

# Cambridge City Council – Petition Scheme<sup>1</sup>

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 7 working days of receipt. This acknowledgement will set out what we plan 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.

Paper petitions can be sent to:

**Chief Executive  
Cambridge City Council  
The Guildhall  
Market Square  
Cambridge CB2 3QJ**

Or be created, signed and submitted online.

Petitions can also be presented to a meeting of the council. Dates and times can be found here [www.cambridge.gov.uk/democracy](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/democracy). If you would like to present your petition to the council, or would like your councillor or someone else to present it on your behalf, please contact Committee Managers on 01223 457013 at least 6 working days before the meeting and they will talk you through the process. If your petition has received 500 signatures or more it can be scheduled for a council debate (we will need 10 working days notice). If this is the case we will let you know whether this will happen at the same meeting or a later meeting of the council.

## **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 who lives, works or studies in Cambridge.

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. 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Petitions relating to planning applications are dealt with by the Development Control Forum. Please refer to that procedure <http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/petitions-and-development-control-forum>

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?**

An acknowledgement will be sent to the petition organiser within 7 working 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. It will also be published on our website.

If we 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, then the acknowledgment 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 the petition does not contain enough signatures to trigger a council debate or a senior officer giving evidence then the acknowledgement will tell you this and will explain when you can expect to receive a response from us.

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 on a matter where there is already an existing right of appeal, such as council tax banding and non-domestic rates, other procedures apply<sup>2</sup>.

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.

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 on our website, except in cases where this would be inappropriate. Whenever possible we will also publish 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, unless you choose to receive other emails from us.

## **How will the council respond to petitions?**

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<sup>2</sup> Tree works on council owned land/open space is covered by a protocol see <http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/public/docs/Tree-works%20protocol.pdf>

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 inquiry 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 council's overview and scrutiny committee\*
- calling a referendum
- writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition

\*Overview and scrutiny committees are committees of councillors who are responsible for scrutinising the work of the council – in other words, the overview and scrutiny committee has the power to hold the council's decision makers to account.

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 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 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 [here](#). 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, but could involve other steps. In any event we will always notify you of the action we have taken.

### **Full council debates**

If a petition contains more than 500 signatures it will be debated by the full council unless it is a petition asking for a senior council officer to give evidence at a public 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 will be given 5 minutes to present the petition at the meeting and the petition will then be discussed by councillors for a maximum of 15 minutes.

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 executive 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.

### **Officer evidence**

Your petition may ask for a senior council officer<sup>3</sup> to give evidence at a public meeting 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.

If your petition contains at least 50 signatures, the relevant senior officer will give evidence at a public meeting of the council's relevant overview and scrutiny committee.

You should be aware that the overview and scrutiny committee may decide that it would be more appropriate for another officer to give evidence instead of the officer named in the petition – for instance if the senior officer has changed jobs. The committee may also decide to call the relevant councillor to attend the meeting. Committee members will ask the questions at this meeting, but you will also be able to ask a question and be able to suggest questions to the chair of the committee by contacting a committee manager up to three working days before the meeting.

### **E-petitions**

In addition to the guidance above, your e-petition will also need to include:

1. A date for when you wish your e-petition to go live on the website. Please bear in mind that it may take officers up to five working days to process your e-petition request.
2. A closing date for your e-petition when the petition will stop collecting signatures. We will host your e-petition for up to 12 months but expect that most petitions to be shorter than this (3 months is usual).

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

1. To create an e-petition, you will need to provide us with your name, postal address and email address this will be done by registering via

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<sup>3</sup> Defined as either the Chief Executive, a Director or a Head of Service.

<https://democracy.cambridge.gov.uk/ielogon.aspx?lp=1&RPID=63044835&HPID=63044835&Forms=1>

2. On the e-petitions homepage, select the 'submit a new e-petition' option.
3. You will be prompted to enter a title which the system will automatically check against existing e-petitions.
4. A drop down box allows you to link your petition with any existing issue in the council's Forward Plan, which details all forthcoming key decision within the council.
5. Fill in the online form which will be submitted to Democratic Services.

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

1. Go to [www.cambridge.gov.uk/democracy](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/democracy)
2. Click on 'E-petitions'
3. Choose the petition which you wish to support and click on 'sign a petition'
4. You will need to provide contact details in order to sign the petition. Once you have signed an e-petition, your name will be displayed on the website but your contact details will not be displayed.

A petition may gather names and addresses both in electronic and paper form, although repeat names will still be removed. Both forms must run for the same time and must be submitted together.

For further information on how to submit an e-petition, please contact Democratic Services on 01223 457013 or [democratic.services@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@cambridge.gov.uk)

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 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.

When an e-petition has closed for signature, it will automatically be submitted in the same way as a paper petition. You will receive an acknowledgement within 7 working days. If you would like to present your e-petition to a meeting of the council, please contact the Democratic Services Manager on 01223 457013 or [democratic.services@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@cambridge.gov.uk) within 10 working days of receipt of the acknowledgement or within 6 working days of the meeting.

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.

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.

#### **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 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 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. 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.