

Midlothian Council

Putting forward a petition to the Council's Petitions Committee – What you need to know – questions and answers

This provides guidance to anyone who will be giving information to or attending a meeting of the Council's Petitions Committee.

What is the Petitions Committee?

The Petitions Committee is a committee of Midlothian Council comprising six councillors.

What can a petition be about?

We will consider petitions which are concerned with the council's role or issues some or all of the residents in Midlothian are concerned about.

Can I put forward a petition about another organisation?

Yes, if the petition is about issues which some or all of the residents in Midlothian are concerned about. So we may consider petitions which relate to services provided by other organisations, for example, the police and health authorities. However, our influence over these organisations is limited.

How do I put forward a petition?

You should put forward your petition on the appropriate form. You can get this from the Petitions Staff whose address is shown at the bottom of this document, or from our website at: **www.midlothian.gov.uk/petitions**. Only one signature is required.

Petitions must be from a person or on behalf of an organisation, and should provide the information listed below. You can provide extra information to support the petition. This should not be more than four sides of A4 paper.

- Your name, address, phone number and e-mail address (if you have one)
- The issue you are concerned about and what you want us to do
- What you have already done to try to settle the matter
- The names of any other people involved in raising the petition (if any)

It is important to note that petitions will be rejected and returned to the Principal Petitioner in cases where the wording contained within the Petition Statement box differs from that on any accompanying petition signature sheets.

Petitions must not contain offensive or inappropriate language.

Who decides if you can accept a petition?

Our Monitoring Officer will check all petitions to make sure that they keep to our procedures. The Monitoring Officer will be the sole arbiter as to whether a petition is valid. Petitions which are deemed not to be valid will not be reported to the Petitions Committee.

Only petitions that are fully valid be accepted. Petitions that are partly valid will be rejected and returned to the Principal Petitioner with an explanation why and asking them to re-submit a fully valid petition. If your petition is valid we will give you a reference number.

Are there any issues you will not accept petitions about?

Yes.

We will not accept petitions about:

- issues that are currently; have recently been; or will shortly be the subject of public consultation. In these circumstances the consultation process will be the mechanism to allow all parties to express their views.
- complaints or issues that should go through our normal procedures
- planning, licensing or other matters where there are already procedures in place to consider objections and appeal against decisions
- personal or business interests
- individual councillors or members of council staff
- employees' terms and conditions of employment
- people or organisations breaking the law or codes of practice or
- a decision the council or any board, committee, joint committee or member of council staff has made within the past six months.

We will also not accept petitions which:

- are made only to cause trouble
- are the same or very similar to petitions we have considered within the past 12 months
- are designed to gain or reduce support for one or more political parties or
- could damage a person's reputation or discriminate against them.

Will I be invited to the meeting the petition is considered at?

Yes.

We will give you five working days' notice of the date of the meeting. We will invite you, together with one supporter, to the meeting.

What happens when I arrive?

We will try to give an approximate time for when we are likely to consider your petition. Someone will meet you when you arrive. However, you may have to wait for a short time. You can wait in the room where the meeting is taking place, unless we are discussing confidential matters. In this case you will wait in a waiting area. In the meeting room there will be members of the Petitions Committee and council staff. Someone will show you where to sit and help you if you have any difficulties. We will give you an agenda for the meeting. Everyone at the meeting will have a name plate so that you will know who's who.

Will I be asked to speak?

Yes.

We will invite you to make a statement lasting no more than ten minutes to support the petition. Your supporter can speak on your behalf if necessary. We may ask you questions.

Are the meetings open to the public?

Yes.

However, if we think any item should be confidential we will ask members of the press and public to leave.

What will happen to my petition?

We will listen to your comments and ask you questions. At the meeting we will make a decision on your petition and will do one of the following.

- Take no action and give you the reason for this
- Refer the petition to a director of the council or to another Committee of the Council to look into, with or without any specific recommendation
- Refer the petition to another public organisation (if the petition relates to that organisation) with or without any specific recommendation

Where can I see other petitions that have been put forward?

Petitions will be available, with the agenda for the Petition Committee's meeting, normally five working days before the meeting. Details of petitions we have received will be available on our website. We will prepare an annual report relating to petitions we have considered and their outcomes.

We hope you find this information useful. If you need any more information or do not understand any of the points, please contact:

Petitions Staff
Legal and Secretariat Section
Resources Division
Midlothian Council
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