

Wigan 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 from the council within 10 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.

Petitions can be submitted on the following

- Issues relating to the Council's responsibilities.
- Issues which affect the Borough as long as the Council is in a position to exercise some degree of influence.
- Anything relating to an improvement in the economic, social or environmental well-being of the Borough to which any of the Council's partners could contribute

Essentially there are three types of petitions:

Ordinary petitions

These must be signed by at least 100 people. However the Council will use its discretion where there are fewer than 100 signatories in cases where there is clear local support for action. Following acceptance of a petition of this nature the petition will be forwarded to an appropriate officer within the service area concerned who will be requested to respond to the petition organiser within 10 working days outlining what the service intends to do.

Petitions requiring debate

If a petition contains 5000 signatures or more it will be debated by the full council unless it is asking for a senior council officer to give evidence at an Overview and Scrutiny Committee 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 ten minutes to present the petition at the meeting and the petition will then be discussed by councillors for a maximum of 20 minutes. The council will decide at this meeting how to respond to the petition. Where the issue is one on

which the council's executive 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 this decision which will also be published on our website.

Petitions to hold senior council employees to account

Petitions which call for evidence from a senior council officer and have at least 1500 signatures will trigger that response. The petition must relate to the employee's job, it cannot relate to their personal circumstances or character. The relevant officer will give evidence at the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This will happen within 20 working days or at the next meeting of the appropriate overview and scrutiny meeting following the petition being accepted. The petition organiser will be given 10 minutes to present the petition at the meeting. The officer will then be offered ten minutes to outline their response. The petition will then be discussed by the committee for a maximum of 20 minutes.

The committee's response to the petition will be submitted and considered at the next meeting of the council's executive where a decision on the petition will be made. The petition organiser will also receive a copy of the decision.

Senior employees of the Council that can be called to give evidence are:

- The Chief Executive
- The Deputy Chief Executive
- Executive Director – Business Support Services
- Executive Director – Health and Well Being
- Executive Director – Children and Young People's Services
- Executive Director – Environmental Services
- Executive Director - Public Health

It should be understood however that it may 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. It may also be decided to invite the relevant executive member to attend the meeting.

How can petitions be submitted?

At present petitions can only be submitted on paper or presented to the council. An electronic facility will be available later this year.

Petitions can be sent or presented to:

Democratic Services Manager
Wigan Council
Town Hall
Library Street
Wigan
WN1 1YN

Petitions submitted to the council must include a clear and concise statement covering the subject of the petition. It should also state

- What action the petitioners wish the council to take
- The name and address and signature of any person supporting the petition (the address can be an address where a signatory lives, works or is undertaking a recognised course of study).

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.

Who can submit a petition?

Anyone who lives, works or is undertaking a recognised course of study in the Borough of Wigan, including under 18's.

What will the council do when it receives a petition?

We will acknowledge the petition within 10 working 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.

If the petition needs more investigation, we will tell you the steps we plan to take.

Are there any petitions which the Council cannot accept?

We believe that the vast majority of petitions that are received will be accepted but in certain circumstances petitions may not be. In particular, petitions will not be accepted where there is an alternative or existing process or mechanism available to deal with an issue. Reasons for rejection could include:-

- If the petition applies to a planning 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 or a separate complaints process.
- Any petition which we consider to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate. We will explain the reasons for this in our acknowledgement of the petition.
- Where a person or organisation (or someone on their behalf) has submitted a petition which is the same or substantially the same as one submitted within the previous 12 months

If we decide that a petition is not acceptable then we will let the petition organiser know our reasons.

If a petition relates to the responsibilities of one of our partners then the petition will be forwarded to that organisation within 10 working days for them to consider unless the petition relates to an improvement in the economic, social or environmental well-being of the Borough. In these cases the petitions will be considered under the Council's scheme.

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. However it 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
- carrying out consultation
- holding a meeting with the petitioners
- referring the petition for consideration by an overview and scrutiny committee.
- writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition

Appeal Procedure

Should the petition organiser not be satisfied with the Council's response to the petition, a review of the decision can be prompted. This request should be received, stating the reasons for the appeal, by the Democratic Services Manager within 15 working days of the date of the original decision. An acknowledgement, outlining what the Council intends to do with the review request will be sent to the petition organiser within 10 working days of it's receipt.

Further information

Should you require any further information or clarification with regards to the petitions process please contact the Democratic Services Manager at the address quoted above or by telephoning 01942 827171 or contacting N.Lamper@wigan.gov.uk.