

Schedule 1: Petition Scheme

The Council welcomes petitions from those who live, work or study in Tamworth Borough and recognises that petitions are one way in which people can have a direct influence on the political process and to let us know concerns that are important to them.

A petition is defined as a communication in writing or using an electronic facility which is signed by the appropriate number of qualifying people.

1. Types of Petitions

Standard petitions

The Council will use its discretion where there are fewer than 1,000 signatories to a petition. Where there is clear support for action on a Borough issue the relevant Scrutiny chair and Cabinet member will suggest to Cabinet the preferred course of action. In cases where it is clearly a local concern (e.g. where all the residents of a small isolated community have petitioned for action on a local issue) the relevant Ward members and Cabinet member will suggest to Cabinet the preferred course of action.

Petitions requiring debate

Petitions which contain 1,000 signatures or more will be debated by full Council (see section 6 for more information).

Petitions to hold a Senior Council Officer to account

Petitions which call for evidence from a Senior Council Officer and have at least 500 signatures will trigger that response (see section 7 for more information).

2. What sort of issues can be the subject of a petition?

Members of the public can submit petitions on the following

- Issues relating to the Council's responsibilities
- Issues which affect the Borough of Tamworth or communities in the area, as long as the Council is in a position to exercise some degree of influence

- Anything relating to an improvement in the economic, social or environmental well-being of the Borough to which any of the Council's partners could contribute.

The Council will respond to all petitions it receives and we will be as flexible as we can when handling your petition so that it is considered quickly and in the most appropriate way.

Before submitting a petition you should first check with your local Councillor or with the Council to see if the Council is already acting on your concern. And, that the Borough Council is the relevant body to receive your petition as sometimes your petition may be more relevant for another public body, such as Staffordshire County Council.

All petitions sent or presented to the Council will receive an acknowledgement 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 the Governance Officer, Legal and Democratic Services, Tamworth Borough Council, Marmion House, Lichfield Street, Tamworth B79 7BZ (contact 01827 709267 email: E-Petitions@tamworth.gov.uk) or be created, signed and submitted online by following this link http://www.tamworth.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/petitions.aspx .

By 15 December 2010 it will be possible to create, sign and submit a petition online by following a link from this Scheme.

Petitions can also be presented to a meeting of the Council. These meetings take place during the months of July, September, December and March, the exact dates and times can be found here http://www.tamworth.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/councillors_democracy_and_ele/meetings_calendar.aspx . If you would like to present your petition to the Council, or would like your Councillor or someone else to present it on your behalf, please contact the Governance Officer in writing as above or e-mail E-Petitions@tamworth.gov.uk at least 10 working days before the meeting. If you would like to discuss this please contact the Governance Officer on 01827 709267 and she will talk you through the process. If your petition has received 1,000 signatures or more it will also be scheduled for a Council debate and if this is the case we will let you know whether this will happen at the same meeting or a later meeting of the Council.

3. 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, 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. 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.

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.

4. 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. It will also be published on our website.

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 acknowledgement 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 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 here

- Comments, Compliments and Complaints
http://www.tamworth.gov.uk/online_forms/tell_us.aspx
- Planning Appeals
http://www.tamworth.gov.uk/planning/planning_application_forms.aspx
- Council Tax Appeals
<http://www.tamworth.gov.uk/housing/benefits.aspx>

- Benefit appeals
<http://www.tamworth.gov.uk/housing/benefits.aspx>
- Licensing (Liquor, Entertainment and Taxi/Private Hire Licences)
http://www.tamworth.gov.uk/business/licensing_and_street_traders.aspx

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.

To ensure that people know what we are doing in response to the petitions we receive the details of all the petitions submitted to us 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). The facility is now operating for electronic petitions and when you sign an e-petition you can elect to receive this information by email. We will not send you anything which is not relevant to the e-petition you have signed, unless you choose to receive other emails from us.

5. 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
- undertaking research into the matter
- holding a public meeting
- holding a consultation
- holding a meeting with petitioners
- referring the petition for consideration to one of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees (responsible for scrutinising the work of the Council)
- calling a referendum
- writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition

In the vast majority of cases your petition will be submitted to a Cabinet meeting where elected Councillors will decide how to respond to the petition. These meetings will be held in public and petitioners are welcome to attend the meeting to observe the proceedings.

Depending on the subject matter, your petition will be submitted to either full Council, the Cabinet or one of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees. There are two exceptions to this –

- If your petition contains more than 1,000 signatures then it must be debated by full Council.
- If your petition is asking for a senior council officer to give evidence at a public meeting then it will be considered by one of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees provided it contains at least 500 signatures.

In addition to these steps, the Council will consider all the specific actions it can potentially take on the issues highlighted in a petition. The table below gives some examples.

Petition subject	Appropriate steps
Alcohol related crime and disorder	If your petition is about crime or disorder linked to alcohol consumption, the council will, among other measures, consider the case for placing restrictions on public drinking in the area by establishing a designated public place order or, as a last resort, imposing an alcohol disorder zone. When an alcohol disorder zone is established the licensed premises in the area where alcohol related trouble is being caused are required to contribute to the costs of extra policing in that area. The council's response to your petition will set out the steps we intend to take and the reasons for taking this approach.
Anti-social behaviour	As the elected representatives of your local area, as social landlord and licensing authority, the council plays a significant role to play in tackling anti-social behaviour. When responding to petitions on ASB, we will consider in consultation with our local partners, all the options available to us including the wide range of powers and mechanisms we have to intervene as part of our role as social landlord and licensing authority. The council, in conjunction with other partners in the Tamworth Community Safety Partnership have set out minimum service standards for responding to issues of anti-social behaviour. You can find out more details of these standards here (http://www.tamworth.gov.uk/pdf/ASB%20Standards%200901.pdf).

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 on our website www.tamworth.gov.uk

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.

6. Full Council debate

If a petition contains more than 1,000 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. 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 Cabinet 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. This confirmation will also be published on our website.

7. 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. 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.

If your petition contains at least 500 signatures, the relevant senior officer will give evidence at a public meeting at one of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees. A list of the senior staff that can be called to give evidence is set out below –

- ***Chief Executive***
- ***Deputy Chief Executive***
- ***Assistant Chief Executive***
- ***Corporate Director Resources***
- ***Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer***

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 elected Councillor with responsibility for the service area 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 Governance Officer up to three working days before the meeting.

8. Are there any petitions the Council cannot accept?

We believe that the vast majority we receive will be accepted but in certain circumstances petitions may not be accepted, including:-

- If the petition applies to a planning 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 or a separate complaints process
- Any petition which we consider to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate. We will explain the reasons for this in our acknowledgement of the petition.
- Where a person or organisation (or someone on their behalf) has submitted a petition which is the same or substantially the same as one submitted in the previous 12 months.

If we decide that a petition is not acceptable then we will let the petition organisers know our reasons.

9. E-petitions

The Council welcomes e-petitions which are created and submitted through our website

http://www.tamworth.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/petitions.aspx

E-petitions must follow the same guidelines as paper petitions (see above). 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 six months, but you can choose a shorter or longer timeframe, up to a maximum of 12 months.

When you create an e-petition, it may take five 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.

If we feel we cannot publish your petition for some reason, we will contact you within this time to explain. 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.

When an e-petition has closed for signature, it will automatically be submitted to the Governance Officer. In the same way as a paper petition, you will receive an acknowledgement within 10 working days. If you would like to present your e-petition to a meeting of the council please contact the Governance Officer within 5 working days of receipt of the acknowledgement.

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

10. How do I 'sign' an e-petition?

You can see all the e-petitions currently available for signature here http://www.tamworth.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/petitions.aspx .

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 on the list of those who have signed it but your contact details will not be visible.

11. 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 within 10 working days of obtaining the decision, to request that the one of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees 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 Cabinet and arranging for the matter to be considered at a meeting of full Council.

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

12. Is there anything else I can do to have my say?

The Council recognises that petitions are just one way in which people can let us know about their concerns. There are a number of other ways in which you can have your say including asking questions at Council meetings and through the Council's compliments, comments and complaints system (Tell Us Scheme http://www.tamworth.gov.uk/online_forms/tell_us.aspx).