

Part 4J

PROCEDURE FOR RECEIVING AND CONSIDERING PETITIONS

1. Horsham District Council wishes to enable all people resident, working or studying in the district to petition the Council and to obtain a response that meets the expectations of the petition or provides a reasoned explanation for why those expectations cannot be met.
2. The District Council provides a number of ways in which petitions may be considered – depending on the subject, the actions sought and the number of signatories.
3. Before considering whether or not to raise a petition to Horsham District Council, you may want to discuss your issue with your local District Councillor (Member) who may be able to help you with it or explain how to make representations on a particular subject to the right person at the District Council.
4. All petitions sent or presented to the District Council will receive an acknowledgement within 10 working days of receipt. This acknowledgement will set out what we plan to do with the petition.

Paper petitions should be sent to :

Democratic Services Officer
Horsham District Council
Park North
North Street
Horsham
West Sussex RH12 1RL

We will be able to accept e-petitions via the District Council's website by 15 December 2010.

How to submit a petition

5. Petitions submitted to the Council **must** include:
 - a clear and concise statement of the subject of the petition
 - a statement about what action the petitioners wish the Council to take
 - the name, address (home or place of work/study if located within the District) and signature of any person supporting the petition



6. 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. If you wish to present your petition in person, please contact Democratic Services (01403 215465) who will be able to advise you and make the appropriate arrangements.
7. 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.
8. A petition **will not be accepted** where:
 - it is considered vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate. If a petition does not follow the guidelines set out above, the District Council may decide not to do anything further with it. In that case, we will write to you to explain the reasons;
 - it refers to a development plan, specific planning or licensing matter;
 - it refers to a decision for which there is an existing right of appeal,
 - it is a statutory petition (for example requesting a referendum on having an elected mayor).
9. The petition must refer to a matter that is relevant to the functions of the District Council. If your petition is about something over which the Council has no direct control (for example the local railway or hospital) we will consider whether we can still deal with the matter. The District Council works with a large number of local partner organisations and, where possible, will work with these partners to respond to your petition. If we are not able to do this for any reason then we will set out the reasons for this to you. You can find more information on the District Council's services on its website.
10. 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. It 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.

What will the District Council do with your petition?

11. An acknowledgement will be sent to the petition organiser within 10 working days of receipt. 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.



12. If we can do what your petition asks for, the acknowledgement may confirm that we have taken, or will take, 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.
13. Once the petition has been published we will let people know what we are doing in response by publishing responses on our website. 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 that is not relevant to the e-petition you have signed, unless you choose to receive other emails from us.

How will the District Council respond to petitions?

14. 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
 - consulting residents about the matter
 - holding a meeting with petitioners
 - referring the petition for consideration by the Scrutiny & Overview Committee
 - referring the petition for consideration by any non-Executive committee
 - writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition
15. Where the petition does not have the prescribed number of signatures to trigger a debate or officer attendance before a committee (see below) the Democratic Services Officer will determine the most appropriate course of action following discussion with the relevant Cabinet Member and the senior officer responsible for the service which is the subject of the petition



District Council Debates

16. If a petition contains a minimum of 1,000 signatures of persons resident, working or studying within Horsham District, the District Council will debate it unless it is a petition asking for a senior council officer to give evidence at a public meeting (see below). The District 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.
17. If you would like to present your petition to the Council, or would like your local Member to present it on your behalf, please contact the Democratic Services Officer at least 13 working days before the meeting and an officer will talk you through the process. The petition organiser will be given five minutes maximum to present the petition at the meeting.
18. The relevant Cabinet Member will be given five minutes (maximum) for a right of reply before Members discuss the petition for no more than 30 minutes with each Member allowed to speak for a maximum of three minutes.
19. The District Council will debate how to respond to the petition at this meeting. It may for example recommend a relevant Cabinet Member to take the action in the debate, or to commission further investigation into the matter. Where the issue is one on which a Cabinet Member is required to make the final decision, the District 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.
20. Dates and times of District Council meetings can be found on the website.

Officer Evidence

21. Your petition may ask for a senior Council officer to give evidence at a Scrutiny & Overview Committee 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.
22. If your petition contains a minimum of 250 signatures of persons resident, working or studying within Horsham District, and your petition clearly states the specific issue you want to raise, the relevant senior officer will give evidence at a public meeting of the Scrutiny & Overview Committee.



23. The senior officers that can be called to give evidence are the Chief Executive, Directors and officers from the Corporate Management Team. You should be aware that the Scrutiny & Overview 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 Scrutiny & Overview Committee may also decide to call the relevant Cabinet Member or another Member to attend the meeting.
24. The Scrutiny & Overview 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 the District Council's designated Scrutiny Officer up to five working days before the meeting. Details will be given to you to assist with this process.

E-petitions

25. The District Council welcomes e-petitions which are created and submitted through our website. E-petitions must follow the same guidelines as paper petitions.
26. 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. You can choose a timeframe, up to a maximum of three months.
27. 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 why. 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.
28. When an e-petition has closed for signature, it will automatically be submitted to the Democratic Services Officer. In the same way as a paper petition, you will receive an acknowledgement within 10 working days. If your petition has the minimum number of signatures required for a District Council debate, or for an officer to be called to give evidence, please also see the relevant sections above.
29. A petition acknowledgement and response will be emailed to everyone who has signed the e-petition and elected to receive this information. The acknowledgement and response will also be published on this website.



How do I “sign” an e-petition?

30. You can see all the e-petitions currently available for signature on the District Council’s website. When you sign an e-petition you will be asked to provide your name, your postcode, a valid email address and to specify whether you live, work or study within Horsham district. When you have submitted this information you will be sent an email to the email address you have provided. This email will include a link, which you must click on in order to confirm the email 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.

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

31. If you feel that we have not dealt with your petition properly, the petition organiser has the right to request that the Scrutiny & Overview 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.
32. The Committee will endeavour to consider the 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 and making recommendations to the relevant Cabinet Member.
33. 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. There is no further right of appeal through the District Council.

