



**MANCHESTER
CITY COUNCIL**

Manchester City Council Petitions Scheme

Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit

Manchester City Council

Adopted by Manchester City Council on 26 November 2014

Introduction

Manchester City Council welcomes petitions and recognises that they are just one of many ways in which people can let us know about their concerns and participate in the the democratic process. This scheme sets out how the Council will deal with petitions that meet the criteria set out in the scheme.

The type of petition determines how a petition will be responded to. There are three types of petitions:

- Ordinary petitions – with 100 or more valid entries or (if less than 100 entries) where there is clear local support for action.
- Petitions requiring a debate at a scrutiny committee -these require 1000 or more valid entries.
- Petitions requiring debate at full Council – these require 4000 valid entries.

More detail about how the Council will respond to each of these is found in section 4 of the scheme. We will be as flexible as we can when handling your petition so that it is considered quickly and in the most appropriate way.

If something is clearly intended to be a petition but does not meet the requirements set out in this scheme, we will ask the relevant service area to provide a response directly to the petition organiser. More detail about how we will deal with petitions that fall outside of the scheme is in section 5.

Paper petitions can be sent to:
Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit
Manchester City Council
Level 6
Town Hall Extension
Manchester
M60 2LA

Petitions can also be created, signed or submitted online by following this link:
www.manchester.gov.uk/petitions

The Council will consider all petitions that fall within the scope of this scheme. A petition template and signature entry sheet is attached at appendix 1. This sets out the information we need to consider your petition under the terms of the Council scheme.

If you need any advice, please contact the Governance and Scrutiny Support unit on 0161 234 3241 or by email at petitions@manchester.gov.uk

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Section 1 – How do I start a petition?

1.1 Who can submit a petition?

Any one who lives works or studies in Manchester can organise or sign a petition, including those under the age of 18.

1.2 Can I sign a petition?

Any individual signing a petition may be any age and should provide an address which shows that they live, work or study in Manchester.

1.3 How do I sign a petition?

For paper petitions, the petition organiser will gather signatures until a specific date that they have decided. These will then be submitted to the council. E-petitions are hosted and signed via the Council's website.

1.4 How do I start an e-petition?

The Council welcomes e-petitions that are created and submitted through our website www.manchester.gov.uk/petitions. E-petitions follow the same guidelines as paper petitions and the petition organiser must live, work or study in Manchester.

To set up an e-petition, you must complete the online petition registration form which will be submitted to the Council. We will then write to you to confirm your full contact details. This is so we can respond to you as the petition organiser. We may also ask you to explain some of the petition's information if the purpose of the petition is not clear to us. We will review the wording of the petition to ensure it is appropriate before we publish the content online. Please see section 3 for further guidance on the type of petitions that cannot be accepted. If the petition is rejected under this scheme, we will inform the petition organiser within 15 working days, but sometimes we may need more time to assess content of the petition to ensure it is appropriate. We will inform you if more time is needed.

You can run an online petition at the same time as a paper petition, combining the two before sending them to the Council. You should send the paper petition to the Council at the same time as the closing date of the online petition so that all of the signatures will be counted at the same time. Please see the separate guidance on e-petitions which gives you more detailed information on how the e-petitions site works.

1.5 What can a petition be about?

Petitions should be relevant to a matter over which the Council has powers or duties. You can refer to the Council's constitution at http://www.manchester.gov.uk/downloads/download/4030/the_constitution or contact the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit if you need further advice. If the petition does not fall within the remit of the Council's powers, we will return your petition to you and where possible, try to identify the correct organisation for you to send the petition to.

Section 2 – Requirements of the petition scheme

2.1 What should a petition contain?

To be considered, a petition should contain a title and short statement about the subject matter of the petition. The petition statement should be clear about what action that you want the Council to take. If this is not clear, we may have to return the petition to you for further clarification.

The petition should contain the name and postal address of the petition organiser. This is the person we will contact to explain how we will respond to the petition. The petition organiser should not be an MP or a councillor of Manchester City Council. If the petition does not clearly state who the petition organiser is, we will not be able to deal with the petition under this scheme.

We **must** be able to identify that the people signing the petition live work or study in Manchester. A valid entry on a petition will contain the name, Manchester address and signature of the person supporting the petition. If you prefer, people signing the petition can put their work or study address, as long as this is based within the geographical boundaries of the council. Entries that do not meet these requirements will be rejected and not counted towards the total number. You can use the blank entry sheet that is appended to this document.

Paper petitions must clearly display:

- the title/subject of the petition and the action you are asking the Council to take;
- the petition organiser's contact address;
- the name, address and signature of anyone supporting the petition.

A register of petitions received that meet the criteria of this scheme will be published on the Council's website. Where possible, we will publish the Council's response to petitions.

e-petitions must be submitted through the Council's e-petitions website and must clearly display:

- the title/subject of the petition;
- the name and address of any person supporting the petition; (users must indicate that they live work or study in in Manchester)
- the starting and closing date of the petition, and whether there is a paper petition collecting signatures in conjunction with the e-petition.

For e-petitions, only the name and area will be displayed on the website.

All petitions that do not meet these criteria will not be considered under this scheme. How we will respond to those that fall outside of the scheme is detailed in section 5.

2.2 How do I submit a petition?

Paper petitions can be submitted to the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit at the address on page 1 of the scheme. You can also submit a petition

at a committee meeting or to your local councillor. They will pass the petition to the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit for processing under this scheme.

E-petitions must be submitted through the Council's website.

Section 3 – Exceptions to the Petitions Scheme

3.1 Are there any petitions that the Council cannot accept?

The majority of petitions we receive will be accepted but there are some circumstances where we will not be able to deal with your petition under this scheme. Petitions that fall outside of this scheme include:

- Any matter that the Council is not directly responsible for or has no influence over. We will return the petition to you and where possible direct you to the correct organisation.
- Any matter relating to a planning decision – These will be dealt with using existing procedures. For further information about making representations about planning decisions, please contact the planning team at planning@manchester.gov.uk
- Any matter relating to a licensing application – These will be dealt with using existing procedures. For further information about making representations, please contact the licensing team at licensing@manchester.gov.uk
- A statutory petition (for example a petition for a directly elected mayor)
- Any matter where there is already an existing right of appeal or a separate complaints process. These will be dealt with using existing procedures
- Any specific issues that the Council is carrying out a formal consultation on. These will be dealt with under a different process. Please see section 3.2 for more details.
- A petition where we have received another petition on the same issue within the previous two years. In these circumstances, we will write to the petition organiser and include a copy of the response to the first petition received
- Any petition which we consider to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate. You should not include potentially libellous, false or defamatory statements or which may cause personal offence, distress or loss.
- Any petition that is asking the Council to do anything unlawful.
- Any petition relating to the subject of any legal action taken by the Council or an individual.
- A petition which contains confidential information for example about a specific individual.

Different procedures apply to all these types of petition for example there are some situations where there are existing ways of making representations. These petitions will be dealt with in accordance with existing procedures in place.

Anyone trying to create an e-petition that falls outside the scheme will be informed that their petition is excluded. We will write to the petition organiser within 15 days to acknowledge receipt and explain why the petition cannot be considered. Where possible, we will advise the petition organiser of the appropriate channel through which they can pursue their concerns.

It may also be inappropriate for the Council to deal with certain petitions during periods when it is subject to restrictions such as immediately before elections or referendums. In these circumstances, the petition organiser will be informed when the petition will be considered, or when any material relating to it will be published on the Council's website.

If we decide that a petition is not acceptable for any of the reasons listed above then we will inform the petition organiser of the reasons when we write to them. If you are not satisfied with the reason for your petition being rejected, you can make a complaint under the Council's corporate complaints scheme and ask for these reasons to be reviewed.

3.2 How will the Council deal with petitions about issues that it is consulting Manchester residents on?

If the Council receives a petition about an issue that it is already consulting with residents about (for example, about changes to services or the formal budget consultation), the petitions scheme will be suspended for that petition. All petitions received that relate to the subject of a formal consultation will automatically be incorporated into the formal consultation process at the earliest stage possible. Petition organisers will be informed of this and the petition will be submitted to the service area managing the consultation for them to respond in accordance with the Council's policy.

This approach will also be taken for petitions that are received relating to any issue about the Council's budget during the Council's annual budget setting process. In addition to being incorporated into the formal consultation process, all petitions relating to budget issues will be made available for inspection at the budget meeting of the Council so that they can properly inform the Council's budget decisions.

Sometimes we receive petitions after the consultation deadline has passed but before the final decision has been made. In these circumstances, if the specific issue is being discussed at one of the Council's scrutiny committees, you will be invited to the meeting to make representations about your petition. If the issue has already been considered by a scrutiny committee or is not going to be considered, the decision maker will be asked to take your petition into consideration when they make the decision.

Petitions received after a decision has been made on a matter that the Council has consulted residents on will not be considered under the scheme but will be passed to the relevant senior officer to respond.

Section 4 – How will the Council respond to my petition

If you are running a paper petition along side an e-petition, both parts of the petition must be received by the Council before they can be considered.

4.1 What happens after the petition is submitted?

We will send an acknowledgement within 15 working days to the petition organiser. This acknowledgement will also say as much as we can at that stage about what we have done, or plan to do, with the petition. In some circumstances, more time will be needed to clarify some details about what action the Council can take but we will inform you of this in your acknowledgement letter. The petition will then be referred to the appropriate service area for consideration.

4.2 How will the Council respond to my petition?

The response to a petition will depend on what a petition asks for and how many people have signed it, but may include one or more of the following actions:

- taking the action requested in the petition
- writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition
- considering the petition at a committee of the Council
- holding a meeting with the petition organisers
- commissioning research
- writing to the petition organiser setting out the Council's views on the request in the petition
- referring the petition to a scrutiny committee for review.

There are three ways in which the Council will respond, which depends on the number of valid entries on a petition.

4.3 Ordinary petitions

These should be signed by at least 100 people who live work or study in Manchester. Petitions with less than 100 valid signatures fall outside of the scheme but will still be passed onto the relevant service area to respond. The City Solicitor will have discretion where there are fewer than 100 valid entries in cases where there is clear local support for a specific course of action.

Ordinary petitions will be submitted to the appropriate senior officer in the service area concerned. Officers will be asked to respond to the petition organiser within six weeks of the date of the acknowledgement letter to set out what action they have taken to respond to the request in the petition. If more time is required, officers must write to the petition organiser to advise them that more time is needed and the date when they will provide a response to you.

4.4 Petitions requiring a debate at a scrutiny committee

Petitions that have over 1000 valid entries will be eligible to be considered by one of the Council's scrutiny committees.

If the issue is already on the work programme for a scrutiny committee, the petition organiser will be invited to the meeting to make representations about their petition under the agenda item that it relates to.

If the item is not due to be considered, the petition will be added to the work programme of the scrutiny committee for the next appropriate meeting when there is a space on the agenda. This date will be agreed between the City Solicitor and the chair of the relevant scrutiny committee but it will be no more than six months of the date the petition was received. When the petition is considered, the committee will consider the statement in your petition and the representations that you make at the meeting. The committee may decide to ask council officers to provide them with extra information which can be considered alongside the petition.

If a scrutiny committee considers your petition, the process outlined below will be followed. The petition organiser will be given 5 minutes to present the petition at the meeting. The relevant council officer or executive member will then be given 5 minutes to outline the Council's response to the petition. The committee will then discuss the petition for a maximum of 25 minutes, before making appropriate recommendations about how to respond to the petition. Any deviation from this format will be at the discretion of the committee.

The petition organiser will be given a copy of the minutes containing the recommendations and any follow up responses.

4.5 Petitions requiring debate at the full Council

If a petition contains 4000 valid entries from people who live work or study in the city, it will trigger the right to be debated at full Council. This means that the issue raised in the petition will be discussed at a meeting where all Councillors can attend.

If the petition organiser wishes to take this opportunity, the Council will aim to consider the petition at its next ordinary meeting, although on some occasions this may not be possible and consideration will then take place at the following meeting. No petition debates will take place at the Council's budget setting or annual general meeting.

At the meeting, the petition organiser, or their representative will be given 5 minutes to present the petition and councillors will then discuss the petition for a maximum of 25 minutes. The Council will then decide how to respond to the petition. If the issue is one that requires the Council's Executive to make the final decision, the Council will decide whether to make recommendations to the Executive.

We will write to the petition organiser to let them know the outcome of the petition debate and the Council's decision.

Section 5 – How will the Council respond to petitions outside of this scheme?

The Council often receives correspondence that is intended to be a petition but does not necessarily meet the criteria set out in this scheme. It is important that we do not ignore these petitions. We intend to be as flexible as possible when we are dealing with this correspondence but it will not be possible for it to be dealt with under the formal requirement of this scheme.

5.1 What are the main reasons for petitions to be rejected?

The specific criteria for petitions are set out in section 2.1 of the scheme and general exceptions are set out in section 3 of the scheme. If a petition does not meet these criteria, it will not be considered under the scheme.

Outside the general exceptions, there are several reasons why a petition may not fall within the scheme but the most common examples are:

- the petition statement is not clear.
- the subject matter of the petition is not within the remit of the Council.
- the entries contain incomplete or invalid information such as no full address.
- we are not able to identify that people signing the petition live work or study in Manchester.
- there are not enough valid entries to meet the threshold for an ordinary petition.

5.2 What will happen to petitions that fall outside of the scheme?

The City Solicitor will have discretion to decide whether a petition meets the criteria set out in the scheme or not. If a petition submitted does not fall within the criteria, we will explain the reason why in our acknowledgement letter, and set out what action we will take in response to your submission.

Petitions that fall outside of the criteria of the scheme will be treated as correspondence and sent to the relevant service area for a response. The Head of Service will have discretion and flexibility to decide how to reply to this correspondence so that they are able to take appropriate action to respond to the request.

Section 6 - What do I do if I am not happy with the way my petition was dealt with?

If you are unhappy with the way that your petition has been processed, you can submit a complaint to the Council via the Corporate Complaints Scheme. You can find more guidance at <http://www.manchester.gov.uk/complaints>

Section 7 - Is there anything else I can do to have my say?

Manchester City Council welcomes feedback as this helps us to review and develop the series that we provide. There are a number of other ways that you can have your say including:

- Write to the appropriate head of service or Executive Member
- Contact your local Councillor
- Make a suggestion through the Council's website
- Suggest an item for consideration at a scrutiny committee
- Respond to consultations

Visit the Council's website at www.manchester.gov.uk for more information.

Petition to Manchester City Council – signature sheet

We the undersigned petition the Council to:

Each person signing the petition should provide their name, signature and a home, work or study address that is in the boundaries of Manchester City Council. Any signatures that do not include this information will not be counted.

Name (please print)	Address including postcode if possible (This should be a Manchester based address)	Signature	Live/work/study address (please indicate)

