regional and cross-authority.

8.3 There is no requirement within the regulations but it would seem sensible to invite a representative of the partner organisation concerned to address the Council where petitions requiring a full council debate and which fall under paragraph 8.2 are heard.

9. Exclusions

9.1 Local authorities are required to approach the petitions they receive positively. However, petitions, which are in the opinion of the authority vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate, must be acknowledged and an explanation given as to why the authority will not be taking action.

9.2 When considering whether a petition is vexatious a local authority should use as a starting point the guidance under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Guidance to the Act states that *"Deciding whether a [Freedom of Information] request is vexatious is a flexible balancing exercise, taking into account all the circumstances of the case. There is no rigid test or definition,*

and it will often be easy to recognise. The key question is whether the request is likely to cause distress, disruption or irritation, without any proper or justified cause". In most circumstances it should be the subject matter of the petition, rather than the personality of the petitioners or the manner in which the issue is supported, that is the deciding factor.

9.3 There are other matters that are excluded from the petition provisions. These are where petitions are provided for under another enactment (eg directly elected mayor) or where there are already well established procedures in place for communities to have their say (eg planning, licensing matters or where there is already an existing right of appeal). However if the petition relates to the failure to deliver such a service these remain within the scope of the petition provisions.

9.4 There may also be other petitions which for one reason or another, it would be inappropriate for a local authority to consider. For example where the issue concerned is the subject of ongoing legal proceedings.

10. E-Petitions

10.1 The 2009 Act applies the same requirements to electronic petitions as to paper petitions, except for the following:

- local authorities are only required to respond to e-petitions made through their e-petition facility
- local authorities must decide, when a request to host an e-petition is received, whether the petition is appropriate for publishing on their facility
- local authorities will decide what equates to a signature on an e-petition
- local authorities are required to provide a facility for people to submit petitions to the authority electronically. In addition to this, local authorities can choose to respond to e-petitions submitted by other means and should indicate in their petition scheme how they will deal with these types of petitions.

10.2 When taking the decision whether to host an e-petition, local authorities should, in addition to following the guidance above on vexatious, abusive and otherwise inappropriate petitions, consider those issues pertinent when publishing any information on their website. For example, issues such as data protection, libel and the statutory requirement, as a public body, to comply with equalities and anti-discrimination legislation.

10.3 The duty to provide this facility does not come into force until 15 December 2010 unlike the other provisions. The Council's new committee management system (Modern.Gov) is currently being developed to provide this electronic facility. Guidance will be required for petition organisers to use this facility and this will need to be included within the petition scheme. Currently the suggested scheme in the Annexe does not include this detailed guidance and this will be included by the time the duty comes into force.

11. Petition debates

11.1. Petitions requiring a debate at meetings of the full council will normally be added to the next appropriate agenda. However a balance will need to be struck between the debate of petitions and other council business. In exceptional cases, for example where there are a number of petitions already scheduled for debate, it may not be possible to debate every eligible petition at the next full council meeting. On these occasions the remaining petition debate(s) will take place at the following meeting of the full council.

11.2 Petitioners will be offered the option of presenting their petition to the Council at the beginning of the debate. Petitioners will also be given the opportunity to answer questions put by councillors or to clarify issues for the Council.

11.3 The debate should conclude with a decision being taken by the full council. This could be a decision 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.

11.4 Where the issue is one on which the Council's Cabinet are required to make the final decision, the full council should decide whether to make recommendations to inform that decision. In line with the principle that local authorities should listen to the people they represent, and give them feedback, the petition organiser should then receive written notification of this decision. The notification should also be published on the local authority's website. Alternatively and if timescales allow the views of the Cabinet could be sought prior to the meeting of Council where the debate is to take place. This would allow for a fully informed debate at the meeting of Council and enable the issue to be resolved at the meeting of Council.

12. Officers Giving Evidence to Overview and Scrutiny

12.1 Local authorities' petition schemes must allow for petitions to trigger a senior member of council staff to attend a meeting of the authority's overview and scrutiny committee and answer questions about their work. This builds on existing powers of overview and scrutiny committees who can already require members and officers to attend a meeting of the committee and give evidence. It is based on the principle that local government should be as transparent as possible and that officers are accountable to elected members. It allows members of the local community to make use of petitions to influence the way that this scrutiny takes place.

12.2 Local authorities must determine which of their officers are able to be called to account in this way and include these details in their petition scheme. This information should include the names and job titles of the officers in question. In order for petitions to have a meaningful impact petitioners must be able to call on the most senior officers to attend meetings to give evidence and to provide information on their activities. Section 16(5) of the 2009 Act

therefore requires that, as a minimum, petition schemes provide that the head of paid service – the chief executive – and statutory and non statutory chief officers as specified within Section 2 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 can be called to give evidence. These are the most senior officers responsible for the delivery of services. The model scheme set out in the Annexe therefore provides for the Chief Executive, all Corporate and Service Directors to be called to answer questions and this is consistent with the current Overview and Scrutiny procedure rules set out within the Constitution.

12.3 The final decision on which officer should attend, and the questions to be asked of him or her, rest with the overview and scrutiny committee however. Under Section 16(10) of the 2009 Act overview and scrutiny committees can decide that for the purposes of addressing the concerns raised in a petition it is more appropriate for another officer to be called to attend instead. The committee may also consider it appropriate to call the relevant cabinet member with responsibility for the service area in question, in addition to the appropriate senior officer.

12.4 The Guidance emphasises that the scrutiny prompted by petitions must be appropriate and fair to the officers involved. They must not be exposed to inappropriate public scrutiny of their private lives, nor to harassment or bullying. To safeguard officers, Section 16 of the 2009 Act stipulates that the 'grounds' given in the petition for attendance at a meeting of the overview and scrutiny committee must relate to their job – it cannot relate to their personal circumstances or character. An officer is not required to attend a meeting of the overview and scrutiny committee to give evidence if the petition calling for the attendance is deemed to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate by the local authority.

13. Petition reviews

13.1 If a petition organiser is not satisfied with the way an authority has dealt with a petition, the organiser has the power to ask an overview and scrutiny committee to review that authority's response to the petition. The overview and scrutiny committee will decide whether the steps taken by the authority in response to the petition were adequate.

13.2 If the overview and scrutiny committee is very concerned – for instance if the committee thinks that the authority is seriously neglecting its responsibility to listen to local people – under Section 21(3)(b) of the Local Government Act 2000 the committee can arrange for the full council to carry out the review function. That is to say the overview and scrutiny committee can arrange for the authority's response to the petition to be discussed at a meeting of the full council.

13.3 The review process is concerned with whether the steps taken by the council in response to the petition were adequate – it is not about whether the decision in responding to the petition was correct.

14. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. To

- (i) approve the petition scheme as set out in the Annexe to this report, in particular to set the thresholds referred to in paragraphs 6.3 and 6.7 ;**
- (ii) note that further detail will be required to guide users on the e-petition element of the scheme and to authorise the Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer to make the final alterations to this part of the scheme;**
- (iii) agree that the scheme replaces the current provisions relating to petitions within the Constitution;**
- (iv) agree that the scheme be reviewed as part of the overall review of the Constitution being undertaken by the Constitution Review Working Group; and**
- (v) produce an easy to read guide to petitions for public use.**

B. To designate the Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer as the proper officer for petitions with delegated authority to determine inappropriate or non-compliant petitions and whether e-petitions may be hosted on the Council's site, as well as approving minor amendments to the scheme such as changes in names of officers or designation of posts.

**John Quinton
Head of Democratic Services**

SUGGESTED SCHEME

Petitions

The council welcomes all petitions from anyone who lives, works, or studies in the Wiltshire or uses the services provided by the council. The council 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 the council plan to do with the petition. The council will treat something as a petition if it is identified as such, or if it seems that it is intended to be a petition.

Paper petitions can be sent to Wendy Packer, Democratic Services, Wiltshire Council, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge BA14 8JN

Or be created, signed and submitted online by following this link [link to follow]

If your petition has received 11,500 signatures or more it will also be scheduled for a council debate [link to section on Full Council Debates] and if this is the case the council will let you know the date of the meeting of the council when it will be heard. These meetings take place at least four times a year, dates and times can be found here [link]. 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 Wendy Packer on 01225 713018 at least 10 working days before the meeting and she will talk you through the process.

Alternatively if your petition does not have sufficient signatures to trigger a debate at full council you may wish for your petition to be referred to the appropriate decision maker, which could be the council's cabinet or appropriate cabinet member. Again if you contact Wendy Packer on 01225 713018 she will talk you through your options.

Or if your issue is a local one and falls within the remit and powers of the area boards you may wish to present your petition there (include link). The council has set a nominal threshold of 2.5% of the population of the area covered by the area board to trigger a formal debate at a board. However any petition received for an area board will be discussed with the appropriate chairman and the appropriate action taken.

As another alternative 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. If your petition contains at least 5,750 signatures, the relevant senior officer will give evidence at a public meeting of one of the council's select committees*.

So no matter what size your petition is you will be kept informed of how the council proposes to deal with it and the action to be taken. The council remains convinced of the need for local discretion and flexibility in the way petitions are managed. Petitions that trigger the thresholds will of course be referred to council, to one of the council's select committees or to an area board. There will however be local discretion and flexibility in dealing with any other petitions. Discussions will take place with the relevant cabinet member or the appropriate area board chairman to determine the most appropriate way of dealing with the petition. The options may include referring the matter to the cabinet or the appropriate area board, or any of those options listed in the section below on **How will the council respond to 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 the council will contact to explain how they 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, the council will contact the first named signatory to the petition to agree who should act as the petition organiser.

Petitions which are considered to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate will not be accepted. In the period immediately before an election or referendum the council may need to deal with your petition differently – if this is the case the council 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, they 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 the council plan to do with the petition and when they can expect to hear from them again. It will also be published on our website.

If the council can do what your petition asks for, the acknowledgement may confirm that the council has 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, then the acknowledgment will confirm this and tell you when and where the meeting will take place. If the petition needs more investigation, the council will tell you the steps they plan to take.

If the petition applies 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. Further information on all these procedures and how you can express your views is available here [insert links]

The council will not take action on any petition which they 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 the council are doing in response to the petitions received, the details of all the petitions submitted will be published on the council's website, except in cases where this would be inappropriate. Whenever possible the council 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. The council 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. [link to account settings]

How will the council respond to petitions?

The council's 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 one of the council's select committees*
- calling a referendum
- writing to the petition organiser setting out the council's views about the request in the petition

(*The council's select committees perform the overview and scrutiny function within the council where councillors are responsible for scrutinising the work of the council – in other words, the select 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.

If your petition is about something over which the council has no direct control (for example the local railway or hospital) the council will consider making 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 the council are not able to do this for any reason (for example if what the petition calls for conflicts with council policy), then they will set out the reasons for this to you. If the petition is of a sufficient size to trigger a debate at a full Council meeting then a representative of the partner organisation will be invited to attend the meeting to assist with the debate.

You can find more information on the services for which the council is responsible here [link]. If your petition is about something that a different council is responsible for the council 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 the council will always notify you of the action they have taken.

Full council debates

If a petition contains more than 11,500 signatures it will be debated by the full 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 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.

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. In addition to your petition the council may also consider the views of the cabinet or cabinet member. If you would like you may also have the opportunity to answer questions or clarify issues for the councillors.

The council will decide how to respond to the petition at this meeting. The council 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 cabinet 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 the council's website. Alternatively and if timing permits the petition may be referred to the cabinet for its views so that at the council meeting the views can be considered alongside the petition and a final decision made.

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 5,750 signatures, the relevant senior officer will give evidence at a public meeting of one of the council's select committees*. A list of the senior staff that can be called to give evidence can be found here [insert link]. 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 cabinet member 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 Wendy Packer on 01225 713018 up to three working days before the meeting.

E-petitions

The council welcomes e-petitions which are created and submitted through our website link. E-petitions must follow the same guidelines as paper petitions [link to guidelines].

The petition organiser will need to provide the council 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 the council has to check that the content of your petition is suitable before it is made available for signature. If the council feels they cannot publish your petition for some reason, they 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 Wendy Packer. 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 Wendy Packer on 01225 713018 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.

Petitions submitted electronically but not through the e-petition facility will be dealt with in accordance with the provisions for paper petitions.

(NB more detailed guidance will need to be included within this scheme to help guide users of the system. This will be added as the facility to host e petitions is developed)

How do I 'sign' an e-petition?

You can see all the e-petitions currently available for signature here [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?

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 select 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.

It is important to emphasise here that the review process is concerned with whether the steps taken by the council in response to the petition were adequate – it is not about whether the decision in responding to the petition was correct.

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 the council has 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 cabinet and arranging for the matter to be considered at a meeting of the full council.

If the select committee feels that it may have a conflict of interest by virtue of any previous involvement in the petition in question, the council can arrange for a differently constituted select committee to deal with your request.

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.