



South Staffordshire Council

Petitions Scheme

November 2021



www.sstaffs.gov.uk



The petitions process allows members of the public to have direct influence on the political process and to raise 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 persons.

Qualifying persons are those who live, work or study within the district of South Staffordshire.

1. Types of petitions

Essentially there are three types of petitions:

“Ordinary” petitions - These must be signed by at least 30 qualifying persons.

Petitions requiring debate - Petitions which have been signed by at least 2000 qualifying persons will be debated by the Full Council (see Section 7 for more information).

Petitions to hold a Senior Council Officer to account - Petitions which call for evidence from a Senior Council Officer and have been signed by at least 1000 qualifying persons will trigger that response (see Section 6 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 Council’s responsibilities.
- » Issues which affect the district of South Staffordshire 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 district to which of the Council’s partners could contribute.

The Council will respond to all the 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 concerns and that the District Council is the most appropriate body to receive your petition as sometimes your petition may be more appropriate for another public body such as the 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.

Paper petitions can be sent to the Director Legal and Governance (contact details are available at the end of this guidance).

Electronic petitions can be signed online by following this Link: **ePetitions (sstaffs.gov.uk)**

Who can submit a petition?

Anyone who lives works or studies in the district of South Staffordshire including under 18s, can sign or organise a petition.

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 also 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. Petitions which do not identify a petition organiser will not be accepted.

Petitions which are considered to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate will not be accepted. 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 the Council receiving the petition. It will set out what we plan to do with the petition and when the organiser 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.

The Council will not under this scheme accept a petition which relates to:

- » A planning decision.
- » A licensing decision.
- » Any matter which relates to an individual or entity where the individual or entity has a statutory right of review or appeal under other legislation.

Petitions for the introduction of a directly elected mayor may also be processed other than in accordance with this scheme (See section 8).

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 (personal detail will be removed). 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 by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- » Calling a referendum.
- » Writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition.

If your petition is submitted to one of the Council's formal meetings where elected Councillors will decide how to respond to the petition, the petition organiser will be entitled to briefly address the meeting (i.e. for no longer than 5 minutes). Meetings will usually be held in public and petitioners are welcome to attend to meeting to observe the proceedings.

If your petition contains more than 2000 signatures then it must be debated by the Full Council (subject to the exceptions set out at 4 above).

If your petition is asking for a Senior Council Officer to give evidence at a public meeting then it will be considered by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee provided it contains at least 1000 signatures.

The Council will consider all the specific actions it can potentially take on the issues highlighted in a petition.

If your petition is about something over which the Council has no direct control (e.g. the local railway or hospital) we will aim to make 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 unable to do this for any reason (e.g. if what the petition calls for conflicts with Council policy), then we will set out the reasons for this to you. You can find our more information on the services for which the Council is responsible on our website **www.sstaffs.gov.uk**

If the petition is about something that a different Council is responsible for, we will give consideration to what is the best method for responding to it. It 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. Senior 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 e.g. 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 1000 signatures, the relevant Senior Officer will give evidence at a public meeting of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The list of senior staff that can be called to give evidence is below

- » Chief Executive
- » Corporate Director Planning and Infrastructure
- » Corporate Director Commercial
- » Corporate Director Resource
- » Director Legal and Governance

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 or alongside any Officer named in the petition - for instance, if the named Officer does not deal with the matters which are referred to in the petition on a day-to-day basis. Committee members will ask the questions at this meeting, but the petition organiser will be able to suggest questions to the Chairman of the Committee by contacting the Director Legal and Governance, up to three working days before the meeting. The Chairman will then at his/her discretion, raise these questions at the meeting.

After the meeting the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will submit a report to the next meeting of the Full Council. The petition organiser will receive a copy of this report.

7. Full Council debates

If a petition contains more than 2000 signatures it will be debated by Full Council unless it is a petition asking for a senior Council Officer to give evidence at a public meeting, or is about a matter listed in section 4 above. This means that the issue raised in the petition will be discussed at a meeting which all Councillors can attend. The petition organiser will be given five minutes to present the petition at the meeting and the petition will then be discussed by Councillors for a maximum of 15 minutes. 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. The petition organiser will receive written confirmation of the decision. This confirmation will also be published on the website.

8. Are there any petitions which the Council cannot accept?

We believe that the vast majority of petitions 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 within the previous 12 months.

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

9. E-petitions

The Council welcomes e-petitions which are created and submitted through our website. E-petitions must follow the same guidelines as paper petitions (see previous page). 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.

If you wish to create an e-petition, please contact **epetitions@sstaffs.gov.uk**; please note, it may take five working 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 ten 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 signatures, it will automatically be submitted to the Director Legal and Governance. In the same way as a paper petition, you will receive an acknowledgement within 10 working days.

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 the Council’s website.

10. How do I “sign” an e-petition?

You can see all the e-petitions currently available for signature [here](#)

ePetitions (sstaffs.gov.uk)

When you sign an e-petition you will be asked to provide your name, 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 in 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 to request that the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee review the steps that the Council has taken in response to your petition.

The Committee will usually consider your request within 30 days of receiving it. Should the Committee determine we have not dealt with the 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 Cabinet and 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 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 raising the matter with your local Councillor or through the Council's complaints system.

If you have any queries on the Petitions Scheme please contact:

Lorraine Fowkes

Director Legal and Governance
South Staffordshire Council
Council Offices
Codsall
South Staffordshire
WV8 1PX

Email: **epetitions@sstaffs.gov.uk**

Website: **ePetitions (www.sstaffs.gov.uk)**



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