

Somerset County 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 upon receipt of 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. Petitions can be posted to us or handed into reception at the Council offices.

Petitions can also be presented during public question time at most public meetings of the County Council or any of its Committees, providing the subject of the petition is within their remit.

Paper petitions can be sent to:

**Customer Experience Team
Somerset County Council
County Hall
Taunton
Somerset
TA1 4DY**

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 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. The Council will contact the organiser to explain how we will respond to the petition, so it would be helpful to include telephone and email contact details as well.

The contact details of the petition organiser will not be placed on the 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.

What will the council do when it receives my petition?

An acknowledgement will be sent to the petitioner upon receipt of their petition. This will set out what we plan to do with the petition. We will provide a full written response to the petitioner within 20 working days of this acknowledgement being issued, if this isn't possible, we'll explain why it might take longer. The petition will also be shared with the local Councillor and the relevant Cabinet Member with responsibility for the service involved.

The acknowledgement will clarify what we plan to do with the petition and when the petitioner 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 then be closed. 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 is on a matter where there is already an existing right of appeal, 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.

The status details of a petition received will be published on our website, including the expected response date and if possible, all correspondence relating to the petition (all personal details will be removed).

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.

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
- referring the petition to an appropriate decision maker* for response
- undertaking research or holding an inquiry into the matter
- holding a public meeting with petitioners
- referring the petition for consideration by the council's Scrutiny Committee*
- considering the petition at a County Council* meeting

*The Cabinet is the main decision making body of the council and Cabinet members and the Leader of Council are responsible for the majority of the council's functions, supported by the Chief Executive and other council employees. The Scrutiny Committee of the council does not make decisions, but seeks to influence decision-makers.

The full County Council has four scheduled public meetings each year. Its main purpose is to agree a budget and policy framework within which the Leader of Council and his Cabinet operate and council services are provided

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 them 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 here www.somerset.gov.uk

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 and informing the petitioner of this as part of the initial acknowledgement but could involve other steps. In any event we will always notify you of the action we have taken.

E-petitions

The council welcomes e-petitions which can be submitted through a number of free online tools such as www.change.org/start-a-petition and www.ipetitions.com. E-petitions must follow the same guidelines as paper. Most petitions run for six months, but you can choose a shorter or longer timeframe, up to a maximum of 12 months. Guidance on how to use the free online tools are included on the respective websites.

When you create an e-petition, you may want to include an email address so that we are notified that a petition is live and so that you can easily send it to us for action once closed. If so, please use the customerexperience@somerset.gov.uk email address.

When your e-petition has closed for signature and is submitted through our customerexperience@somerset.gov.uk email address, the Customer Experience Team will ensure that it is forwarded to an appropriate decision maker. In the same way as a paper petition, you will receive an acknowledgement upon receipt. If you would like to present your e-petition to a meeting of the council, please contact us within 10 working days of receipt of the acknowledgement.

The acknowledgment and response will be published on the Somerset County Council 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 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 Scrutiny 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. If your petition includes a request for a senior council officer to give evidence at a public meeting and has at least 2500 signatures (0.5% of the local population) a specific senior officer or Cabinet member (as decided by the Committee) will be required to attend the meeting and participate.

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.

Full council debates

If a petition contains more than 5000 signatures (1% of the local population) the petition organiser can request a further escalation to a meeting of the County Council.

This means that the issue raised in the petition will be discussed at a meeting which all councillors can attend. The council will normally consider the petition at its next 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, normally for a maximum of 15 minutes. The Chairman of Council will decide whether the petition organiser may make a supplementary statement during the debate.

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. Where the issue is one on which the Cabinet 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.

More information

For more information about the council's petition scheme or to present your petition, please contact:

Customer Experience Team
Somerset County Council
County Hall
Taunton
Somerset
TA1 4DY

Email: customerexperience@somerset.gov.uk
Tel: 0300 123 2224

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