



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

## West Oxfordshire District Council petition scheme

The Council welcomes petitions from those who live, work, or study in West Oxfordshire 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.

**Paper** petitions can be sent to the Head of Democratic Services, West Oxfordshire District Council, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxon, OX28 1NB; and **e-petitions** may be submitted via our website – see <http://www.westoxon.gov.uk/about-the-council/having-your-say/petition-scheme/>

Petitions can also be presented to a meeting of the Council. These meeting dates and times can be found at [www.westoxon.gov.uk/meetings](http://www.westoxon.gov.uk/meetings) If you would like to present your petition, or would like your councillor or someone else to present it on your behalf, please contact Democratic Services ([enquiries@westoxon.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@westoxon.gov.uk)) or 01993 851533 at least 10 working days before the meeting and they will talk you through the process.

If your petition has received 1500 signatures or more it will automatically also be scheduled for a Council debate 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.

## 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, which must be not fewer than 10 persons

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 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?

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.

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 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.

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. Please contact us for more information.

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 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?**

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 one of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees \*
- calling a referendum
- writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition

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

\* The Overview and Scrutiny Committees are Committees of councillors who are responsible for scrutinising the work of the Council – in other words, they have the power to hold the Council's decision makers to account.

## **Appropriate steps**

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.westoxon.gov.uk](http://www.westoxon.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, 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 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. 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 15 minutes (subject to an extension of time being permitted at the discretion of the Chairman in exceptional circumstances).

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 Cabinet 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. This confirmation will also be published on our website.

## **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 one of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The senior staff that can be called to give evidence are:

- Chief Executive (Head of the Paid Service)
- Any of the three Strategic Directors
- Head of Business Improvement and Customer Services
- Head of Community Services
- Head of Finance (GO Shared Services)
- Head of Environmental Services
- Head of Democratic Services
- Head of Legal and Property Services
- Head of Leisure and Tourism
- Head of Planning and Strategic Housing
- Head of Revenues and Housing Support

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 Democratic Services ([enquiries@westoxon.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@westoxon.gov.uk)) up to three working days before the meeting.

## **E Petitions**

The council welcomes e-petitions which are created and submitted through our website – see <http://www.westoxon.gov.uk/about-the-council/having-your-say/petition-scheme/> . E-petitions must follow the same guidelines as paper petitions [see [above](#)]. The petition organiser will need to provide us with their name, postal address and email address. You will also need to decide how long you would like your petition to be open for signatures, up to a maximum of 12 months.

When you create an e-petition, it may take five working 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. 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 on the website.

When an e-petition has closed for signature, you will receive an acknowledgement within 10 working days. If you would like to present your e-petition to a meeting of the council, please contact Democratic Services ([enquiries@westoxon.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@westoxon.gov.uk) or 01993 851533) within 10 working days of receiving the acknowledgement.

The petition response will be emailed to everyone who has signed the e-petition and asked to receive this information. The response will also be published on the website.

### **How do I sign an e-petition?**

You can see any e-petitions currently available for signature on our website – see <http://www.westoxon.gov.uk/about-the-council/having-your-say/petition-scheme/> and follow the links.

When you sign an e-petition you will be asked to provide your name, your postcode and a valid email address; and 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.

### **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 relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviews 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 Overview and 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. Should the Committee determine that 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 Cabinet 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 five working days. The results of the review will also be published on our website.