

PETITIONS SCHEME

SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Leader has requested that improvements be made to the Petitions Scheme in order that it is as accessible as possible so user groups and others can better engage with the council ahead of the budget consultation and thereafter.
- 1.2 This report sets out a number of proposals to achieve this, including:
 - The introduction of a process where petitions can be formally accepted at the start of Council Cabinet meetings
 - The reduction in the number of signatures required to trigger a Council debate, from 8,500 at present to 4,000
 - The relaxation of e-petition requirements, making it easier for such petitions to be posted and considered
 - The publication of a new Petitions Scheme, offering clear guidance to would-be petitioners to ensure their petition meets the requirements to be accepted, as well as a petition template to assist petitioners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To recommend to Council that the attached Petitions Scheme be approved, subject to any amendments proposed by the Board and that Council Procedure Rules, relating to the consideration of petitions, be amended accordingly.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To ensure potential petitioners find the process as accessible as possible.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Acceptance of petitions

- 4.1 The existing scheme proposes that petitioners should formally hand their petition to either the Mayor or the Chief Executive. Experience has shown that many petitioners would prefer for their petitions to be accepted by the relevant Council Cabinet member. It is proposed to adjust the scheme accordingly, so lead petitioners have a range of options for submission of the petition.
- 4.2 In addition, it is proposed to introduce a standing item on Council Cabinet agendas for the receipt of petitions. It is recognised that it would not be appropriate for lengthy debates on petitions to take place at this stage before officers have had an opportunity to consider the petition and offer advice to members. It is proposed, then, that the Council Cabinet member will receive the petition prior to the meeting commencing and the receipt of petitions will be formally reported by the Council Cabinet member at the meeting.

Petitions triggering a Council debate

- 4.3 Council agreed to introduce provision for petitions to trigger Council debates in May 2010. The threshold of signatures required stands at 8,500. In the two years since its introduction, only one petition has ever satisfied this criterion. It is felt it would be appropriate to cut this threshold by more than half to 4,000 signatures – less than two per cent of the city's population.

E-petitions

- 4.4 The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 placed various requirements upon councils in terms of how they considered petitions, including the consideration of e-petitions. However, the requirement to consider e-petitions was repealed as part of the Localism Act 2011.
- 4.5 It is felt that it would be a retrograde step not to consider e-petitions. While the Localism Act removed the requirement to do so, it did not remove the possibility. It is proposed to use the change positively to offer a more relaxed approach to accepting e-petitions, making it easier for them to be considered. It is therefore proposed to accept any e-petition, provided it satisfies the necessary criteria, rather than stipulating that petitioners have to use a particular website or format.

Publication of new Petitions Scheme

- 4.6 The proposed scheme is attached at Appendix 2. It includes specific advice on the requirements for a petition to be validated. It is anticipated this would remove the existing problem of petitioners sometimes going to great lengths to submit petitions only to discover parts of it are invalid for avoidable reasons. The creation of a petition template will also assist petitioners and help avoid this problem. The proposed template is attached at Appendix 3.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 Take no action. The existing scheme is legal and acceptable, but taking no action would miss the opportunity to make significant cost-free improvements to public engagement.

This report has been approved by the following officers:

Legal officer Financial officer Human Resources officer Service Director(s) Other(s)	Stuart Leslie – Director of Legal and Democratic Services N/A N/A Stuart Leslie – Director of Legal and Democratic Services
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For more information contact: Background papers: List of appendices:	David Walsh 01332 643655 david.walsh@derby.gov.uk None Appendix 1 – Implications Appendix 2 – Proposed Petitions Scheme Appendix 3 – Draft petition template
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IMPLICATIONS

Financial and Value for Money

1.1 There would be no cost to making the proposed improvements.

Legal

2.1 None

Personnel

3.1 None

Equalities Impact

4.1 None

Health and Safety

5.1 None

Environmental Sustainability

6.1 None

Asset Management

7.1 None

Risk Management

8.1 None

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

9.1 The proposed Petitions Scheme promotes democracy, makes council decision making more accessible and promotes citizen engagement.