

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Petitions Scheme

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 by Governance and Democratic Support (Strategy and Resources Directorate), or in the case of electronic petitions through the City Council's e-petitions facility.

This acknowledgement will set out what the City Council plans to do with the petition. The City Council 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. A petition must contain at least 100 signatures, issues attracting less than 100 signatures will be treated as service requests.

Paper petitions can be sent to:

Governance Division
Strategy and Resources Directorate
Civic Centre,
Glebe Street
Stoke-on-Trent ST4 1RN
E-mail: CabinetandCommitteeSupport@stoke.gov.uk

Or be signed and submitted online by following this link www.stoke.gov.uk/petitions

Petitions containing between 100 and 1000 signatures will be considered by the council's relevant overview and scrutiny committee and petitions containing 1000 or more signatures can be debated by full council.

If you would like to present your petition at a meeting, please contact the Governance Division (01782) 233540 at least 10 working days before the meeting, who will talk you through the process.

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 identity of any person supporting the petition, including their address/postcode.

Petitions should be accompanied by contact details, including an address for the Lead Petitioner. This is the person we will contact to explain how we will respond to the petition.

Please note that the contact details of the Lead Petitioner will be placed on the City Council website unless we are contacted. If you have any objections to this, please make it clear when you submit your petition. If the petition does not identify a Lead Petitioner, we will contact signatories to the petition to agree who should act as the Lead Petitioner.

You may run a 'traditional' paper based petition and web-based e-petition concurrently, which will be treated as one single petition.

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.

What will the council do when it receives my petition?

All petitions sent or presented to the council will receive an acknowledgement from the council within 10 working days of receipt by the Governance and Democratic Support Team, or in the case of electronic petitions through the City Council's e-petitions facility.

This acknowledgement will set out what the City Council plans to do with the petition. The City Council 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 and it contains at least 100 signatures.

Acknowledgement will be by letter to the Lead Petitioner of a paper-based petition or by e-mail to the Lead Petitioner of an e-petition. It will let them know what we plan to do with the petition and when they can expect to hear from us again.

If we can do what the petition asks for, the acknowledgement may confirm that we have taken the action requested and the petition will be closed. The acknowledgment will tell you when and where the meeting to consider the petition 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, a live consultation, is a statutory petition (for example requesting a referendum on having an elected mayor), or is on a matter where there is already an existing right of appeal, such as council tax banding and non-domestic rates, other procedures apply.

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.

Petitions can also be rejected for the following reasons:-

- if it is abusive or libellous;
- if it defames an organisation or individual
- if it is from a lead petitioner on a matter where they have been deemed a persistent or vexatious complainant
- if it relates to an identifiable person;
- if it might lead to the Council acting illegally;
- if it clearly supports the financial interests of the person submitting the petition;
- if it contains matters associated with political parties or organisations;
- if it refers to a matter which is already the subject of legal proceedings;
- if it is submitted from employees regarding terms and conditions of employment;
- if it duplicates a previous petition submitted within the previous six months.

The petition must be signed by at least 100 people.

How will the council respond to petitions?

The City Council's response to a petition will depend on what a petition asks for and how many people have signed it, but will include considering the petition at a council meeting and may include one or more of the following:

- taking the action requested in the petition
- holding an inquiry into the matter
- undertaking research into the matter
- holding a public meeting
- holding a consultation
- holding a meeting with petitioners
- writing to the Lead Petitioner setting out our views about the request in the petition

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 that a different body is responsible for, for example the Police Service, NHS or another local authority, we will give consideration to what the best method is for responding to it. In any event we will always notify you of the action we have taken.

Petitions considered by Overview and Scrutiny

If your petition has received at least 100 signatures but less than 1000 it will be considered by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and the lead petitioner will be invited to speak to the petition and outline the reasons for the petition and what the petition hopes to achieve. The committee may ask the petitioner questions. The committee may take advice and hear from relevant officers with regard to the subject matter of the petition. The petition will then be discussed by the committee. Members may move a motion to make recommendations to the relevant decision maker as appropriate.

Depending on the nature and subject matter of your petition, you might wish to include a request for a Chief Officer to attend the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting to answer questions about something for which they are responsible. Chief Officers that can be requested to attend are:-

- The City Director
- The Director of Children and Family Services
- The Director of Housing, Development and Growth
- The Director of Adult Social Care Health Integration and Wellbeing
- The Director of Strategy and Resources and Section 151 Officer
- The Monitoring Officer

Please note that it will be for the Committee members to ask questions of the officer and not the lead petitioner. You should be aware that the Committee may decide that it would be more appropriate for another officer to give evidence instead of one that you have named in the petition. The committee may also decide to call the

relevant councillor to attend the meeting and answer any questions the committee may have.

Petitions reported to Full Council

Petitions containing between 500 and 999 signatures in addition to being considered by Overview and Scrutiny (as set out above), will be reported to full council and the lead petitioner will be allowed a maximum of three minutes to speak to the petition if they wish to. This will be confined to reading out or summarising the substantive of the petition and making relevant supporting remarks. The petition will not be the subject of a debate, and members will not ask questions of the Lead Petitioner.

Petitions debated by Full Council

If a petition contains 1,000 or more signatures it will be debated by the full Council. This means that the issue raised in the petition will be discussed at a meeting which all councillors can attend.

The council will ensure that the matter is dealt with at the next full City Council meeting, or an extraordinary City Council meeting called for that purpose within 6 weeks.

The Lead Petitioner will be given five minutes to present the petition at the meeting. Members shall then debate the petition. The length of the debate shall be at the Lord Mayor's discretion. 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 Cabinet are required to make the final decision, the council will decide whether to make recommendations to inform that decision. The Lead Petitioner will receive written confirmation of this decision. This confirmation will also be published on the City Council website.

E-petitions

The council welcomes e-petitions which are created and submitted through our website www.stoke.gov.uk/petitions. E-petitions must follow the same guidelines as paper petitions.

The Lead Petitioner 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. We would expect that most would run for up to three months, but you can choose a shorter or longer timeframe, up to a maximum of six months.

When you create an e-petition, we have to check that the content of your petition is suitable before it is made available for signature. Your e-petition will be acknowledged within ten working days.

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 ten 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 dealt with in the same way as a paper petition.

A petition acknowledgement and response will be sent to the Lead Petitioner.

How do I 'sign' an e-petition?

You can see all the e-petitions currently available for signature by following this link:
www.stoke.gov.uk/petitions.

When you sign an e-petition you will be asked to provide your name, address, postcode and a valid email address. People visiting the e-petition will not be able to see your name.

What can I do if I feel my petition has not been dealt with properly?

If the petitioner considers that the authority has not dealt with the petition properly, the Lead Petitioner has the right to request that the steps that the council has taken in response to the petition are reviewed through the corporate complaints procedure.