

ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL PETITIONS POLICY

Essex County Council values the opinion of its citizens. Responding to petitions is a key way of promoting engagement and democracy. Under our policy, a petition may be raised by any person who lives or works within Essex to request that:

- the Council takes action or ceases taking action;
- a matter be looked at by the Chairman of the Scrutiny Board; or
- there be a debate at Full Council or other public meeting.

The person who starts a petition is known as the 'lead petitioner'. The Council recommends that, before starting a petition, the lead petitioner checks with the local County Councillor. They can tell you whether the Council is already acting on the matter and if the County Council is the most appropriate body to receive the petition.

Some petitions cannot be considered under this policy – these are set out below.

In all cases the lead petitioner will receive an acknowledgment and a subsequent email or letter informing them what action is to be taken.

There are various ways you can submit a petition:

1. You can submit a petition directly to the service responsible. If, for example, your petition is about the roads, you can send it to the Highways Service at County Hall.
2. You can submit a petition as part of a formal consultation exercise. In this case it must be received before the date that the consultation closes or it may not be included in the consultation – but it will still be treated in accordance with this policy.
3. If you're not sure who is responsible, submit a paper petition directly to: Head of Democratic Services, Democratic Services, Essex County Council, County Hall, Market Road, Chelmsford, CM1 1LX
4. You can attach a scanned copy of your petition to an email to the ECC service directly or to Democratic.services@essex.gov.uk
5. You can ask your local County Councillor to submit your paper petition on your behalf. The Councillor may be able to present the petition at Full Council. You can [find the contact details of your County Councillor](#) on our website.
6. You can start or sign a [petition online on the ECC website](#). A copy of the response a petition on an ECC website will be sent to everyone who signed the petition online.
7. You can start a petition using another website or online resource but we can only act upon a petition when it is closed and submitted to us. We cannot act upon on-going or 'rolling' petitions nor can we monitor or intervene in these external petitions. Furthermore, if an external site is raising a petition we will only consider it valid if, once submitted, we agree that it conforms to the principles of this policy.

What should a petition look like?

If you wish to design and print your own paper petition, remember it is important that people understand what they are signing. Your petition should include:

- the name and contact details of the lead petitioner;
- a clear, concise statement covering the subject of the petition;
- a statement explaining what action the petitioners wish the Council to take;
and
- the name, address and signature of the persons supporting the petition.

If a petition does not follow these broad guidelines, the Council may decide not to do anything further with it. If that happens, the lead petitioner will be provided with an explanation. If the petition does not identify a lead petitioner, we will normally contact the first signatory to the petition and ask them to agree to act as the lead petitioner or contact the local councillor.

A suggested format is shown as an appendix 1 to this policy. You are welcome to use this version.

Who can sign a petition?

The Council will accept a petition if it is signed by people who live, work or study within the administrative boundaries of Essex. A person signing should normally be at least 12 years of age.

How many people need to sign a petition?

To trigger any action a petition must have a minimum of 10 signatures.

What will the Council do with petitions?

A petition (with 10 signatures or more) will always be acknowledged by email or letter to the lead petitioner within 10 working days of receipt. This acknowledgment will usually be from the service responsible but will always advise what we will be doing with the petition.

What action is taken will largely be determined by how many signatures there are.

- **Petitions signed by between 10 and 1,999 people:** A relevant Senior Officer will provide a written response to the Lead Petitioner. The Cabinet Member responsible may also respond.
- **Petitions signed by between 2,000 and 7,499 people:** The relevant Executive Director will provide a written response to the Lead Petitioner. The Cabinet Member responsible may also respond
- **Petitions signed by between 7,500 and 13,999 people:** The relevant Cabinet Member will provide a written response to the lead petitioner.
- **Petitions signed by 14,000 or more people:** The relevant Cabinet Member will provide a written response to the lead petitioner. If the Cabinet Member does not agree to take the action requested by the petition then the matter will be considered at a meeting of the Full Council for noting or (if appropriate) public debate. The lead petitioner may also be invited to attend and perhaps address the meeting.

- In addition, **any petition of 2,000 signatures or more** will be referred to the Chairman of the relevant Scrutiny Committee who will decide how the petition is reported to a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee. If a petition is considered by a Scrutiny Committee the Committee may require a Senior Council Officer or a Cabinet Member to attend a meeting of the relevant Scrutiny Committee for the purpose of considering the matter in public. If the Committee exercises this power then the lead petitioner will also be invited to attend and may address the meeting.
- **Public Consultations:** If the petition is concerned with a matter that is currently in consultation then every effort will be made to include it as a response, but to do so it must be received before the end of the consultation period.

Petitions not covered by this scheme

The following petitions are not covered by this scheme:

- those that the Head of Democratic Services considers to be rude, frivolous, offensive, defamatory, scurrilous or vexatious;
- petitions that relate to planning applications, planning policy or licensing matters– for which there are alternative arrangements ([See the ECC website for details](#));
- petitions about issues for which this Council is not responsible and cannot influence; or
- petitions relating to any individual or the personal circumstances of individual Councillors or employees of the Council or matters that should properly be dealt with under the Council's complaints procedure.

Additionally, a petition will not normally be considered if it is received within six months of another petition on the same matter. However, if two or more petitions on the same subject are received at a similar time the lead petitioner may be contacted to determine if the petitions may be merged. Otherwise each petition will be treated separately.

If a petition relates to something over which the Council has no direct control or influence an acknowledgement of receipt will still be sent to the lead petitioner. However, the acknowledgement will inform the petitioner that they should re-direct the petition to the body responsible. More information on the services for which the Council is responsible can be found at: www.essex.gov.uk .

If the Council decides that a petition does not fall within the scheme, the lead petitioner will be informed and an explanation will be provided.

What you can do if you think your petition has not been dealt with in accordance with this policy?

The lead petitioner should in the first instance seek an informal review by the Monitoring Officer who will inform the lead petitioner of any decision arising from the informal review.

Once the formal review has been undertaken the lead petitioner will be informed within seven working days.

