

THE WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL PETITION SCHEME

Petitions

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 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 Head of Committee and Governance Services
Westminster City Council
City Hall,
64 Victoria Street
London SW1E 6QP

Or can be created, signed and submitted online by following this link [insert link]

Petitions can also be presented to an ordinary meeting of the council by a councillor on petitioners' behalf. It is the convention that petitions relating to a local ward matter are presented by one of the relevant ward councillors. Ordinary Council Meetings take place at least 4 times a year, dates and times can be found [here](#). If you would like your Councillor to present your petition on your behalf, please contact the Council, Cabinet and Committee Secretariat on 020 7641 3160 or email: petition@westminster.gov.uk and they will talk you through the process. Alternatively please contact your Ward Councillor

The Councillor will provide a copy of your petition to the Head of Committee and Governance Services 14 days prior to the Council meeting for inclusion on the agenda of that meeting or give notice of their intention to submit the petition in person and of its contents by no later than 5pm on the day before the Council meeting. If your petition has received 10,000 signatures or more it will be scheduled for a council debate (see below) and if this is the case we will let you know whether this will happen at the same meeting or a later meeting of the council. Otherwise petitions submitted to ordinary Council Meetings shall, without debate, be referred to the relevant Chief Officer for reporting to the relevant Cabinet Member or Committee within 3 months of the date the petition was presented.

Councillors are encouraged to inform the Head of Committee and Governance Services of their intention to submit a petition so that he can advise the relevant Chief Officer of its likely receipt and therefore allowing that Chief Officer the opportunity to commence preliminary work on the Council's response.

What are the Guidelines for Submitting a Petition?

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.

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. If the petition does not identify a petition organiser, we will take reasonable steps to identify 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 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 Head of Committee and Governance Services has the discretion to verify the name and Westminster address/ postcode and signature of any person supporting the petition should he consider it necessary for any reason and also to decide that a petition should not be considered further as he considers it to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate.

What will the Council do when it receives my Petition?

An acknowledgement by the Head of Committee and Governance Services 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, then the acknowledgement 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 apply. Further information on all these procedures and how you can express your views is available as follows.

[Planning](#)

[Licensing](#)

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 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 hard copy petition. However, the contact details of the petition organiser and any signatories will not be placed on the website but will be available on the copy available for inspection and copying at the Council's offices.

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 one of the Council's Policy and Scrutiny Committees *
- Calling a referendum.
- Writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition.
- In all cases where a petition has been presented by a Councillor to an ordinary Council meeting the relevant Chief Officer shall, within 3 months 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 full Council meeting or have not been presented by a Councillor to an ordinary Council meeting, shall be acknowledged by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and referred to the relevant Chief Officer who shall advise the petition organiser, within 3 months, but sooner if possible, of the Council's response, including the relevant Cabinet Member(s) and Ward Members. The Head of Legal Services will inform the relevant Cabinet Member(s) 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.

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) we will consider making representations on behalf of the community to the relevant body. The council works with a large number of local 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.

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 Debates

If a petition contains more than 10,000 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. It will be placed on the agenda of the next available ordinary council meeting so long as the meeting is not due to fall in less than 21 days time. Following receipt of such a petition the Head of Committee and Governance Services shall prepare a report to full council setting out details of the petition and outlining the process to be followed, which includes that 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 or such longer period as the Council shall determine. The relevant chief officer may also be asked to prepare a briefing on the subject of the petition which shall be circulated with the agenda of the council meeting, together with a copy of the petition.

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 executive 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 our website.

Any petition which triggers a full council debate but does not provide at least 21 days notice will be placed on the agenda of next ordinary Council meeting.

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 5,000 signatures, the relevant senior officer will give evidence at a public meeting of the relevant Policy and Scrutiny committee. A list of the senior staff that can be called to give evidence can be found at the end of this document. You should be aware that the Policy and Scrutiny 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 the Council, Cabinet and Committee Secretariat on 020 7641 3160 up to five working days before the meeting.

E-Petitions

The Council welcomes e-petitions which are created and submitted through our website which can be viewed [here](#). 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 Westminster.

E-petitions can run for a maximum of 3 months but you can choose a shorter timeframe if desired.

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 within the same six 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 why. You will be able to change and resubmit your petition if you wish (if you do not do this within the allocated time a summary of the petition and the reasons 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, 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 the Cabinet, Committee and Scrutiny Secretariat, 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 [\[insert link\]](#)

When you sign an e-petition you will be asked to provide your name, your Westminster relevant 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. The Council reserves the right to verify your Westminster connection.

The personal details you provide either as a petition organiser or a signatory will only be used by the Council and solely in connection to the petition such as updating you on the Council's response.

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 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, making recommendations to the council 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.

Officers who may be called to account

- Chief Executive
- CLT members
- Director of Law
- Any other Chief Officers as defined by Section 2 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989