

Newark & Sherwood District Council's Petition Scheme

Introduction

The Council welcomes petitions and recognises that petitions are one way in which people can let us know their concerns. A petition is defined as a communication in writing or using an electronic facility, which is signed by the appropriate number of qualifying people. 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. 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 the Chief Executive, Newark & Sherwood District Council, Castle House, Great North Road, Newark, Notts. NG24 1BY.

Petitions can be presented to a meeting of the full Council. These meetings take place within an annual cycle of meetings, details of which can be found at www.newark-sherwooddc.gov.uk. If you would like your petition to be presented to a full Council Meeting please contact your local Councillor asking them to present it on your behalf or contact Democratic Services on 01636 655243 or committees@newark-sherwooddc.gov.uk at least 10 working days before the Council meeting.

If your petition has received 1,000 signatures or more from people that live and/or work in the District then this will trigger a debate at full Council. If this is the case contact will be made with the lead petitioner to discuss options for enabling this to take place.

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. The subject should be relevant to some matter in relation to which the Council has functions or which affects the area or its inhabitants. It should also state what action the petitioners wish the Council to take; and
- the name and address (including postcode) and signature of any person supporting the petition.

Signatures are only valid for people who live, work or study within the District. In the case of an e-petition submitted via the Council's website or an alternative platform, a signature is not required but a valid email address, name, address and postcode must be supplied by each of the petitioners. Further details about e-petitions are given later in this petition scheme.

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.

If you want to submit a petition to a specific meeting of the Council then you need to ensure that we receive a completed petition with details of the petition subject matter, number of signatures and your contact details 10 working days before the meeting to enable it to be submitted and included on the summons for the meeting.

Petitions which are considered to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate 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.

The Council's Monitoring Officer will decide as to whether or not the guidelines referred to above have been met and therefore whether a petition should be accepted.

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 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 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 will apply.

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).

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 a committee of the Council whose remit includes the matters referred to in the petition
- calling a referendum

- writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition

If your petition is about something that a different Council is responsible for or over which the Council has no direct control (for example rail services or a hospital) 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 organisation, but could involve other steps. In any event we will always notify you of the action we have taken.

Full Council Debates

If a petition contains more than 1,000 signatures it will be scheduled for debate by the full Council. This means that the issue raised in the petition will be discussed at a meeting at 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 or the Councillor acting on their behalf will be given five minutes to present the petition at the meeting and the petition will then be discussed by Councillors. If the petition organiser indicates they wish to present the petition at the meeting but they are unable to attend the meeting, the Council will continue to debate the petition without presentation. The Council may exercise their discretion to limit the debate to 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.

The Council may consider there to be a more expedient way in which to deal with a petition which contains more than 1,000 signatures. If this is the case, the lead petitioner will be notified accordingly.

Presentation of Petitions at Full Council

Your petition may not have the requisite number of signatures to trigger a Council debate. However, your petition can still be presented to a meeting of the full Council. When you are satisfied that your petition meets all of the criteria you should contact your local Ward Councillor or appropriate Member to make arrangements for the submission of the petition to the next full Council Meeting. Democratic Services can also approach the relevant Councillor on your behalf.

The Member being asked and wishing to present the petition should satisfy themselves that the petition meets the guidelines for petitions as set out in this Scheme and notify the Chief Executive, prior to the full Council meeting that they intend to present the petition. They have a maximum of 3 minutes in which to present the petition to the full Council meeting. The petition organiser does not have a right to present the petition to the full Council meeting and there will be no debate.

E-Petitions

The Council welcomes e-petitions which are created through our website www.newark-sherwooddc.gov.uk/epetitions. For these the petition organiser must provide us with their name and address (including postcode) 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 will take up to 5 working days before it is published on the website. This is because we have to check that the content of your petition before it is published online. If we feel that 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 on 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 acknowledgment within 10 working days. You can see all the e-petitions currently available on the website www.newark-sherwooddc.gov.uk/epetitions. When you sign the e-petition you will be asked to provide your name, postcode and a valid email address.

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 a review of 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 relevant 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 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.