

MILTON KEYNES COUNCIL

SCHEME FOR PETITIONS

Petitions

The Council welcomes petitions and recognises that petitions are one way in which people can let it know of their concerns. All petitions sent or presented to the Council will receive acknowledgment from the Council within 10 working days of receipt. This acknowledgement will set out what the Council plans to do with the petition. The Council will treat something as a petition if it is identified as being a petition, or if it appears that it is intended to be a petition.

Paper petitions should be sent to:

The Committee Services and Scrutiny Manager
Milton Keynes Council
1 Saxon Gate East
Central Milton Keynes
MK9 3EJ

or be created, signed and submitted online.

Petitions can also be presented to a meeting of the Council or the Cabinet. Dates of these meetings are available on the Council's website, but generally happen monthly. On presenting your petition to a meeting you will be given up to a minute to present it and outline its purpose. Councillors will only discuss the subject of your petition if there is already an item on the Agenda for the meeting. You can contact your local Councillor well in advance of the meeting and ask him or her to place an item on the Agenda. If you present the petition to the Council and there is not an item already on the Agenda the petition will be referred for consideration at a future meeting of the Cabinet, by a Cabinet Member, or by one of the Council's officers to deal with. If you present the petition to the Cabinet and there is not an item already on the Agenda it is likely that the Cabinet will call for a report on the subject of the petition to a future meeting.

If you would like advice on the procedure please contact Simon Heap on 01908 252567 at least ten working days before the meeting and he will talk you through the process. If your petition has received 1,000 signatures or more it will be automatically scheduled for a discussion by either the Council or the Cabinet. If this is the case, you will be informed when this will happen and you will be able to present your petition at that meeting.

What are the Guidelines for Submitting a Petition?

Petitions submitted 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; and
- (b) the name and address and signature of every person supporting the petition.

Petitions should be accompanied by contact details, including an address, for the petition organiser. This is the person the Council will contact to explain how it will respond to the petition. If the petition does not identify a petition organiser, the Council will contact the first signatory to the petition.

Petitions which are considered to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate will not be accepted. 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, you will be told the reasons.

What will the Council do when it receives my Petition?

An acknowledgement will be sent to the petition organiser within ten working days of receiving the petition. It will let them know what the Council plans to do with the petition and when they can expect to hear from the Council. Details of the petition will also be published on the Council's website, except in cases where this would be inappropriate. The contact details of the petition organiser will not be placed on the website.

If the Council can do what your petition asks for, the acknowledgment may confirm that the action requested has been taken and the petition will be closed. If the petition has enough signatures to trigger a Council / Cabinet debate, or request a senior officer to give evidence at a public meeting of one of the Council's overview and scrutiny committees, then the acknowledgment will confirm this and tell you when and where the meeting will take place. If the petition needs more investigation, you will be told of the steps the Council plans to take.

If the petition applies to a planning or licensing application, is a statutory requirement (for example, requesting a referendum on having an elected mayor), or is on a matter where there is already an existing right of appeal, such as Council Tax banding and non-domestic rates, other procedures apply. Further information on all these procedures and how you can express your views is available from the following contacts:

- (a) Planning – Planning Enquiry Desk: 01908 252358
- (b) Licensing – Senior Licensing Officer: 01908 252409
- (c) Elected Mayor – Elections Officer: 01908 252529
- (d) Council Tax – Enquiries: 01908 253794

How will the Council Respond to Petitions?

How the Council responds to a petition will depend on what the petitions asks for and how many people have signed it, but may include one or more of the following:

- (a) taking the action requested in the petition;
- (b) considering the petition at a Council / Cabinet meeting;
- (c) holding an inquiry into the matter;
- (d) undertaking research into the matter;
- (e) holding a public meeting;
- (f) holding a consultation;
- (g) holding a meeting with petitioners;
- (h) referring the petition for consideration by the Council’s Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee;

Note: The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee is responsible for deciding what work of the Council should be scrutinised - in other words, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee has the power to hold the Council’s decision makers to account.

- (i) calling a referendum; and
- (j) writing to the petition organiser setting out the Council’s views about the request in the petition, which may include taking no action.

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

If your petition is about something over which the Council does not have direct control (for example, the local railway or hospital) the Council can 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 the Council is not able to do this for any reason (for example, if what the petition calls for conflicts with Council policy), then the Council will tell you why.

If your petition is about something that a different Council is responsible for, the Council 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, the Council will always notify you of what action has been taken.

Full Council / Cabinet Debates

If a petition contains more than 1,000 signatures, it will be debated by the Full Council or the Cabinet unless it is a petition asking for a senior Council officer to give evidence at a public meeting of one of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees. This means that the issue raised by the petition will be discussed at a meeting which all Councillors can attend. The Council / Cabinet 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 a future meeting. The petition organiser will be given a minute to present the petition at the meeting and the petition will then be discussed by Councillors. The Council / Cabinet will decide how to respond to the petition at this meeting. The Council / Cabinet may decide to take the action the petition requests (if it has the power to do so), 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 / officers. Where the issue is one on which the Cabinet is required to make the final decision (the Cabinet is responsible for the executive functions of the Council), the Council will refer the matter to the Cabinet and the Council will decide whether to make recommendations to the Cabinet to inform that decision. The petition organiser will receive written confirmation of this decision.

Officer Evidence

Your petition may ask for a senior Council officer to give evidence at a public meeting of one of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee 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 500 signatures, the relevant senior officer will give evidence at a public meeting of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee. The Management Committee may either make recommendations on the matter there and then, or decide to refer the matter to a Select Committee. Senior staff that can be called to give evidence are either the Council's Chief Executive, Corporate Directors or Assistant Directors as considered appropriate by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee. You should be aware that the Overview and Scrutiny Management 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 the relevant Councillor to attend the meeting. Committee Members will be able to ask the questions at this meeting. The Chair of the meeting may also let you ask questions of the officer. If not, you may be able to suggest questions to the Chair of the Committee by contacting him / her before the meeting. The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee may decide to refer the matter to one of its select committees, or to a review group for more detailed work.

E-Petitions

The Council welcomes e-petitions which are created and submitted through its website. E-petitions must follow the same guidelines as paper petitions. The petition organiser will need to provide the Council 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 time that a petition may remain open is six months.

When you create an e-petition, it may take five working days before it is published online. This is because the Council has to check that the content of your petition is suitable before it is made available for signature.

If the Council feels it cannot publish your petition for some reason, you will be contacted you within this time to explain why not. You will be able to change and resubmit your petition if your wish. If you do not do this within ten 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, it will automatically be submitted. In the same way as a paper petition, you will receive an acknowledgement within ten working days. If you would like to present your e-petition to a meeting of the Council, please contact Simon Heap on 01908 252567 within ten working days of receipt of the acknowledgement.

A petition acknowledgement and response will be e-mailed 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?

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.

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

If you feel that the Council has not dealt with your petition properly, the petition organiser has the right to request that the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Management 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.

The Committee will endeavour to consider your request as soon as possible. Should the Committee determine the Council has 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's 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 the Council's website.