

Special Advisory Group

21 April 2016

Report title	Petitions Committee	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	n/a	
Key decision	No	
In forward plan	No	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Kevin O'Keefe, Governance	
Originating service	Corporate Administration	
Accountable employee(s)	Martyn Sargeant	Group Manager – Corporate Administration
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Report to be/has been considered by	n/a	

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Advisory Group is recommended to:

1. Agree the proposed arrangements for considering petitions from the public from 19 May 2016, specifically:
 - (a) Petitions with fewer than 50 signatures to be considered and responded to by employees, with a summary reported to Scrutiny Board and the relevant Cabinet Member(s).
 - (b) Petitions with 50 – 2,499 signatures to be considered by the relevant scrutiny panel with recommendations made for action by employees or review by the Executive as appropriate.
 - (c) Petitions with 2,500+ signatures to be considered by the Council as per the existing arrangements.
2. Agree that the arrangements for considering petitions be reviewed in twelve months' time.
3. Support the development of a protocol for the consideration of petitions by scrutiny panels, to ensure consistency in the way they are reviewed and responded to.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 This report outlines proposals for the future consideration of petitions received by the Council from members of the public, to be effective from the beginning of the new municipal year.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The City of Wolverhampton is one of only a handful of local authorities in the country to have a dedicated Petitions Committee. Other councils have a range of mechanisms in place for considering petitions, including review by employees, the scrutiny function, the Executive or full Council.
- 2.2 Whilst the Council promotes its petitions arrangements and has an online system for submission, the number of petitions is relatively low (20 in 2015).
- 2.3 The Petitions Committee meets about six times per annum but it can sometimes be three or four months from receipt of a petition to its consideration by the Committee (due to scheduling of meetings, preparing a response, etc.). This often means that events overtake the petition, which could have been satisfactorily resolved much quicker.
- 2.4 At the instigation of the Chair of the Petitions Committee, a review and options appraisal was conducted to consider future arrangements. The options included consideration by Councillors at a range of different meetings and also whether there should be a threshold, below which a petition might expediently be considered by employees.

3.0 Proposed future arrangements

- 3.1 The review identified that, during 2015, 60% of petitions received had fewer than 100 signatures (and many of those with only 10-20 signatures) and only 5% (one petition) met the threshold for consideration by Council (2,500+ signatures).
- 3.2 In light of the number of petitions and their typical scale, it is proposed that the Petitions Committee should be dissolved and the following arrangements implemented from the beginning of the new municipal year:

Petitions with fewer than 50 signatures	Reviewed and responded to by employees within ten working days and a summary included in a report to the next Scrutiny Board meeting, and also reported to the relevant Cabinet Member(s).
Petitions with 50-2,499 signatures	Submitted to the next meeting of the relevant scrutiny panel, with a report from employees recommending an appropriate course of action. Can be referred to the Cabinet (e.g. for review of a decision, etc.) if the scrutiny panel deems that appropriate.
Petitions with more than 2,499 signatures	Considered at the next meeting of the Council in accordance with the existing petitions protocol.

- 3.3 The proposals above should ensure that a prompt response and resolution can be provided for residents and Councillors to what are often minor, neighbourhood issues, whilst protecting the ability of members of the public to escalate any matter of concern for consideration by the Council.

4.0 Financial implications

- 4.1 The payment of special responsibility allowances to the Chair and Vice-chair would cease on dissolution of the Petitions Committee. The saving generated would be just over £12,000.

[GE/06042016/R]

5.0 Legal implications

- 5.1 Under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, the Council is required to have a petitions scheme and thereby a mechanism for consideration of petitions from the public. The proposals contained in this report will enable the Council to continue to meet this obligation.

[TS/06042016/P]

6.0 Equalities implications

- 6.1 The proposals outlined in this report do not require an equalities analysis, as the Council does not propose to change its current practice of encouraging, considering and responding to petitions. The change in respect of smaller petitions should enable a quicker turnaround and resolution of issues raised through petitions, providing an improved service to all members of the community.

7.0 Environmental implications

- 7.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

8.0 Human resources implications

- 8.1 There are no human resource implications arising from this report.

9.0 Corporate landlord implications

- 9.1 There are no corporate landlord implications arising from this report.

10.0 Schedule of background papers

n/a