

Petitions

The council welcomes petitions and recognises that petitions are one way in which people can let us know their concerns. All petitions sent or presented to the 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. 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.

Paper petitions can be sent to:

Committee and Member Services
Sefton Council
Town Hall
Lord Street
Southport
PR8 1DA

Online petitions will be available by 15th December 2010 and we will issue further information on this before the system goes live.

What are the guidelines for submitting a petition?

Petitions submitted to the council must include:

- a clear and concise statement covering the subject of the petition. It should state what action the petitioners wish the council to take
- the name and address and signature of any person supporting the petition.

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 the petition does not identify a petition organiser, we will contact the first signatory on the petition to act as petition organiser. Petitions which are considered to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate will not be accepted. In the period immediately before an election or referendum we may need to deal with your petition differently – if this is the case we will explain the reasons and discuss the revised timescale which will apply. 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.

What will the council do when it receives my petition?

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. 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.

If the petition applies to

a planning application <http://www.sefton.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=7010>
licensing application <http://www.sefton.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=4082> ,
is a statutory petition (for example requesting a referendum on having an elected mayor) <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/petitioning>
or on a matter where there is already an existing right of appeal, such as council tax banding and non-domestic rates <http://www.sefton.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=3419> ,
other procedures apply. Further information on all these procedures and how you can express your views is available at the links above.

We will not take action on any petition which we consider to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate and will explain the reasons for this in our acknowledgement of the petition.

How will the council respond to petitions?

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
- holding a public meeting
- commissioning research
- holding a meeting with petitioners
- referring the petition for consideration by the council's overview and scrutiny committee*
- writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition

*Overview and scrutiny committees are committees of councillors who are responsible for scrutinising the work of the council – in other words, the overview and scrutiny committee has the power to hold the council's decision makers to account.

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 [here](#).

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.

Full council debates

If a petition contains more than 2,750 signatures it will be debated by the full council unless it is a petition asking for a senior council officer to give evidence at a public meeting. This means that the issue raised in the petition will be discussed at a meeting which all councillors can attend. 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 and the petition will then be discussed by councillors for a maximum of 15 minutes. The council will decide how to respond to the petition at this meeting. They may decide to take the action the petition requests, not to take the action requested for reasons put forward in the debate, or refer the matter to another decision-making body of the Council. Where the issue is one on which another Council body or Officer are 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.

Officer evidence

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.

If your petition contains at least 1,375 signatures, the relevant senior officer will give evidence at a public meeting of the council's overview and scrutiny committee. A list of the senior staff that can be called to give evidence can be found at Appendix A.

You should be aware that the overview and 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 relevant councillor to attend the meeting. Committee members will ask the questions at this meeting, but you will be able to suggest questions to the chair of the committee by contacting the Overview and Scrutiny Section scrutiny@sefton.gov.uk up to three working days before the meeting.

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

If you feel that we have not dealt with your petition properly, the petition organiser has the right to request that the appropriate council overview and scrutiny 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. 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. If the appropriate overview and scrutiny committee have already dealt with the matter it will be referred to the Chief Executive and an appropriate course of action determined. Once the appeal has been considered the petition organiser will be informed of the results within 5 working days.

OFFICERS OF THE COUNCIL THAT CAN BE CALLED TO ACCOUNT

Chief Executive
Assistant Chief Executive
Transformation Director
Head of Corporate Finance and ICT Strategy
Director of Corporate Services
Strategic Director, Children, Schools and Families
Strategic Director, Communities
Strategic Director, Social Care and Wellbeing
Monitoring Officer