

## Petitions Scheme

### 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Petitions Scheme was approved by the Council under the provisions of Section 11(1) of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. It incorporates procedures to comply with the requirement under the act for the Council to set up an e-petitions scheme.
- 1.2 This scheme, which is available on the Council's website, will be updated periodically in response to experience with the scheme, guidance from the Government or changes in legislation. The scheme will be reviewed annually as set out in Section 14 below.
- 1.3 The Council has appointed a petitions officer, who will receive petitions and from whom further information and advice can be obtained. You can contact the petitions officer by e-mail: [governance@lbhf.gov.uk](mailto:governance@lbhf.gov.uk), or by post at: Petitions Officer, Governance & Scrutiny, Hammersmith Town Hall, King Street, London, W6 9JU.

### 2. PRINCIPLES

- 2.1 The Council welcomes petitions, either in paper form (see the form at the end of this document) or submitted via e-mail or through our e-petitions online facility. We accept petitions as a way in which people can let us know of their concerns and the degree of local support for what we do. We have agreed special procedures to ensure that all valid petitions are reported to an appropriate body within the Council.
- 2.2 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. Valid petitions, whether received by post, by hand, by e-mail or submitted in person or via our e-petitions online facility, will be accepted in accordance with this Scheme.
- 2.3 A petition can be open for signature up to a maximum of 90 days, unless an extension is agreed with the petition organiser; most will be responded to much sooner.

### 3. WHO CAN SUBMIT A PETITION?

- 3.1 Anybody who lives, works or studies in the borough may organise, submit or sign a petition.

### 4. WHAT ARE THE GUIDELINES FOR SUBMITTING A PETITION?

- 4.1 A valid petition submitted to the Council must:
  - Relate to something which is the Council's responsibility, or which the Council has some influence over – the Council has close working relationships and, often, partnership agreements, with a wide range of

public organisations operating in the borough and across London. These organisations include the Hammersmith and Fulham Primary Care Trust, the local emergency services, the West London Waste Authority, and Transport for London as it operates in the borough.

- Be a clear and concise statement covering the subject of the petition. It should state what action the petitioners wish the Council to take.
- Have the names, addresses and signatures of the people who support the petition (name, address and valid e-mail address if the petition is submitted via e-mail or via the E-petition facility). The address might be a residential, work place or study location within the borough, with a valid postcode.
- Meet defined thresholds for numbers of signatures of people who live, work or study in the borough. (See section 9 below).
- Contain contact details, including an address, of 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 our 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.
- Not, in the Council's opinion, be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate.
- Not relate to planning or licensing decisions or to any other matter where people have a statutory right to make comments, or to request a review or to appeal.

## 5. HOW TO SUBMIT A PETITION

5.1 Petitions may be submitted by e-mail, post, in person at the Town Hall, or through our e-petitions website. All petitions currently available for signature will be shown on our website. We reserve the right to check the validity of the addresses of anyone who signs a petition to ensure that they have a real interest in the borough.

5.2 Organisers of petitions can visit our website to submit a petition online or download the petition form. The Petitions Officer can be contacted in the following ways:

**Email:** [governance@lbhf.gov.uk](mailto:governance@lbhf.gov.uk)

**Address:**

Petitions Officer,  
Governance & Scrutiny,  
Hammersmith Town Hall,  
King Street,  
W6 9JU

5.3 We welcome e-petitions which are created and submitted through our website. E-petitions must follow the same guidelines as paper petitions. On receipt of details from a person wanting to sign an e-petition, we will send an e-

mail to the e-mail address provided. This e-mail will include a link which must be clicked in order to confirm the e-mail address is valid. Once this step is complete, the 'signature' will be added to the e-petition. People visiting the e-petition on our website will be able to see the names of everyone who has 'signed' it but not their contact details.

- 5.4 All petitions currently available for signature will be posted on the Council's website. The website shows what is happening to a petition as it goes through the various stages of the process set out in this scheme. It will take five working days before a petition is available on our website. This is because the content of the petition needs to be checked as to whether it is suitable, and the petitioners' names verified to ensure they have a genuine interest in the borough. It will then be made available on the website for further signatures.
- 5.5 Elected Members of the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham may sign a petition but will need to follow the Council's rules about declaring an interest if they are involved in decision making in response to the petition.

## **6. WHAT IS EXCLUDED FROM THE SCHEME?**

- 6.1 The following petitions will be excluded from the scheme:-
- Where a petition is considered to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate.
  - The petition applies to a planning or licensing application, where there are already procedures to make representations.
  - The petition is a statutory petition (for example requesting a referendum on having an elected Mayor).
  - The petition concerns a matter where there is already an existing right of appeal, such as Council Tax banding and non-domestic rates, where other procedures apply.
  - The petition concerns a matter which the Council has no ability to influence (see section 11 below)
- 6.2 Invalid petitions will not be published. An explanation with the reasons for this will be sent out to the petition organiser.
- 6.3 In the period immediately before an election or referendum, the Council may need to deal with petitions differently. This is because the law requires local authorities during the period before an election or referendum to act in a way which does not appear to favour or discriminate any political party.
- 6.4 Where the petition is valid but the Council cannot publish it for some reason, we will contact the petition organiser with an explanation, and advise on how to change the petition in order to overcome the problem. If the petition is not resubmitted 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.

## **7. WHAT WILL THE COUNCIL DO WHEN IT RECEIVES A PETITION?**

- 7.1 The Petitions Officer will send a valid petition to a Responding Officer in the relevant Council department. The Responding Officer will be responsible for investigating the issue and advising on the action to be taken by the Council. An acknowledgement of receipt will be sent to the person organising the petition within 10 working days of the petition having been made. Where the petition has been submitted via the E-petitions facility, the acknowledgment will also be sent to everyone who provides a valid e-mail address. The acknowledgement will say what we have done or intend to do in response to the petition. It will also be published on our website, except in cases where this would be inappropriate. The petition will be copied to the relevant Ward Councillor(s).
- 7.2 We want to ensure that petitions are clearly and effectively worded. We will therefore offer help to petition organisers to enable them to make their petitions as focused as possible, in the interests of getting a response from the Council which addresses petitioners' concerns. If we feel there are other ways of getting a quicker and more satisfactory response to the subject of the petition, we will suggest them. We may therefore contact the petition organiser about these issues before the acknowledgment is sent or afterwards.
- 7.3 If the Council can do what the petition asks for, the acknowledgement may confirm that the requested action has been taken (or will be taken by a specified date) and the petition organiser will be asked to agree to the closure of the petition, either immediately or after the specified date.
- 7.4 If the petition has enough signatures to trigger a Council debate (see paragraph 9.1 below), or the petitioners want a senior officer to give evidence (see paragraph 9.3 below), then the acknowledgement will confirm this and state when and where the meeting will take place. If the subject of the petition needs more investigation, the petition organiser will be informed of the steps the Council plans to take.

## **8. HOW WILL THE COUNCIL RESPOND TO PETITIONS?**

- 8.1 The response to a petition will depend on what the 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 consultation
  - holding a meeting with petitioners

- referring the petition for consideration by one of the Council's Policy and Accountability Committees
- writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition
- resolve that the content of the petition be taken into account when reaching a decision on the relevant report.

Policy and Accountability Committees are committees of Councillors who are responsible for policy development and for scrutinising the work of the Council - in other words, they have the power to hold the Council's decision-makers to account.

## **9. TYPES OF PETITION**

### **a. Petitions for debate at Council**

- 9.1 If a petition attracts a minimum of **5,000 valid signatures** (unless it is a petition asking for a senior Council officer to give evidence at a public meeting) this will automatically trigger a debate at a full Council meeting. The full Council, a meeting which all Councillors attend to discuss major issues, will decide to take or not take the action requested in the petition, or to commission further investigation into the subject of the petition. The Council will try to consider the petition at its next scheduled meeting, although on some occasions this may not be possible; the discussion will then take place at the following meeting.
- 9.2 The petition organiser (or someone they nominate) may address the Council for no longer than five minutes on the subject of the petition. The Petitions Officer will contact the petition organiser in advance of the meeting to arrange this. Councillors will question all parties on the subject of the petition.

### **b. Petitions to call an officer to give evidence**

- 9.3 The petition may ask for the Chief Executive or an Executive Director to give evidence at a relevant Policy and Accountability Committee meeting about something for which the officer is responsible as part of their job. A minimum of **2,000 valid signatures** will be required to trigger this action. For example, the petition may ask an Executive Director to explain progress on an issue, or to explain the advice given to elected Members to enable them to make a particular decision. The Policy and Accountability Committee may decide that it would be more appropriate for another officer to give evidence instead of the senior officer named in the petition. The Committee may also decide to call a Cabinet Member or other Councillor to attend the meeting.
- 9.4 The petition organiser (or someone they nominate) may address the Policy and Accountability Committee for no longer than five minutes on the subject of the petition. The Petition Officer will contact the petition organiser in advance of the meeting to arrange this. Policy and Accountability Committee members will question all parties on the subject of the petition.

**c. Petitions to Cabinet**

- 9.5 A petition with a minimum of **250 valid signatures** will be considered at a meeting of the Cabinet (the Council's top decision-making body). Cabinet meets monthly (though usually not in August). The Cabinet will try to consider the petition at its next scheduled meeting, although on some occasions this may not be possible and the petition may have to be deferred to the following meeting.
- 9.6 The petition organiser (or someone they nominate) may address the Cabinet for no longer than five minutes on the subject of the petition. The Petition Officer will contact the petition organiser in advance of the meeting to arrange this. Cabinet Members will question all parties on the subject of the petition.

**d. Petitions to a Cabinet Member**

- 9.7 Petitions with a minimum of **100 signatures** will be considered by the relevant Cabinet Member(s). Each member of the Council's Cabinet holds Executive responsibility for a specific portfolio of Council functions. A Cabinet Member may refer a petition to the full Cabinet for consideration if they are of the view that the matters raised are sufficiently significant.
- 9.8 The Cabinet Member may request a meeting with the petition organiser (or someone they nominate) to discuss the subject of the petition. The Petitions Officer will contact the petition organiser in advance to arrange this.
- 9.9 **Summary of Petition Types, Requirements and Decision Maker.**

<b>Type of Petition</b>	<b>Threshold</b> (minimum number of signatories)	<b>Decision Maker</b>
Council Debate	5,000	Full Council
Call an Officer to give evidence	2,000	Policy and Accountability Committee
Petitions to Cabinet	250	Cabinet
Petitions to Cabinet Members	100	Relevant Cabinet Member(s)

**10. NOTIFYING THE DECISION TAKEN IN RESPONSE TO A PETITION**

- 10.1 All petition organisers will be notified of the decision taken (with reasons if the decision is to take no action) within 5 working days of the decision being made. This notification will be published on our website, unless it is considered inappropriate to do so.
- 10.2 The Council accepts that it will not normally be sufficient for a decision maker to merely “note” a petition. The response to a petition will normally provide information on the steps the Council intends to take to address the concerns

of the petitioners or reasons why their concerns cannot be addressed in the way they wish.

## **11. WHAT WILL THE COUNCIL DO IF THE PETITION IS NOT DIRECTLY RELATED TO SERVICES PROVIDED BY IT?**

- 11.1 If the petition is about something which the Council has no power to influence, we will consider making representations on behalf of the community to the relevant body. In such cases, the Petitions Officer will ask the petition organiser whether they wish the Council to send the petition to the relevant authority if this is possible.
- 11.2 However, in many cases where the Council is not directly responsible for the matter which is the subject of the petition, it may work closely (or have formal partnership arrangements) with the body that is responsible (see para. 4.1 above). In this case, the decision maker may refer the matter to a Policy and Accountability Committee which will invite representatives of the relevant body to attend while the petition is considered.
- 11.3 If the petition is about something that a different Council is responsible for, the Council 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 the Council will notify the petition organiser of the action taken.

## **12. WHAT CAN PETITIONERS DO IF THEY ARE NOT SATISFIED WITH THE RESPONSE TO A PETITION?**

- 12.1 If the petitioners are not satisfied with the Council's decision in response to a petition, the petition organiser can request the Finance, Commercial Revenue and Contracts Policy & Accountability Committee to review whether the Council's decision is adequate, by e-mailing or writing to the Petitions Officer. This should be done within 28 days of the Council's response being received by the petition organiser, who should provide a short explanation of the reasons why the Council's response to the petition was not considered to be adequate.
- 12.2 The Finance, Commercial Revenue and Contracts Policy & Accountability Committee will call for a report from officers on the request for a review of the Council's decision, and will endeavour to consider the request at its next scheduled meeting; on some occasions this may not be possible and consideration will be deferred to the following meeting. Should the Finance, Commercial Revenue and Contracts Policy & Accountability Committee determine the Council has not dealt with the 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's Cabinet and arranging for the matter to be considered at a meeting of the full Council.
- 12.3 The petition organiser (or someone they nominate) may address the Finance, Commercial Revenue and Contracts Policy & Accountability Committee for no

longer than five minutes on the subject of the petition. The Petitions Officer will contact the petition organiser in advance of the meeting to arrange this. Committee members will question all parties on the subject of the petition.

- 12.4 The petition organiser will be informed of the results of the Finance, Commercial Revenue and Contracts Policy & Accountability Committee's review of the Council's decision on the petition, with reasons as to why no action or any further action is recommended, within 5 working days of the Committee's meeting. This notification will be published on our website, unless it is considered inappropriate to do so.

### **13. ATTENDING A MEETING WHERE A PETITION IS BEING CONSIDERED**

- 13.1 A petition may be considered at a formal meeting of the full Council, Cabinet or Policy and Accountability Committee.

#### **13.2 Receiving of petitioners at a formal meeting**

- (i) People who have signed a petition may attend a meeting where the petition is being considered. The petition organiser will be given adequate notice of the date and time of the meeting.
- (ii) The petition organiser (or one person nominated by them) may address the meeting for a period not exceeding 5 minutes.
- (iii) Members may during a period not exceeding 10 minutes ask questions of a petition organiser (or nominee) if required.
- (iv) Members may then invite officers of the Council and/or representatives of other relevant authorities to comment on the subject of the petition.
- (v) The Committee will then debate the subject of the petition for a maximum of 30 minutes, taking into account the issues raised by the petitioners, officers and representatives of other relevant authorities. Petitioners may remain for the duration of the debate if they so wish.

#### **13.3 Limitation on the number of petitioners attending a formal meeting**

The Chair of the meeting reserves the right to limit the number of petitioners present at a meeting to maintain order and/or to allow sufficient time for other business specified on the agenda.

### **14. ANNUAL REPORT ON THE OPERATION OF THE SCHEME**

- 14.1 The Council will receive an annual report detailing the subject matter of all petitions received during the year, the number of signatures to each petition and a summary of the Council's response to each. Changes to the Scheme will be recommended as necessary in the light of experience with its operation.