

PETITIONS SCHEME

1. INTRODUCTION

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 and contains the names of more than ten signatories or if it seems to us that it is intended to be a petition.

Paper petitions should be sent to:

**Chief Executive
Chorley Council
Town Hall
Market Street
Chorley PR7 1DP**

Or be created, signed and submitted online by following this link: www.chorley.gov.uk/e-petitions.

If your petition has received 1500 signatures or more it will be included for debate at a meeting of the full Council and 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.

You may choose to contact your Ward Councillor to gain their support for your petition. The Council's website www.chorley.gov.uk will provide details of your Ward Councillors.

2. 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. 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.

Petitions which are considered to be vexatious, abusive, contain confidential information or are 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 a 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.

If the petition applies to a planning or licensing application it will be dealt with by the relevant committee when the application is considered. If it 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. In these circumstances please contact Democratic Services for further information and to discuss your issue.

3. WHAT WILL THE COUNCIL DO WHEN IT RECEIVES MY PETITION?

An acknowledgement will be sent to the petition organiser within 10 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.

Petitions will normally be discussed with the relevant Executive Member or go to Executive Cabinet for a decision on any action to be taken.

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 (1500 signatures), 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.

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. Petitions which deal with staffing matters will be dealt with directly by the Chief Executive as Head of the Paid Service.

To ensure that people know what we are doing in response to the petitions we receive the details of all petitions submitted to us will be published on our website, except in cases where this would be inappropriate.

4. 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 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 on the Council's website www.chorley.gov.uk.

If your petition is about something that a different Council is responsible for (eg Lancashire County Council) 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.

Once action has been decided and the petitioner informed, then the receipt of the petition and the action decided will be reported to a full Council meeting for information.

5. FULL COUNCIL DEBATES

If a petition contains more than 1500 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.

In line with the public question facility at Council meetings, 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. 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's 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.

6. OFFICER EVIDENCE

Your petition may ask for a senior Council officer 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 750 signatures, the relevant senior officer will give evidence at a public meeting of the Council's Executive Cabinet where petitioners will be able to ask questions in line with the public speaking facility.

7. E-PETITIONS

The Council welcomes e-petitions which are created and submitted through our website www.chorley.gov.uk/e-petitions. E-petitions must follow the same guidelines as paper petitions but specific guidance is attached to this Scheme. The petition organiser will need to provide us with their name, postal address and e-mail address. You will also need to decide how long you would like your petition to be open for signatures. The maximum period is 6 months.

When you create an e-petition, it may take a few days before it is published online. This is because we have to check that the content of your petition is suitable before it is made available for signature.

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.

When an e-petition has closed for signature, it will automatically be submitted to the Chief Executive. In the same way as a paper petition, you will receive an acknowledgement within 10 working days.

8. HOW DO I "SIGN" AN E-PETITION?

When you sign an e-petition you will be asked to provide your name, your postcode and a valid e-mail address. When you have submitted this information you will be sent an e-mail to the e-mail address you have provided. This e-mail will include a link which you must click on in order to confirm the e-mail address is valid. Once this step is complete your "signature" will be added to the petition. People visiting the e-petition will be able to see your name in the list of those who have signed it but your contact details will not be visible.

9. 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 Monitoring Officer undertakes a review of how your petition was handled. 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. This may result in a report to the appropriate Executive Member, Executive Cabinet or full Council Meeting depending on the outcome of the review. Once the appeal has been considered the petition organiser will be informed of the results within five working days.