

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. 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:

Petitions,
Democratic Services,
1st Floor,
Town Hall,
Mulberry Place,
E14 2BG

Or can be scanned and e-mailed to general.enquiries@towerhamlets.gov.uk

All petitions will receive a response from the relevant Council Directorate as set out at section 4 below within 28 days of receipt. This will usually be the quickest way of addressing the issue. If you wish to present your petition to a meeting of elected councillors, please see section 5 below for details of how this may be done.

The Council is currently developing a facility for residents to host or sign on-line petitions via our website.

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 name, address and signature of each person supporting the petition
- 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 placed on the website.
- 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.

The Council will 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.

Petitions which are considered to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate will not be accepted.

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 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 (see section 5 below), the acknowledgment will confirm this and tell you when and where the meeting will take place (if known at that stage). If the petition needs more investigation, we will tell you the steps we plan to take.

If the petition applies to a planning or licensing application, is a statutory petition (for example requesting a referendum on having an elected mayor), or on a matter where there is already an existing right of appeal, such as council tax banding and non-domestic rates, other procedures apply. Further information on all these procedures and how you can express your views is available on the Council's website.

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

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. THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO YOUR PETITION

The Council's 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

- undertaking research into the matter
- holding a public meeting
- holding a consultation
- holding a meeting with petitioners
- referring the petition for consideration by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee (a cross-party committee of councillors which has the power to hold the Council's decision makers to account.)
- calling a referendum
- writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition

In addition to these steps, the Council will consider all the specific actions it can potentially take on the issues highlighted in a petition, including potential use of any of the Council's statutory powers; and/or recommendations to, or action in conjunction with, our partner agencies or others.

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 [link to Tower Hamlets Partnership website] and where possible will 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.

You can find more information on the services for which the Council is responsible on our website.

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.

In all cases we will provide the written response within 28 days of receiving your petition.

5. 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 elected councillors. There are a number of 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 at least 30 persons who live, work or study in the borough, it may be presented to an ordinary meeting of the Council or (if it relates to a matter that is on the agenda for the meeting) to the Council's Cabinet or a Council Committee. A full calendar of meeting dates can be found on the Council's website.

If you would like to present your petition to one of these meetings, please contact the Service Head, Democratic Services on 020 7364 4204 well in advance of the meeting for further information. The final deadline for receipt of petitions is noon, three clear working days before the meeting. However, please note that a maximum of three petitions will normally be taken at any meeting and these slots are allocated in order of receipt, so early submission is advised.

At the meeting, you will be invited to speak for up to three minutes in support of your petition and councillors may then ask you questions for a further three minutes before the relevant Lead Member or Committee Chair responds to the matter that you have raised.

(b) Debate at a Council Meeting

If your petition includes the names, addresses and signatures of at least 2,000 persons who live, work or study in the borough you may request that a debate be held about the petition at the full Council meeting. The Council will endeavour to consider your petition at its next meeting, although on some occasions this may not be possible and consideration will then take place at the following meeting. We will tell you the date of the meeting at which the debate will take place once this is confirmed.

At the meeting, the petition organiser or another signatory to the petition will be given three minutes to present the petition. The person who presents the petition must live, work or study within the borough. The petition will then be debated by Councillors for a maximum of 15 minutes. Following the debate, 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 to commission further investigation into the matter, for example by a relevant committee.

Where the issue is one on which the Council's Executive (Cabinet) are required to make the final decision, the Council will decide whether to make recommendations to inform that decision. As the petition organiser, you will receive written confirmation of this decision, which will also be published on our website.

In the event that two or more petitions which are substantially the same are received from different petition organisers, the Chief Executive 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.

(c) Officer evidence to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

As an alternative to a Council debate, your petition may ask for a senior Council officer to provide information in public about something for which the officer is responsible as part of their job – for example to 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).

If your petition includes the names, addresses and signatures of at least 1,000 persons who live, work or study in the borough, the relevant senior officer will give evidence at a public meeting of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. 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 Service Head, Democratic Services up to three working days before the meeting.

5. 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 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 Council's 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.