

# Sheffield City Council Petitions Scheme

## Introduction

The Council welcomes petitions and recognises that they 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 14 days of receipt. This acknowledgement will set out what we plan to do with the petition.

Paper petitions can be sent to:

- John Turner, Democratic Services, Sheffield City Council, Town Hall, Pinstone Street, Sheffield S1 2HH
- or emailed to [john.turner@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:john.turner@sheffield.gov.uk) or [committee@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:committee@sheffield.gov.uk)

E-Petitions can be created and signed online at <https://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk>

Petitions can also be presented to:-

- Full Council
- Cabinet
- Scrutiny Committees

The Calendar of meetings is available on the Council's website: <http://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/mgCalendarMonthView.aspx?GL=1&bcr=1>

If you would like to present your petition to a meeting, or would like it to be presented on your behalf, please give advance notice by contacting John Turner, Democratic Services on 0114 474 1947 or email [john.turner@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:john.turner@sheffield.gov.uk) or [committee@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:committee@sheffield.gov.uk) and you will be advised on the process.

Full Council meetings usually take place on the first Wednesday of the month at 2.00 p.m. The meeting takes place in the Council Chamber in the Town Hall. Dates and times can be found here:

<http://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeeld=154>.

You will need to give advance notice of your petition by 10.00 a.m. on the day of the meeting and can either present your petition at the meeting, or ask that it be submitted to the meeting on your behalf. If you attend the meeting, you will be able to speak for up to three minutes.

## What are the guidelines for submitting a petition?

Petitions submitted to the Council must include:

- A minimum of **five** signatures, from anyone who either lives, works or studies in Sheffield.
- A clear and concise statement covering the subject of the petition, to include what action the petitioners would like the Council to take.
- Contact details, including a postal address, for the petition organiser. This is the person we will contact to explain how we will respond to the petition (only the organiser's name will appear on the Council website).
- The name, postal address and signature of any person supporting the petition.

If the petition does not identify an organiser, we will contact one of the signatories to the petition.

Petitions which are considered to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate will not be accepted. 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.

### Data Protection

Use of individuals' personal data, including their addresses/email addresses, will be protected under the terms of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and will be held by us only for the purpose of corresponding in relation to the petition submitted.

We advise that for paper petitions, you include the following wording on each page of your petition that will contain signatures:

"Sheffield City Council (the Council) will become the data controller when the petition is deposited with the Council. The details you provide on this form will only be used for the purpose of this petition. Your information may be shared with the petition organiser, Council officers, Councillors or service providers."

## What will the Council do when it receives my petition?

We will send an acknowledgement to the petition organiser within 14 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. Details of the petition will also be published in the Council Petitions Log, on our website. If the Council 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 at a public meeting of one of the Council's Scrutiny Committees, 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 you require information on these procedures and how you can express your views you should in the first instance contact John Turner (details as before).

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 relates to a matter where there is already an existing right of appeal such as Council Tax banding and non domestic rates, other procedures apply, outside of this Scheme. With specific reference to planning and licensing application petitions, the approach adopted in Sheffield is to permit the receipt of these by the Council or their presentation at Full Council, Cabinet or a Scrutiny Committee, which will then trigger a referral to the Planning and Highways or Licensing Committee, as appropriate. The receipt and recording of the petition and actions to be taken will be administered in the same way, for consistency and in the spirit of the provisions of this Scheme.

If you require any further information on (a) the Planning and Highways Committee, please ring 0114 273 4014 or (b) the Licensing Committee, please ring 0114 273 4122.

We will not take any 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 details of all the petitions submitted to us will be published in the Council Petitions Log, on our website except in cases where this would be inappropriate.

## **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 enquiry 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 the relevant Scrutiny Committee\*
- writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in question

\* Scrutiny Committees are Committees of Councillors who are responsible for monitoring and evaluating decisions affecting services and the performance of officers.

The Committees can make recommendations to the Cabinet or Full Council on changes to policy and the provision of Council services

(<https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/content/sheffield/home/your-city-council/scrutiny.html>)

In addition to these steps, the Council will consider other specific actions it may be able to 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 aim to make 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. You can find more information on the services for which the Council is responsible on the website:

<https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/content/sheffield/home.html>.

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. It 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.

Essentially there are three types of petitions:

- “Ordinary” petitions
- Petitions requiring debate
- Petitions to hold senior Council employees to account.

### **Ordinary Petitions**

Ordinary petitions must be signed by at least **five** people. We will acknowledge the petition within 14 days of receiving it and let the petition organiser 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 the petition needs more investigation, we will tell you the steps we plan to take.

In the vast majority of cases, the petition will be submitted to one of the Council’s formal Member meetings where elected Councillors will decide how to respond to the petition. These meetings will be held in public and petitioners are welcome to attend the meeting and observe the proceedings. The petition organiser will be given three minutes to present the petition at the meeting.

A petition can be submitted to the Council, the Cabinet or one of the Scrutiny Committees.

### **Full Council Debates**

If a petition contains **5000** signatures or more, it will trigger a debate by the Full Council, in public, unless it is a petition asking for a senior Council officer to give evidence at a

public meeting of one of the Scrutiny Committees. This means that the issue raised in the petition will be discussed at a meeting which all Councillors can attend.

For petitions that trigger a debate at Full Council, we require **seven** working days' notice to be given prior to a Council meeting to ensure Councillors have adequate preparation time. The Council will endeavour to consider the petition at its next meeting, but due to other Council business, it may not be possible to debate every eligible petition at the next Council meeting, and it is unlikely that any more than two eligible petitions will be debated at any one meeting. Therefore, on occasions, an eligible petition may be debated at the next but one Council meeting.

The petition organiser will be given three minutes to present the petition at the meeting and the petition will then be discussed by Councillors. The Council will decide how to respond to the petition at this meeting. If it is within their remit, 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.

If the matter is one that falls under the remit of the Cabinet, Full Council can decide whether or not to submit recommendations as to how the final decision should be made. The petition organiser will receive written confirmation of this decision. The decision will be published on the Council's website.

### **Officer Evidence**

Your petition may ask for a senior Council officer to give evidence at a public meeting of one of the Council's Scrutiny Committees and 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. Petitions which call for evidence from a senior Council employee, and have at least **2500** signatures, will trigger that response.

If the subject matter of the petition falls within the remit of more than one Scrutiny Committee, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee will decide where to refer the matter.

Senior staff that can be called to give evidence are:

- Chief Executive
- Executive Director – People Services
- Executive Director – Place
- Executive Director – Resources

and Directors as considered appropriate by the relevant Scrutiny Committee.

You should be aware that the relevant 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.

If you want to speak during a Scrutiny Committee meeting, please tell the Committee Secretary before the meeting has started. Further information is also available on involvement in Scrutiny Committee meetings at <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/content/sheffield/home/your-city-council/scrutiny.html>.

## **E-Petitions**

The Council welcomes e-Petitions which are created and submitted through the website <http://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/mgepetitionlistdisplay.aspx?bcr=1>

E-Petitions must follow the same guidelines as paper petitions. The petition organiser will need to provide us with their name, postal address and e-mail address.

### **Your e-Petition will also need to include:**

- A date for when you wish your e-Petition to go live on the website.
- A closing date when the e-Petition will stop collecting signatures. We will host your e-Petition for up to 12 months, but expect that most petitions will be open for signatures for a much shorter period than this.

### **How to start an e-Petition:**

- Go to <http://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/mgepetitionlistdisplay.aspx?bcr=1> and select the 'submit a new e-Petition' option.
- You will need to be registered to submit an e-Petition. This is a simple process which requires you to provide us with your name, postal address and email address. Only your name will be displayed on our website in connection with your e-Petition.
- You will be prompted to enter a title which the system will automatically check against existing e-Petitions.
- You will then be asked to provide details of what action you would like the Council (or its partners) to take, and provide supporting information for your petition.
- The online form will then be submitted to Democratic Services.
- The Council is required by UK law to ensure that petitions that are published do not contain any defamatory or offensive material. Therefore we will need to

review your petition before it is published on our website. Petitions will be reviewed and published during normal office hours. We expect to be able to publish your petition the same day provided that it is submitted by 12.00 noon.

- A petition must be submitted in good faith. You must not include:
  - potentially libellous, false or defamatory statements;
  - information protected by a court order (e.g. the identities of children in custody disputes); or in accordance with any other enactment;
  - matters which are subject to appeal processes or legal actions (e.g. planning appeals, enforcement action or other legal actions in court etc.);
  - material which is commercially sensitive, confidential or which may cause personal distress or loss;
  - the names of individual officials of public bodies; or information where they may be easily identified, in relation to criminal accusations.
- Petitions which are considered to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate will not be published, but we will contact you to explain the reasons. 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, except in cases where this would be inappropriate.
- For further information on how to submit an e-Petition, please contact Democratic Services on 0114 474 1947 or email [john.turner@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:john.turner@sheffield.gov.uk) or [committee@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:committee@sheffield.gov.uk)

### **How to sign an e-Petition:**

- Go to <http://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/mgepetitionlistdisplay.aspx?bcr=1>
- Choose the petition which you wish to support and select 'sign petition'
- You will need to be registered to sign an e-Petition. This is a simple process which requires you to provide us with your name, postal address and email address. Once you have signed an e-Petition, only your name will be displayed on our website.

### **Additional Information**

The Council accepts no liability for the petitions published on its website and the views expressed in the petitions do not necessarily reflect those of the Council.

A petition response will be e-mailed to everyone who has signed the e-Petition and also published on our website.

## **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 Overview and Scrutiny Management 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 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, depending on workload. 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 recommendation to the Council's Cabinet and/or 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 seven days. The results of the review will also be published on our website.