

Appendix 5

Report for:	Constitution Review Working Group
Title:	Haringey Petitions Scheme
Lead officer:	Ken Pryor, Deputy Head of Local Democracy and Member Services
Date:	11th November 2010

1. Purpose

To propose a revised petition scheme which will need approval by the full Council and to note the steps being taken to establish an e-petitions system.

2. Background

The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (LDEDC) imposes a duty on local authorities to respond to petitions. The duty came into force on 15 June 2010. From 15 December 2010 all local authorities will also be required to have an electronic petitioning system on their website.

At full Council on 19 July 2010 a petition scheme for Haringey was agreed. It was also agreed that CRWG would consider any review of the scheme. Section 11(5) of the LDEDC Act allows a council to revise their petition scheme at any time, with Council being required to approve any changes.

On 24 September 2010 the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) issued a notice to Council Chief Executives announcing the withdrawal of the statutory guidance for petitions. The statutory duty to respond to petitions, as well as the requirement to provide an e-petitions facility will, however, remain. In setting up an e-petitions facility CLG has requested that councils consider 'current circumstances, and [have] regard to both the Government's commitment to remove unnecessary prescription for local authorities and the priority of cutting out all wasteful spending.' While the Council is statutorily obliged to promote the scheme, and revisions to it, the extent to which we do so is a matter for local discretion.

3. Review of the existing petitions scheme

Officers have made suggested amendments to the existing scheme in order to ensure that it is compatible with the introduction of e-petitions. A revised scheme is attached as Appendix 1. Principle recommendations for amending the scheme are as follows:

- Amendments to incorporate new ways to submit a petition. The sections titled 'e-petitions' and 'how do I sign an e-petition' are taken from the guidance produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government.



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- Information submitted on a petition by the petition organiser and the other petitioners will be made available publicly via the website.
- E-petitions to remain on the council website for a maximum of 6 months, with a default setting of 2 months (this default is prescribed by the modern.gov system however it can be amended). The guidance (non-statutory) suggests that most petitions run for 6 months, with a maximum of 12 months.
- That a step be added to the process of calling for a review so that discussion can take place between officers and the lead petitioner. It is anticipated that this would help to ensure that additional and unnecessary burdens are not placed upon Overview and Scrutiny.

Any additional amendments agreed by the CRWG will be incorporated into the scheme, which will then be need to be agreed by Full Council.

4. Establishing an e-petitions system

Officers have reviewed the market and consider that the best option is to make use of the e-petitions facility provided by our agenda management supplier – modern.gov. This has been offered as a free add-on to our current system and officers are satisfied that this system would meet the minimum statutory requirements. Minimal staffing costs associated with implementation can be contained within existing budgets.

A number of different companies offer e-petition systems and the market is quite congested however this has not resulted in significant reductions in cost such that they would be competitive with the modern.gov free offer.

It is recommended that in the initial stages the modern.gov system is used on the basis that it is free and relatively simple to set up, allowing us time to assess demand without committing to up-front costs. Should a more advanced system be required this could then be considered at a later date.

5. Implications for Haringey

The council currently receives on average 1-2 petitions per month, however the introduction of an electronic petitioning scheme is likely to increase this number.

In addition to this, a number of policy announcements by the coalition government may have implications for use of petitions and the number received. These include:

- Resident power to veto council tax rises
- New powers to help communities save local facilities and services from closure
- Resident power to instigate a referendum on any issue
- Council's right to challenge proposed closure of local services

For now, it is recommended that officers continue with a business as usual approach but be vigilant to any significant increase in the number of petitions and the potential impact on council resources.

Utilising the modern.gov petitions option will incur relatively small costs, arising from some necessary work by corporate IT and officer time in Local Democracy and Member Services. Any minimal costs arising will be contained within existing budgets.



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6. Recommendations

That:

- Members of CRWG approve the amendments to the Haringey Petitions Scheme (Appendix 1) recommended by officers.
- Members of CRWG agree the scheme together with any further amendments required.
- The scheme is reported up to full Council.
- Officers set up the modern.gov e-petitions system and make it accessible via the council's website in accordance with the statutory timescales.