

Petitions Scheme for Mid Sussex District Council

1. Mid Sussex 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 Mid Sussex 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 Council will receive an acknowledgement within 10 working days of receipt. This acknowledgement will set out what we plan to do with the petition.

Petitions should be sent to:

Petitions Officer
Mid Sussex District Council
Oaklands
Oaklands Road
Haywards Heath
West Sussex
RH16 1SS

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 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.
7. 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 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, for example, licensing or planning decisions;
 - it is a statutory petition (for example requesting a referendum on having an elected mayor)
8. Further information on the Council's procedures and how you can express your views are available on the Council's website at <http://www.midsussex.gov.uk/7507.htm>

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 school or hospital) we will consider whether we can still deal with the matter. The 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 our 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 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.
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 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.

How will the Council respond to petitions?

13. 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 one or more of the Council Scrutiny Committees
 - 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
14. Where the petition does not have the prescribed number of signatures to trigger a debate or officer attendance before a committee (see below) the Solicitor to the Council 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.

Council Debates

15. If a petition contains a minimum of 1,300 signatures the 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 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.
16. If you would like to present your petition to the Council, or would like your local elected District Councillor to present it on your behalf, please contact the Petitions Officer at least 10 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.
17. 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.
18. The 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 the petition requests, not to take the action requested for reasons put forward 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 Council will decide whether to make recommendations to inform that decision. The petition organiser will receive written confirmation of this decision.
19. Dates and times of Council meetings can be found on the 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.
21. If your petition contains a minimum of 500 signatures, 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 appropriate Scrutiny Committee.
22. The senior officers that can be called to give evidence are the Chief Executive, Heads of Services and Business Unit Leaders. Their details can be found on the Council's website. You should be aware that the 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 Cabinet Member or another Member to attend the meeting to give evidence.
23. The 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 Petitions Officer up to five working days before the meeting. Details will be given to you to assist with this process.

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

24. If you feel that we have not dealt with your petition properly, the petition organiser has

the right to request that the relevant 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.

25. 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.
26. 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 Council.