

North Devon Council petitions scheme

North Devon Council (NDC) supports local people in expressing their views. NDC feels petitions help people to get their opinions heard. The Council has chosen to respond to all petitions it receives and states what actions it will take when it receives one.

There is no maximum number of names on a petition. On average the Council would expect the minimum to be 20, however this depends on the particular issue. The council agrees to the following responses.

- If less than 20 names are on a petition, the petition will be treated as a letter and you will receive a response within 10 working days
- If a petition with at least 20 and not more than 999 signatures is submitted to the council this may be presented at a full council meeting under Part 4 of the NDC constitution and referred to the relevant committee if appropriate. A full council meeting is held approximately every eight weeks.
- Petitions with 1,000 signatures and above triggers a full council debate.

All paper-based petitions to be sent to,

Monitoring Officer
North Devon Council,
Lynton House
Commercial Road
Barnstaple
North Devon
EX31 1DG

You can also submit e-petitions online on the Council's website
www.northdevon.gov.uk.

North Devon Council will find it easier to resolve an issue raised by a petition if the petition is about the council's own services. North Devon Council's services include

- Waste and Recycling
- Housing
- Environmental Health
- Sports and Leisure
- Museums
- Theatres
- Parks and open spaces
- Planning
- Building Control
- Street Cleaning

- Toilets
- Ilfracombe Harbour
- Benefits
- Community Development
- Elections

If the petition is not a function of NDC then NDC will forward the petition to the relevant authority.

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 and 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 the first five signatories on the petition to identify 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.

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.

Once your petition has been finalised 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 Corporate and Community Services on 01271 388253 at least 10 working days before the council meeting and they 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.

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 on the Council website.

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. Petitions requesting that officers give evidence before a public meeting will also not be accepted.

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 any relevant correspondence relating to the petition (all personal details will be removed).

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 meeting with petitioners
- referring the petition for consideration by the council's policy development committee*
- writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition

*the policy development committee is responsible for questioning members of other Committees and Chief Officers from the Council on issues and proposals affecting the North Devon area or the performance of the Council.

The services for which the Council is responsible for are outlined in the introduction. 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 external

organisations and where possible will work collaboratively 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 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.

Full council debates

If a petition contains 1,000 signatures or more it will be debated by the full council. This means that the issue raised in the petition will be discussed at a meeting which all councillors can attend. If the petition is received at least 9 clear working days before a meeting, it will be discussed at that meeting. If not, 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 for a maximum of 30 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. Where the issue is one on which the Strategy and Resources Committee 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.

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. 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.

When you create an e-petition, 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 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 Monitoring 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 Corporate and Community Services within 10 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.

How do I 'sign' an e-petition?

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