

Petition Scheme

1. Oxfordshire County Council welcomes petitions and recognises that petitions are one way in which people can let us know their concerns or the strength of public feeling. 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.
2. Paper petitions can be sent to:

Ms Sue Whitehead
Petitions Co-ordinator
Law and Governance
Oxfordshire County Council
County Hall
New Road
Oxford
OX1 1ND
3. They can also be created, signed and submitted online from the 1 December 2010 at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk. Or e-mail us now at: petitions@oxfordshire.gov.uk
4. Petitions can also be presented to a meeting of the Council, Cabinet or other Committee of the Council. These meeting dates and times can be found at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk If you would like to present your petition, or would like your councillor or someone else to present it on your behalf, please contact (01865) 810262
5. There are several types of petition and these are listed below and have different requirements. Staff will be happy to talk you through the process and answer your questions.

Types of Petition

6.
 - (a) Ordinary Petitions

These are petitions simply expressing views which the Petitioner wants to bring to the attention of the Council. The Council will determine how these are to be handled.
 - (b) Petition with request to address the Council, Cabinet or other Committee of the Council.

These petitions must comply with Rule 10 of the Council Procedure Rules which in summary are:

- (i) be relevant to the functions of the Local Authority and/or directly affects the County or its inhabitants and
- (ii) Notice is submitted no later than 9am the working day before the Council meeting.
- (iii) Minimum of 10 signatories

The Petitioner has the right to address Council for 3 minutes

(c) Petitions for Debate at Council

If you want your petition to be reported and debated at a meeting of the Council it must contain at least 15,995 signatories or petitioners (this is reduced to 7,797 where the petition relates to a local issue, affecting no more than two electoral divisions within the Council's area).

(d) Petitions to hold an Officer to Account

If you want a Senior Council Officer to give evidence at a public meeting about something that the officer is responsible for as part of their work then your petition must contain at least 4,000 signatories (this is reduced to 2,000 signatories where the petition relates to a local issue, affecting no more than two electoral divisions within the Council's area).

What are the guidelines for submitting a petition?

7. Petitions submitted to the council must include:
 - (a) a clear and concise statement covering the subject of the petition. It should state what action the petitioners wish the council to take;
 - (b) the name and address and signature of any person supporting the petition.
8. 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.
9. Petitions which are considered to be vexatious, duplication, 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 the petition organiser to explain the reasons.

What will the council do when it receives my petition?

10. 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. The Council may decide to verify the authenticity of the petition by performing a check (where possible) to ensure that those who have signed the petition are real signatories. The petition will also be published on our website.
11. 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.
12. 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, other procedures apply. Please contact us for more information.
13. We will not take action on any petition which we consider to be vexatious, duplication, abusive or otherwise inappropriate and will explain the reasons for this in our acknowledgement of the petition.
14. 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. 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?

15. 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 relevant scrutiny committee*
- calling a referendum
- writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition

*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.

16. In addition to these steps, the council will consider all the specific actions it can potentially take on the issues highlighted in a petition.

Appropriate Steps

17. 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 at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk.
18. 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

19. If a petition contains more than 15,995 signatures (or 7,797 if a local issue) 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 five minutes to present the petition at the meeting and the petition will then be discussed by councillors for a maximum of 30 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 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.

Officer Evidence

20. 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 4,000 signatures (2,000 if a local issue), the relevant senior officer will give evidence at a public meeting of the council's relevant scrutiny committee. Senior staff refers to the Chief Executive, Directors, Deputy Directors and Heads of Service and a list of these staff can be found on the Council website www.oxfordshire.gov.uk. 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 any officer named in the petition – for instance if the named officer has changed jobs. The committee may also decide to call a relevant councillor to attend the meeting. Committee members will ask the questions at this meeting, but you will be able to suggest questions to the chairman of the committee by contacting petitions@oxfordshire.gov.uk up to 3 working days before the meeting.
21. Please note that where the petition raises issues of competence or misconduct, the petition will be referred to the Chief Executive and will be considered under the authority's Disciplinary Procedures, and not under this Petitions Procedure.

What can I do if I feel my petition has not been dealt with properly?

22. If you feel that we have not dealt with your petition properly, the petition organiser has the right to request that the council's Strategy & Partnerships 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.
23. 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.
24. 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.