

# Surrey County Council Petition Scheme

## Introduction

1. Surrey County Council welcomes petitions from all people resident, working or studying in the county, recognising that petitions are one way in which people can let us know their concerns. The purpose of this scheme is to establish a clear process for petitions submitted to the council to be handled in accordance with the relevant legislation. This scheme was approved by the county council on 15 June 2010 and is available on the authority's website ([www.surreycc.gov.uk](http://www.surreycc.gov.uk))
2. The county council provides a number of ways in which petitions may be considered - depending on the subject, the actions sought, and the number of signatories. 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.
3. Before considering whether or not to raise a petition to Surrey County Council, you may want to discuss your issue with your local county 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 county council. Details on how to contact your local county councillor are available on the authority's website [[insert link](#)]

## How to submit a petition

4. Petitions may be submitted to Surrey County Council in the following ways:
  - on paper
  - in person
  - electronically through the council's own e-petition facility
  - electronically by email\*

\* in the case of emailed petitions, each sheet of signatures must be scanned in full as an exact replica of the original copy. Original copies must be retained for six months.

5. All petitions sent to Surrey County 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.

Paper petitions can be sent to:  
Cabinet Business Manager  
Room 122  
Surrey County Council  
County Hall  
Kingston upon Thames  
KT1 2DN

Or an electronic petition (e-petition) can be created, signed and submitted online by following this [[link](#)]

6. Petitions submitted to the council **must** include:
  - a clear and concise statement covering the subject of the petition.
  - a statement about what action the petitioners wish the council to take.
  - the name and address and signature of any person supporting the petition.

7. The petition organiser must provide contact details, including an address. This is the person we will contact to explain how we will respond to the petition.
8. 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.
9. A petition will **not** be accepted where:
  - it is considered to be 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 right of way matter.
  - it refers to a decision for which there is an existing right of appeal, for example school admissions.
  - it is a duplicate or near duplicate of a similar petition received or submitted within the last 12 months.
10. Further information on the county council's procedures and how you can express your views are available here [\[links to be added\]](#):
  - Rights of Way
  - County planning applications
  - School admission appeals.
11. The petition must refer to a matter that is relevant to the functions of the county 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 county 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 county council's services on its website [\[link\]](#)
12. 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 when it receives my petition?**

13. 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 acknowledgement will also be published on our website.
14. 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 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.
15. To ensure that people know what we are doing in response to the petitions we receive, the details of the petitions submitted to us will be published on our website, except in cases where this would be inappropriate. 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.

16. To ensure the council understands the level of local support for a petition, it reserves the right to seek to verify each signature appended to a petition. This can be significant when establishing whether a petition has obtained the requisite number of signatures to trigger specific processes.

### **How will the county council respond to petitions?**

17. 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 (minimum of 20,000 signatures)
  - considering the petition at a Cabinet/Cabinet Member meeting (minimum of 100 signatures)
  - considering the petition at a local committee (find out the minimum number of signatures required for your local committee here – [\[link\]](#))
  - 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 of the council's select committees\*
  - writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition.

\*select committees are committees of councillors who are responsible for scrutinising the work of the council.

18. Where the petition does not have the prescribed number of signatures to trigger a debate at council or officer attendance before a committee (see below), the Monitoring Officer will determine the most appropriate course of action following discussion as necessary with the relevant Cabinet Member and/or senior officer responsible for the service which is the subject of the petition.
19. At the end of the process of considering the petition, a relevant officer will write to the petition organiser with a formal response. This communication will normally outline the steps taken by the council to consider the issue and will refer to the involvement (where applicable) of the authority's elected members.
20. This formal response will be despatched within 90 days of receipt or submission of a petition, and a copy will be published on the council website and easily accessible from the relevant pages of the e-petition facility.

### **County council debates**

21. If a petition contains more than 20,000 signatures, the county council will debate it unless it is a petition asking for a senior council officer to give evidence at a public meeting (see paragraph 24). The county 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.
22. The petition organiser will be given five minutes to present the petition at the meeting. The relevant Cabinet Member will then be given five minutes for a right of reply before Members have an opportunity to debate the petition for no more than 30 minutes with each Member allowed to speak for a maximum of 3 minutes.
23. The County Council will decide how to respond to the petition at this meeting. It may, for example, 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 or an individual Cabinet Member is required to make the final decision, the county council will decide whether to make recommendations to inform that decision. The petition organiser will receive written confirmation of this decision within five working days of the meeting. This confirmation will also be published on our website.

## **Officer evidence**

24. 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.
25. If your petition contains at least 10,000 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 select committee.
26. The senior officers that can be called to give evidence are the Chief Executive, Assistant Chief Executive, Strategic Directors, Assistant Directors and Heads of Service. Their details can be found here [\[insert link\]](#). You should be aware that the select 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 select committee may also decide to call the relevant Cabinet Member to attend the meeting.
27. Members of the select committee will ask the questions at this meeting, but you will be able to suggest questions to the chairman of the select committee by contacting the Scrutiny Manager up to five working days before the meeting. Details will be given to you to assist with this process when your petition is received.

## **E-petitions**

28. The council welcomes e-petitions which are created and submitted through our website [\[link\]](#). E-petitions must follow the same guidelines as paper petitions.
29. 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. Most petitions run for three months, but you can choose a shorter or longer timeframe, up to a maximum of six months.
30. When you create an e-petition, it may take up to 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.
31. 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.
32. When an e-petition has closed for signature, it will automatically be submitted to the Cabinet Business Manager to process. 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 county council debate, or for an officer to be called to give evidence, please also see the relevant sections above.

33. A petition acknowledgement and response will be emailed to everyone who has signed the e-petition and elected to receive this information. The acknowledgment and response will also be published on this website.

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

34. You can see all the e-petitions currently available for signature here [\[insert link\]](#) on the county council's website. When you sign an e-petition you will be asked to provide your name, your postcode and a valid email address. 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?**

35. If a petition organiser feels that the council has not dealt with a petition properly, he or she may request a review. Such a request should be made in writing within 28 days of the dispatch of the formal response to the petition organiser, providing a short explanation of the reasons why the council's response is not considered to be adequate.
36. Within five working days of receipt of intention to appeal, the county council will determine which is the relevant select committee to carry out the review. 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, making recommendations to the Cabinet or relevant Cabinet Member as appropriate and arranging for the matter to be considered at a meeting of the county council.
37. 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 county council.