

PETITIONS

1 Introduction

- 1.1 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 within 5 working days of receipt. This acknowledgement will inform and confirm what the Council intends 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 and the organiser agrees.
- 1.2 For practical purposes we will not class it as a petition unless it has reached at least 10 signatures from people who live, work or study in the Rochford District.
- 1.3 In the following paragraphs details are given on how you can go about submitting a petition, the different types of petition and how, in certain cases, special rules apply.
- 1.4 Petitions will be considered by the Assistant Director, Legal & Democratic to ensure they are not vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate.

2 Guidelines for Submitting a Petition

- 2.1 Paper petitions should be sent to:
The Assistant Director,
Legal & Democratic,
Rochford District Council,
Council Offices,
South Street,
Rochford,
Essex,
SS4 1BW

or, in the case of a consultation petition (see paragraph 3.5 below), to the address given in the consultation.

- 2.2 You may also use the Council's online e-petitions facility to create, sign and submit a petition by following the link below or going to the Council's petitions page and then accessing the e-petitions website.
- 2.3 It is advised that Councillors should not act as the petitioner for reasons of bias and predetermination. If a Councillor wishes to petition the Council then they will not be allowed to participate on the debate or vote on the matter.

- 2.4 [Petitions](#) can be presented to ordinary meetings of the Council. Dates and times can be found on the Council's website. If you would like to present your petition to the Council, or someone else to present it on your behalf, please contact the Member Services Team at the Council (contact details are given at the end of this document) at least 10 working days before the meeting and they will talk you through the process and help with any questions.
- 2.5 A petition must include:-
- a clear and concise statement covering the subject of the petition and a statement of what action the petitioners wish the Council to take.
 - the name and address and signature of any person supporting the petition.
- 2.6 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.
- 2.7 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.

3 Types of Petition

- 3.1 There are different types of petition as set out below. How your petition is dealt with depends on which type you submit.

Ordinary Petitions

- 3.2 These are any petitions not included in the types below. Please note that a petition which raises issues of possible Councillor misconduct will be dealt with under separate standards procedures, rather than under the petitions scheme.
- 3.3 Similarly, a petition that makes a complaint about the conduct of a Council officer may need to be dealt with under the Council's complaints procedure.
- 3.4 We would let you know how we intend to proceed.

Consultation Petitions

- 3.5 These are petitions in response to an invitation from the Council for comments as part of a consultation on a particular matter. For example, on a planning or licensing application or a proposed policy or strategy affecting a community. A petition on such a matter will be reported to the meeting, person or body with responsibility for taking the decision.

Governance Petitions

- 3.6 There are certain matters where an Act of Parliament requires the Council to consider a petition from local electors. For example, a petition calling for a referendum on having a directly elected mayor or asking for the creation of a parish or community council in part of the Council's area. This petitions scheme does not apply to such petitions.
- 3.7 Advice about these petitions should be sought from the Member Services Team (contact details are given at the end of this document).

Petitions for Debate

- 3.8 In addition to a right for a petition to be presented directly at a Council meeting (see paragraph 2.3), a petition will be debated at a Council meeting if it contains 1500 or more signatures.
- 3.9 If a petition contains at least 750 signatures but less than 1500 it will be debated, at a public meeting of the Council's Review Committee*.
- 3.10 More information about petitions for debate at Council meetings is given in section 6 below.

(*The Review Committee is a Committee of Councillors responsible for reviewing and scrutinising the work of the Council and holding decision making and decision makers to account.)

4 What will the Council do when it receives a petition?

- 4.1 An acknowledgement will be sent to the petition organiser within 5 working days of receiving the petition. The acknowledgement will advise on what the Council plans to do with the petition and when the organiser can expect to hear from the Council again. It will also be published on the Council's website.
- 4.2 If the Council can do what the petition asks for, the acknowledgement will confirm that the action requested has been taken and the petition will be closed. If the petition has enough signatures to trigger a debate at a Council meeting, or a senior officer giving evidence, then the acknowledgment will confirm this and advise when and where the meeting will take place. If the petition needs more investigation, we will tell you the steps the Council plan to take.
- 4.3 To ensure that people know what the Council is doing in response to petitions received, the details of all petitions submitted will be published on our website, except in cases where this would be inappropriate. 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.

5 How will the Council respond to a petition?

- 5.1 The 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 meeting of the Council or other council body such as the Executive (cabinet), or the Review Committee
 - holding an inquiry into the matter
 - undertaking research 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 Council's views about the request in the petition.
- 5.2 In addition to these steps, the Council will consider what specific actions are available to address the issues highlighted in the petition.
- 5.3 If a petition is about something over which the Council has no direct control (for example the railway or a 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 and, where possible, will work with appropriate partners to respond to your petition. If we are not able to do this for any reason (such as if what the petition calls for conflicts with Council policy) we will set out the reasons for this to you.
- 5.4 If the 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.

6 Debates at Council or Review Committee Meetings

- 6.1 A petition containing 1500 or more signatures will be debated at a Council 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 or their representative 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 petition organiser or their representative will be given the opportunity to sum up at the end of the debate for a maximum of 1 minute if they so wish.
- 6.2 The Council will decide how to respond to the petition at the meeting. It 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.

- 6.3 Where the issue is one on which the Council's Executive (cabinet) is 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 the decision which will also be published on the Council's website.
- 6.4 If your petition contains at least 750 signatures but less than 1500 it will be debated at a public meeting of the Council's Review Committee. The Committee may decide to call a relevant officer or Councillor to attend the meeting. Committee members will ask the questions at the meeting, but you will be able to suggest questions to the Chairman of the Committee by contacting the Member Services Team up to three working days before the meeting.
- 6.5 The Review Committee will make recommendations to Council or the Council's Executive on how to respond to the petition.

7 E-petitions

- 7.1 E-petitions can be created and submitted through the website. E-petitions must follow the same guidelines as other petitions set out above. The petition organiser will need to provide their name, postal address and email address. The organiser will also need to decide how long the petition should be open for signatures. Most petitions run for six months, but a shorter or longer timeframe can be chosen, up to a maximum of 12 months.
- 7.2 When you create an e-petition, it will take five working days before it is published online.
- 7.3 If we feel we cannot publish your petition for some reason, we will contact you within the five working days to explain. You will be able to consider changing and resubmitting the petition if you wish. If this is not done within 5 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 Council's website.
- 7.4 When an e-petition has closed for signature, it will automatically be submitted to the Member Services Team. In the same way as a paper petition the organiser will receive an acknowledgement within 5 working days. If you would like to present your e-petition to a meeting of the Council, please contact the Member Services Team within 5 working days of receipt of the acknowledgement.
- 7.5 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.

8 How do I 'sign' an e-petition?

- 8.1 You can see all the e-petitions currently available for signature by following [this link](#) to our petitions page and then accessing the e-petitions website.

- 8.2 When you sign an e-petition you will be asked to provide your name, your postcode and a valid email address. 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.

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

- 9.1 If it is felt that the petition has not been dealt with properly, the petition organiser has the right to request that the Council's Review Committee review the steps that the Council has taken in response to the petition. The petition organiser must give a short explanation of the reasons why the Council's response is not considered to be adequate.
- 9.2 The Review Committee will endeavour to consider the 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 petition has not been dealt with adequately, it may use any of its powers to deal with the matter. These include commencing an investigation, making recommendations to the Council or the Executive and arranging for the matter to be considered at a meeting of the Full Council.
- 9.3 Once the appeal has been considered the petition organiser will be informed of the results within 5 working days. The results will also be published on the Council's website.

Contact Details:-

Member Services
Rochford District Council,
Council Offices,
South Street,
Rochford,
Essex,
SS4 1BW

Email – memberservices@rochford.gov.uk

Phone – 01702 318141/179