

Report for: Standards Committee 27th of June 2023

Title: Haringey Petitions Scheme Update

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Ward(s) affected: All

**Report for Key/
Non-Key Decision:** Non Key Decision

1. Describe the issue under consideration

- 1.1 The Petitions Scheme was implemented in 2010 and updated in 2011 to meet the requirements of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 which imposed a duty on local authorities to respond to petitions. The requirements of the Act in relation to petitions has been repealed. For the majority of local authorities, processes for dealing with petitions were already in place and petitions submitted to a local authority by a body of its citizens were usually presented to the full Council. Some councils have removed or amended the provisions regarding petitions from their Constitutions following the repeal of the statutory requirements, while others have retained the schemes.
- 1.2 To note that prior to 2009, there was an existing provision for petitions under the local government Act 1972. This allows a petition to be handed in at a meeting of the Council or its Committees. The petition would be handed to the chair and noted as received with a response provided at the next meeting of the Council or Committee. This provision has always continued and is contained in the Council's Standing Orders.
- 1.3 There is also a separate legislation covering petitions on referendums and changes in local authority governance. This is under Local Authorities (Referendums) (Petitions) (England) Regulations 2011 - Regulations 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 13, 14.
- 1.4 In Haringey the petitions scheme operates outside of the Constitution and information on the scheme is included on the Council's website.
- 1.5 Taking account the recent comments from residents about the configuration and understanding of the process around petitions set out on our web pages and the recent increase in the number of e- petitions, it was felt important to review the

petitions scheme and ensure it was clear to the public and responded to democratic expectations and requirements. The review also considered if any of the detail of the scheme should be included in the Constitution as it can need to be referred to at Council meetings.

- 1.6. There has been research into other boroughs which have similar schemes with consideration given to the practicalities and past use of the scheme. This report was considered and commented on by the Constitution Review Working Group. A summary of the proposed changes to the scheme outlined in track changes is as follows and was accepted and informed by the Constitution Working Group:
- 1.7 The option of calling officers to give evidence at a meeting has been deleted as over the last 13 years this option has not been requested or number of signatures required for this option not been met.
- 1.8 Making clear, at the start of the scheme, that both paper and electronic versions of petitions are accepted.
- 1.9 Including clearer information on who can sign a petition.
- 1.10 Outlining that there are 3 options for submitting a petition and how each option works. Currently, this information is combined, and Democratic Services get a lot of queries about application of a paper petition and e petition processes.
- 1.11 Adding in a clause that states that matters which are subject to legal proceedings cannot be taken forward in a petition.
- 1.12 Making clear when a petition cannot relate to exempt information.
- 1.13 Having an additional clause that if a petition is raising substantially similar issues and requesting the same action as a petition currently running on the e petition website / or paper petition handed in, the Council also reserve the right to reject this. This includes additional wording suggested by the CWG to make clear that this is added to ensure the Council can hear as many voices as possible.
- 1.14 Reducing the number of options available concerning a response to a petition from 11 to 4. This takes into account resources of the Council and considers the current use of the scheme. We can usually have between 30 to 50 responses to a local neighbourhood issue but then can get over 2000 signatures for LTN petitions, Tree preservation and climate action related issues.
- 1.15 Including the option for responses provided by officers [usually where the issues has between 30 to 100 signatures] to be referred to the Corporate Feedback team, if felt that the petition was not dealt with in accordance with the scheme.
- 1.16 Including a more comprehensive section on submitting an e- petition. This includes stating that the views expressed in the petitions do not necessarily reflect those of the Council.
- 1.17 Considering e – petitions collated on a national website such as change.org.uk.

- 1.18 Inclusion of a privacy notice on data. As suggested by the CWG, there will be additional web pages as well setting out the safeguarding of information of under 18's signing petitions and also attending meetings to present petitions.
- 1.19 The acknowledgement to the petition setting out what the Council plans to do was deleted as often it is not known how many signatures will be collated for an e-petition. If the petition is complete, then we will advise the options.
- 1.20 Adding a maximum hosting period of 3 months for e-petitions. This is felt to be an appropriate time to allow an issue to be responded to with signatures and a response from the Council. The current scheme is silent on extensions, and this allows clarity on the maximum period for a petition.

- 1.21 The CWG recommended that the provision of a Council debate on a petition which has over 2643 signatures [1% of the borough population] should be added to the Council Committee procedure rules as set out at Appendix 2.

2. Cabinet Member Introduction

N/A

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 To consider the changes to the Petitions Scheme set out at Appendices 1 to 3 and recommend adoption to Full Council on the 17th of July 2023.

4. Background information

- 4.1 As set out in paragraphs 1.1 to 1.21.

- 4.2 The Haringey Deal outlines that the Council need to work harder to hear the voices that are too often overlooked. Some residents face real barriers to join in council consultations and decision-making activities and to make their voices heard. To promote use of this scheme and participation in council meetings, Democratic services could further attend community network meetings and the Multi Faith Forum to promote the use of this scheme and enable communities to say where they want to see a change in policy. Leaflets in local languages could also be compiled and distributed providing a simplified version of the petitions scheme and how to access this.

5. Statutory Officers comments (Chief Finance Officer (including procurement), Assistant Director of Corporate Governance, Equalities) Finance

- 5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this change in scheme.

Head of Legal and Governance & Monitoring Officer

These are set out within the report.

6. Use of Appendices

Appendix 1 – Haringey Petitions Scheme track changes

Appendix 2 – Haringey Petitions Scheme without track changes

Appendix 3 - Changes to Council Standing Orders.

7. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

7.1 Background documents:

- *Haringey Council's Constitution*

7.2 The background papers are located at George Meehan House, Wood Green, London N22 8JZ.

7.3 To inspect them or to discuss this report further, please contact Ayshe Simsek on 0208 489 2929.