

Southborough Town Council

Petition Policy

(Adopted by Council 23 April 2015)

Petitioning is one way that individuals, community groups and organisations can participate in the democratic process, by raising issues of public concern with the Council and allowing Councillors to consider the need for change within the Parish.

What can petitions achieve?

Petitions sent in to the Council can have positive outcomes that lead to change or inform debate.

For example, petitions can:

- bring an issue to the attention of the Council
- show strong public approval or disapproval to something that the Council is doing.

What issues can a petition relate to?

Petitions should be relevant to a matter over which the Council has powers or duties.

Can I raise a petition?

To raise a petition you should be an interested party who either lives or works in the parish of Southborough and High Brooms, and be aged 18 or over.

Can I sign a petition?

People signing petitions (signatories) should live or work in the Parish area, and be aged 18 or over.

How do I start a petition?

There is no particular process for starting a paper petition. Generally you and other key petitioners will gather signatures until a date you have decided in advance. You may wish to contact the Council to check if your petition's content is acceptable.

To produce an e-petition, you must complete an online form and submit it to the Council. You will then be contacted to check your contact details. You may also be asked to explain some of the petition's information.

You can run an online petition at the same time as a paper petition, combining the two before submitting them to the Council. Some people prefer this option as they find it easier to have one they can hand around to friends and family.

What should my petition contain?

A petition should include a brief title and a short, clear and concise statement covering the subject of the petition. It should clearly state what action the petitioner wishes the Council to take. The petition will be returned to you to explain further if it is unclear.

In order for the petition to be considered;

Paper petitions must clearly display:

- the title/subject of the petition;
- the principal petitioner's contact address (which we will write to about the petition);
- the name, address and signature of anyone supporting the petition;
- the starting and closing date of the petition

E-petitions must follow the e-petitions online form and must clearly display:

- the title/subject of the petition;
- the principal petitioner's contact address (which we will write to about the petition);
- the name and location of any person supporting the petition;
- the starting and closing date of the petition.
- The contact details of the lead petitioner are essential. For e-petitions, although the name and address of any person supporting the petition is required for checking purposes, only the name and area will be displayed.

A petition must be submitted in good faith. You must not include:

- potentially libellous, false or defamatory statements;
- matters which are subject to prescribed statutory requirements, such as changes to governance arrangements e.g. an elected mayor or Chairman
- information protected by a court order (e.g. the identities of children in custody disputes); or in accordance with any other enactment;
- matters which are subject to appeal processes or legal actions (e.g. planning appeals, licensing matters, enforcement action or other legal actions in court etc);
- material which is commercially sensitive, confidential or which may cause personal distress or loss;
- the names of individual officials of public bodies;
- the names of individuals, or information where they may be easily identified, in relation to criminal accusations;

A petition will not be accepted if a petition to the same or substantially similar effect has been made to the Council within the previous 12 months

Please note that once submitted, we will endeavour to approve e-petitions within 5 working days. **Petitioners are advised to take this timeframe into account before proceeding.**

You should take care not to include any information or signatures that should not be made public.

Petitions that do not follow these guidelines will not be accepted. In these cases, you will be informed in writing of the reasons why a petition cannot be accepted. If you are not satisfied with the reason for your petition being rejected the matter can be further considered by the Chairman of the Council.

In the six weeks before an election local authorities cannot publish any material which may support any political party or a point of view which may be associated with any political party.

Promoting the e-petition

As with paper petitions, the responsibility for publicising the e-petition lies with the petition organiser.

What happens once the signatures have been collected?

The lead petitioner should decide when he or she has collected sufficient names or submit it to the council for consideration following the closing date. The Council requires a minimum of 1000 signatures for the petition to become valid.

For e-petitions, the lead petitioner should set a closing date. Once that closing date has been reached, the principal petitioner should then arrange for it to be submitted as appropriate.

What is the process for submitting the petition?

As soon as the closing date is reached the principal petitioner must ensure its final submission to the Council.

If you are running a paper petition alongside an e-petition, both parts of the petition must be received by the Council before they can be submitted for consideration.

Paper petitions should be sent to The Town Clerk, Southborough Town Council, c/o Tunbridge Wells Town Hall, Mount Pleasant Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN1 1RS.

Petitions can also be submitted in person to an officer of the Council, via a local Borough Councillor, Town Councillor or by e mail.

How many names should be on a petition?

The Council requires a minimum of 1000 signatures for the petition to become valid.

What happens after the petition is submitted?

Once the petition has been submitted to the council, it will be referred to Full Council for acceptance, at which the lead petitioner will be able to speak for 5 minutes in support of the petition. It will if accepted, then be referred to the relevant Committee for debate.

The Council will respond to the petition in one of the following ways:

- To comply with the request in the petition

- To commission further research in to the matter, hold an inquiry, or in some cases hold a public meeting to seek further information
- To provide a written response, setting out the Council's policy or views

If an acceptable petition is received with signatures of more than 25% of the Parish this will automatically be debated at a future meeting of the Full Council.

Privacy Statement

Your petition details will be held in computer readable form to allow the principal petitioner to administer and submit the petition you have signed. Only your name and area will appear on the website. The other details you give are needed by the Council to validate your support.

Your details will only be used by the Council and the principal petitioner for any petitions that you sign. Your details will not be used for any purposes other than e-petitions, unless you have expressly given permission otherwise.