



South Somerset District Council

Part 8

Petition Scheme

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This council believes it acts in the best interests of the people who live in the area and is responsive to their concerns. However sometimes there are issues that you believe the council should address and there are a number of ways by which you can be heard. You can raise matters at any of our meetings (including our area committee meetings), you can contact your elected district councillor and ask that they raise a matter on your behalf or you can contact any relevant officer direct. You can now also raise matters by way of a petition. This council welcomes petitions as it recognises that they are another way in which people can let us know their concerns.

There are several types of petitions (see 3.1 below for a description of each type) depending on the number of signatures. This scheme sets out how the Council will respond to petitions.

2. What can petitions cover?

- 2.1 You can submit a petition on the following issues:
- Issues which relate to the Council and/or the services it provides to local people
 - Matters which affect local people or local communities in South Somerset more than the general public nationally

3. What are the different types of petitions?

- 3.1 There are three different types of petitions:

'Ordinary' petitions

Petitions containing at least 25 signatures. The petition organiser can present their petition to a meeting of the Council (i.e. a meeting to which the Chairman and all Councillors are invited) who will, without discussion, refer the petition to the relevant decision-maker (this could be an officer of the council or one of the council's committees) OR the petition organiser (with two other people who signed the petition) can meet with the relevant decision-maker direct to present their petition.

Petitions for Council debate

Petitions containing at least 8,000 signatures will be debated (or discussed) at a meeting of the Council.

Petitions calling for Council employees to give evidence at an Overview and Scrutiny meeting

Petitions containing at least 4,000 signatures can call for a senior Council employee to give evidence at a public meeting of the Scrutiny Committee or an Overview Commission.

4. Who can submit a petition?

- 4.1 Anyone who lives, works or studies in South Somerset, including under 18's, can sign or organise a petition.

5. What must a petition include?

5.1 Petitions **must** include all of the following:

- at least 25 signatures;
- a clear and concise statement covering the subject of the petition. It should state what action the petitioners wish the Council to take;
- the subject matter of the petition on each page;
- the name, address (or place of work or study if the person does not live in South Somerset) and signature of any person supporting the petition; and
- contact details, including a phone number and address, for the petition organiser – this will be the person who we will contact to explain how we will respond to the petition.

5.2 The Council may also ask for such additional information as it may require in order to confirm that the petition complies with the requirements of this scheme.

5.3 The Council's Monitoring Officer may decline to accept any petition where in his opinion the petition does not include any of the above.

5.4 A template to help you organise a petition is provided at the end of this document.

6. Are there petitions which the Council will not accept?

6.1 The vast majority of petitions will be accepted provided they meet with the requirements of 5.1 above. However, there are certain circumstances when petitions will not be accepted by the Council's Monitoring Officer), including:

- Petitions considered to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate (e.g. for political campaigning). We will explain the reasons for this in our acknowledgement of receipt of the petition.
- Petitions which are identical or very similar to a petition that has already been presented to the Council in the past 12 months.
- The period immediately before an election or referendum we may need to deal with the petition differently – if this is the case we will explain the reasons and give the petition organiser revised timescales which will apply.
- Petitions which relate to planning or licensing application, or is a statutory petition (e.g. requesting a referendum on whether the Council should continue to have an elected mayor), or is a matter where there is already an existing right of appeal such as council tax banding and non-domestic rates. We will advise the petition organiser what will happen to petitions under this category.
- Petitions which relate to a subject where consultation by the Council is currently being undertaken or is due to be undertaken in the next six months. We will ensure the petition is included as part of the consultation and contact the petition organiser to give them details of the consultation.
- Where the identities of the signatories to the petition cannot be verified.

7. How to submit a petition

7.1 Petitions can be sent to:

Specialist – Democratic Services
South Somerset District Council
Council Offices
Brympton Way
Yeovil
Somerset. BA20 2HT

Alternatively, you can give your petition to your local councillor who will deliver it on your behalf.

7.2 Please indicate which type of petition you are submitting (see 3.1 above). If you would like your petition to be presented at a Council meeting, it must be delivered to the Specialist - Democratic Services by 4.00 p.m. 10 clear working days before the meeting. For a calendar of meetings please visit our website www.southsomerset.gov.uk or contact our Specialist – Democratic Services (01935 462148)

7.3 Arrangements for creating, signing and submitting petitions on-line is available through the Council's website: www.southsomerset.gov.uk

8. What will the Council do when it receives my petition?

8.1 All petitions sent or presented to the Council will receive an acknowledgement within 10 working days of receipt. The acknowledgement will be sent to the petition organiser and will explain what we plan to do with the petition and when you can expect to hear from us again. Details of your petition will be provided to the Chairman of the Council, the political party group leaders, the Monitoring Officer and the Chief Executive so they are informed of the details of the petition.

8.2 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 meeting debate, or a senior Council employee 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.

8.3 If you submit an 'ordinary' petition (see 3.1 above) the Specialist - Democratic Services will contact the petition organiser and inform them which body/decision-maker will respond to the petition and invite them to choose whether they wish to make a presentation at a Council meeting or for the petition to be referred direct to the body/decision-maker concerned. However, if the subject of the petition is due to be considered by the decision-maker before the next meeting of the Council it will be referred to the decision-maker direct and you will not, therefore, have the opportunity to present your petition at a Council meeting. If you choose to submit your petition directly to the decision-maker you will be informed who makes the decision and who will be contacting you to make arrangements for you to meet with the decision-maker.

8.4 To ensure that people know what we are doing in response to the petitions we receive, we will publish the details of petitions we receive on our website (except in cases where this would be inappropriate). Wherever possible we will also publish all correspondence relating to the petition on our website but will remove all personal details first. The name and address of the petition organiser will also be published on

the Council's website unless the petition organiser expressly requires their contact details to be kept confidential.

9. How do I present my petition at a Council meeting?

9.1 Any type of petition can be presented by you at a council meeting although only those containing at least 8,000 signatures will actually be debated or discussed there. If you wish for your petition to be presented to a meeting of the Council you have the option of speaking at that meeting. You can speak in support of your petition for up to five minutes. To register to speak you must inform the Specialist - Democratic Services (by telephone 01935 462148 or e-mailing angela.cox@southsomerset.gov.uk by 4.00 p.m. the day before the Council meeting.

9.2 At the meeting the Chairman will invite you to speak. When you make your speech you can only refer to matters relevant to the petition and must:

- a) not use discriminatory or offensive language;
- b) not make any party political statements;
- c) not use personal abuse; and
- d) treat others with courtesy and with respect.

If the Chairman considers that you have broken any of these requirements he may take appropriate action (including preventing you from speaking further).

10. How will the Council respond to petitions?

10.1 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 (where the subject of the petition does not fall within the remit of an appropriate body or person).
- Holding an inquiry into the matter.
- Undertaking research into the matter.
- Holding a public meeting.
- Holding a consultation.
- Holding a meeting with the petitioners.
- Referring the petition for consideration by the Council's Scrutiny Committee or Overview Commission*.
- Calling a referendum
- Writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition.

*The Scrutiny Committee and the Overview Commission includes the Councillors who are responsible for scrutinising the work of the Council – in other words, these people have the power to hold the Council's decision-makers to account.

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 table below gives some examples:

| Petition subject | Appropriate steps |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Alcohol related crime and disorder | If your petition is about crime or disorder linked to alcohol consumption, the Council has a number of options it can consider to address the issue. The Council's response to your petition will set out the steps we intend to take and the reasons for taking this approach. |
| Anti-social behaviour (ASB) | <p>The Council plays a significant role in tackling anti-social behaviour as the elected representatives of your local area, through the partnership with social landlords and as licensing authority.</p> <p>When responding to petitions on ASB, we will consider, in consultation with our local partners, all the options available to us including the wide range of powers and mechanisms we have to intervene. For example, we will work with the neighbourhood policing team in the affected area to identify what action might be taken including what role CCTV might play, consider identifying a dedicated contact within the Council to liaise with the community, neighbourhood and other partners on issues of ASB in the area in question and, where appropriate, we will alert the Scrutiny Committee to the issues highlighted in the petition.</p> |

10.2 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.southsomerset.gov.uk

10.3 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.

11. Petitions for debate at a Council meeting

11.1 If a petition contains at least 8000 signatures it will be discussed by a meeting of the council unless it is a petition asking for a senior council employee to give evidence at a public meeting (see 12. 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. The petition organiser will be given five minutes to present the petition at the meeting (see 9. above) and the petition will then be discussed by the Chairman and councillors for a maximum period of 15 minutes (unless the council decides to extend this period at the meeting). The council will decide how to respond to the petition at this meeting, it may decide to:

- take the action the petition requests
- not to take the action requested for reasons put forward in the debate
- make recommendations to the Leader or Chief Executive if the issue is one for either of them to make the decision

- commission further investigation into the matter, for example by a relevant committee.

The petition organiser will receive written confirmation of this decision and this will also be published on our website.

12. Petitions asking for officers to give evidence

- 12.1 If your petition contains at least 4000 signatures 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. A list of the officers that can be called to give evidence is as follows:

Chief Executive – Jane Portman
Director - Service Delivery - Kirsty Larkins
Director – Strategy, Support & Environmental Services – Nicola Hix
Section 151 Officer – Karen Watling
Monitoring Officer – Jill Byron

- 12.2 Your petition may ask the officer to explain progress on a particular issue or to explain the advice given to the Leader and/or councillors to enable them to make a particular decision. The petition must relate to the officer's job and cannot relate to their personal circumstances or character.
- 12.3 The evidence will be given at a public meeting of the council's Scrutiny Committee or Overview Commission and not at a meeting of the Council. The officer giving evidence at the meeting may be accompanied by another officer, technical expert or a representative from a partner agency. You will be given details of the meeting so that you can attend. The Committee meetings are normally held in public, but the Committee has the option to exclude the press and public from any part of the meeting that discusses confidential information. If the Committee does exclude the press and public you will also have to leave the meeting. If possible you will be given the opportunity to present your petition first. If it is likely that the press and public will be excluded from the whole or any part of the meeting you will be notified of this and given the reason(s) why when we give you the details of the meeting. You should be aware that the 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 the Leader or relevant councillor to attend the meeting. Only the Committee will ask questions at this meeting, but you will be able to suggest questions you would like them to ask by contacting the Specialist - Scrutiny (by telephone 01935 462148 or e-mailing democracy@southsomerset.gov.uk by 4.00 p.m. three working days before the meeting.

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

- 13.1 If you feel that we have not dealt with your petition properly, the petition organiser has the right to appeal and request the Council's Scrutiny Committee to 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 in writing of the reasons why they feel the council's response is not considered to be adequate.
- 13.2 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 include:
- instigating an investigation
 - making recommendations to the Leader

- arrange for your request to be considered by a meeting of the council if it considers the council has seriously neglected its responsibility to listen to local people

13.3 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.

14. What else can I do to have my say?

14.1 There are a number of other ways you have your say and get involved in local decisions, including:

- Attending meetings
- Public question time
- Speaking on planning or licensing applications
- Overview and scrutiny
- Community partnerships
- Become a councillor
- Take part in consultations
- Write to us about issues that are of concern to you

15. Special requirements and Assistance

15.1 If you need any special help with accessing any Council buildings or if you have any special requirements or if you are unsure what to do or need help with the wording of your petition then please contact our Specialist -Democratic Services (either by telephone 01935 462148 or emailing democracy@southsomerset.gov.uk) as soon as possible.

To ask for a copy of this guide in another format or language, or for more information on petitions or Council meetings, please contact:

Specialist - Democratic Services on (01935) 462148

Email: democracy@southsomerset.gov.uk

| | |
|---|-------------------|
| Subject of petition: | |
| What action do you want the council to take: | |
| Organiser / Main Contact for Petition | |
| Name: | Telephone number: |
| Address: | |

Petition type: *please tick relevant box*

Ordinary (contains 25 signatures or more)

please indicate where you wish to submit your petition:

Council or Direct to Decision Maker

If you have chosen to submit your petition straight to Council would you like to speak at the Council meeting? *please tick box below*

Yes Name of speaker: No

Petitions for Council debate (contains 8,000 signatures or more)

please indicate if you would like to speak at the Council meeting

Yes Name of speaker: No

Petitions calling an officer to give evidence (contains 4,000 signatures or more)

please indicate if you would like to speak at the Committee meeting

Yes Name of speaker: No

