

# LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

## PETITION SCHEME

### 1. SUBMITTING A PETITION TO THE COUNCIL

Tower Hamlets Council welcomes petitions and recognises that petitions are one way in which people can let us know their concerns. 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** are those prepared in the traditional way: a petition organiser creates a paper document that includes a proposed action. Residents physically write their name, address and signature on this document to show their support of the proposed action.

To help you organise paper petition, the Council has prepared a template that is attached as Appendix 3.

Paper petitions can be sent to the Democratic Services Team on the details provided at Section 7 of this Scheme.

**e-Petitions** are created, signed, and submitted entirely online. The petition organiser uses a website to create their petition and residents can electronically add their name via the website to show their support of the action the petition organiser proposes.

It is recommended that e-petitions are created via the Council's e-petition facility [www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/petition](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/petition). e-petitions created or submitted through third party websites may be accepted if they comply with the provisions of this scheme.

### 2. GUIDELINES FOR SUBMITTING A PETITION

Petitions submitted to the Council must include:

- A clear and concise statement covering the subject of the petition. This should state what action the petitioners wish the Council to take.
- The names and signatures of each person supporting the petition, together with the full addresses (including postcode) at which they live, work or study in Tower Hamlets.
- 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. The contact details of the petition organiser will not be published.
- If the petition does not identify a petition organiser, we will contact the first listed signatory to the petition to agree who should act as the petition organiser.

**Scope of Petition.** The Corporate Director, Governance may reject a petition if it:

1. is not about a matter for which the local authority has a responsibility or which affects the borough;
2. is defamatory, frivolous; offensive; vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate;
3. is substantially the same as a petition which has been put at a meeting of the Council in the past 6 months;
4. requires the disclosure of confidential or exempt information; or
5. seeks to pursue or further a complaint against the Council, where other channels already exist for the determination of complaints.

In addition, there are some circumstances where petitions will not be dealt with under this Scheme. These include any matters relating to planning or licensing applications; where a separate consultation process is active; or other circumstances which, in the opinion of the Corporate Director, Governance would mean the petitions would better be dealt with using a different Council procedure.

The Council may seek to verify the authenticity of each entry on a petition by reference to existing information such as (where appropriate) the current electoral register or other relevant records. Entries which cannot be verified may not be counted for the purposes of determining whether a petition has exceeded a threshold set out in this scheme.

In the period immediately before an election or referendum, when certain legal restrictions apply, 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.

### **3. ACTION BY THE COUNCIL ON RECEIPT OF A PETITION**

An acknowledgement will be sent to the petition organiser within 10 working days of us receiving the petition. This will let them know what we plan to do with the petition and when they can expect to receive a formal response to it. If the petition needs more investigation, we will tell the petition organiser the steps we plan to take.

If we can do what the petition asks for, the acknowledgement may confirm that we have taken the action requested and the petition will be closed.

Petitions will receive a formal response from the relevant Corporate Director within 28 days of receipt. This will usually be the quickest way of addressing the issue.

If however, the petition meets the requirements to be presented/debated at a meeting of Councillors under the provisions of Section 4 of this scheme, the petition will receive a formal response within 28 days from the meeting. If you request this option, the relevant Corporate Director may still write to you. You may choose not to proceed with presentation at a meeting if you feel their response resolves the matter.

The acknowledgment will confirm when and how your response will be sent and tell you when and where the meeting will take place (if applicable and if known at that stage).

To ensure that people know what we are doing in response to the petitions we receive, the details of all petitions submitted to the Council will be published on our website, except in cases where this would be inappropriate. Whenever possible we will also publish all correspondence relating to the petition (all personal details will be removed).

#### **4. PRESENTATION OF A PETITION TO ELECTED COUNCILLORS**

Subject to your petition containing sufficient signatures as set out below, you may request to present the petition to a meeting of Councillors. There are several ways in which this can be done.

##### **(a) Presentation to a meeting of the Council, Cabinet or relevant committee**

If your petition includes the names, addresses and signatures of 30 persons who live, work or study in the borough it can be presented at an ordinary meeting of the Council or to a Council Committee.

The procedure for presenting a petition at full Council or Committee meetings is included in Appendix 1 of this scheme.

Separate to the above provision, the Mayor has agreed a scheme for public engagement at executive meetings (the Cabinet and Cabinet sub-committees), which provides a number of different ways that members of the public can make submissions relating to items on the agenda. The Cabinet public engagement scheme is set out at Appendix 2 of this Scheme.

##### **(b) Debate at a Council Meeting**

If your petition includes the names, addresses and signatures of 2,000 persons who live, work or study in the borough, you may request that a debate be held about the petition at a full Council meeting.

The procedure for debating a petition at full Council meetings is included in Appendix 1 of this scheme.

##### **(c) Officer evidence to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

If your petition includes the names, addresses and signatures of at least 1,000 persons who live, work or study in the borough, you may request that a relevant senior officer give evidence at a public meeting of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. For example, you may request that a senior officer explain progress on an issue, or the advice given to councillors to enable them to make a particular decision. The senior officers who may be called to give evidence under this procedure include the Head of the Paid Service (Chief Executive) and any of the Council's statutory or non-statutory Chief Officers (Corporate Directors).

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 will also call the relevant Executive Councillor(s) 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 Democratic Services team (see Section 7) up to three working days before the meeting.

### **General guidance on requesting your petition be presented or debated**

If you would like your petition to be presented/debated at a meeting, you must submit (1) the petition; (2) a request to present or debate the petition; and (3) any request for additional assistance such as an interpreter, to the Democratic Services Team (see Section 7) by noon, 9 clear working days (not including the day notice is given or the day of the meeting) before the relevant meeting. However, please note that there is likely to be a maximum number of petitions presented at any one meeting and these slots are normally allocated in order of receipt, so early submission is advised.

When determining whether a petition has met or exceeded a threshold set out in this scheme, the Council will only count signatories for which a local connection (i.e. that the signatory either lives, works or studies in Tower Hamlets) can be evidenced from the information supplied. There is a risk that petitions created and/or submitted via third party e-petition websites may not satisfy this criterion so it is strongly recommended that e-petitions are created via the Council's own e-petition facility [www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/petition](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/petition)

**Similar petitions:** In the event that 2 or more petitions which are substantially the same are received from different petition organisers, the Corporate Director, Governance may aggregate the number of valid signatures in each petition for the purpose of determining whether the threshold to trigger a Council debate of the matters raised has been reached if that is the wish of the petition organisers.

## **5. PETITIONS ON NON-COUNCIL FUNCTIONS**

If your petition is about something over which the Council has no direct control (for example the local railway or hospital) it is unlikely you will be able to present it to a Council meeting, but 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 may liaise 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.

If your petition is about something that a different authority 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 authority, but could involve other steps. In any event we will notify you of the action we have taken.

You can find more information on the services for which the Council is responsible on our website. [www.towerhamlets.gov.uk](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk)

In all cases we will provide the written response as set out in Section 3.

## **6. IF YOU ARE NOT SATISFIED WITH THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE**

If you feel that we have not dealt with your petition properly, the petition organiser has the right to request that the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee 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 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 the Council has 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 Council's Mayor (Executive) or arranging for the matter to be considered at a meeting of the full Council.

Once the appeal has been considered the petition organiser will be informed of the outcome within 5 working days. The results of the review will also be published on our website.

## **7. FURTHER INFORMATION**

Should you wish to submit a petition or require any further information, please contact:

Petitions,  
Democratic Services,  
1<sup>st</sup> Floor,  
Town Hall,  
Mulberry Place,  
E14 2BG

020 7364 4651

Email: [committee.services@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:committee.services@towerhamlets.gov.uk)

Website: <http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/committee>

e-petitions website: <http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/petition>

QR code for website:



## PROCEDURE FOR HEARING PETITIONS AT MEETINGS OF THE FULL COUNCIL

**Agenda order:** All petitions received within the deadline (see Section 4 of the Petition Scheme) will be listed on the Council agenda.

The agenda will list 4 petitions as 'to be heard', which will be listed in order of receipt, except that petitions for debate will take precedence. Any petitions listed as 'to be heard' for which the person(s) listed to present are absent, will be noted (see below).

All remaining petitions will be listed as 'to be noted'. These petitions will not be heard and the Speaker will state where they will go for a full response.

### Petition presentation procedure (for petitions of between 30 and 1,999 signatures)

1. Up to 3 seats in the public gallery will be reserved for the person(s) presenting each petition. The person(s) presenting the petition must live, work or study within the borough.
2. The person(s) presenting each petition will be invited to speak for up to 3 minutes in total in support of the petition. Additional time will be allowed if an interpreter is used. In this case the interpreter must not use the additional time to introduce new information.
3. Councillors may then ask the petitioners questions for a further 4 minutes;
4. The speaker will invite the Mayor or (at the Mayor's discretion) the relevant Lead Member or Committee Chair to respond to the matters raised for up to 2 minutes.
5. The petition will be referred to the relevant Corporate Director who will respond in writing within 28 days from the date of the meeting.

### Petition debate procedure (for petitions in excess of 2,000 signatures):

1. Up to 3 seats in the public gallery will be reserved for the person(s) presenting each petition. The person(s) presenting the petition must live, work or study within the borough.
2. The person(s) presenting each petition will be invited to speak for up to 3 minutes in total in support of the petition. Additional time will be allowed if an interpreter is used. In this case the interpreter must not use the additional time to introduce new information.
3. Councillors may then ask the petitioners questions for a further 4 minutes.

4. The petition will then be debated by Councillors for a maximum of 15 minutes. All speeches are limited to a maximum of 3 minutes. During his or her speech, any Councillor may move a motion for the Council's consideration relevant to matters in the petition (this does not require the suspension of the Council Procedure Rules).
5. Following the debate, the speaker will invite the Mayor or (at the Mayor's discretion) the relevant Lead Member or Committee Chair to respond to the matters raised, for up to 3 minutes.
6. Following the petition debate, any motions moved will be put to the vote in the order they were tabled.
7. If no motion is agreed, the petition will stand referred to the relevant Corporate Director for a written response within 28 days of the meeting.

### **General guidance on petition hearings at Council meetings**

**Executive functions:** In relation to executive functions, the Council does not have powers to override any executive decision of the Mayor or substitute its own decision. The Council may however pass a motion expressing a view on the matter or referring the matter to the Mayor, calling on him/her to take some action, or consider or reconsider a decision, with recommendations to inform that consideration. Officers will advise on the constitutional validity of any motion that may be moved.

**Limitation.** An individual or group may submit either a petition or a question to the Council, not both. In addition, an individual or group may not submit a petition to a meeting of the Council if that individual or group has previously submitted a question or a petition to either of the previous 2 Council meetings.

**PROCEDURE FOR HEARING PETITIONS AT MEETINGS OF THE CABINET**

The procedure for hearing petitions at meetings of the Cabinet is contained in the Executive Procedure Rules at Part 4.4 of the Council's Constitution. The relevant provision is replicated below:

**Public Engagement at Cabinet**

Whilst the main focus of Cabinet is as a decision-making body, there is an opportunity for the public to contribute through making submissions that specifically relate to the reports that are set out on the agenda. Members of the public may therefore make written submissions in any form (for example; Petitions, letters, written questions) and which are to be submitted to the Clerk to Cabinet (whose details are on the Cabinet agenda front sheet) by 5 pm the day before the meeting. The consideration of such written submissions will be at the discretion of whosoever presides at the meeting.



**PETITION TEMPLATE**

To Democratic Services,  
 Tower Hamlets Council  
 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Town Hall  
 Mulberry Place  
 London E14 2BG  
[committee.services@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:committee.services@towerhamlets.gov.uk)  
 020 7364 4207

**Petition to Tower Hamlets Council**

Dear Democratic Services, please find attached a petition relating to...

...for your attention. The petition statement, which explains what action we would like the Council to take, and the names, addresses and signature of each person supporting the petition, can be found on the attached pages.

**Details of petition organiser**

Name:	Address:
Email:	Telephone No:

Tick this box if you are also running a linked petition on the Council's website at [www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/petition](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/petition)

I believe this petition contains .....signatures;

<b>Preferred response:</b> I would like (tick 1 ONLY):	
For this petition to be referred to a senior Council officer who will arrange for a response to be sent within 28 days of receipt by the Council;	
To present this petition in person at a future meeting of the Council or a committee <i>[if the petition includes at least 30 valid signatures]</i>	
For this petition to be debated by Councillors at a future meeting of the Council <i>[if the petition includes at least 2,000 valid signatures]</i>	

(note to petition organiser – please complete this cover page in full and print 1 copy. Please complete and then print as many copies of the following signature sheet as you feel necessary. All signature sheets must also include the petition statement. Combine all pages and return to the address above.)

