Petitions from the public

1.0 Paper petitions can be sent to:

Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager
Thanet District Council
PO Box 9
Cecil Street
CT9 1XZ

Petitions can also be presented to a meeting of the Council. Dates and times can be found at www.thanet.gov.uk

This scheme sets out thresholds for responding to petitions, as follows:

1. Ordinary petitions - those petitions signed by 25 or more petitioners but fewer than 650 will be presented to Council and referred to the Cabinet or another appropriate committee without debate, for report to the Council within three ordinary meetings.

2. Petitions signed by 650 or more petitioners, but fewer than 1,000, will be considered at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel, and, the petitioner will have the option to have a named officer attend the meeting to give evidence.

3. Petitions signed by 1,000 or more petitioners will be debated at a meeting of Council, unless:

(a) the petitioner has already exercised the above option to request that a named officer attends, in which case it will be considered at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel or

(b) the petition relates to an issue for which the executive has responsibility and Council decides, following presentation of the petition, to refer it to Cabinet without debate. In such a case, the person who presents the petition at the Council meeting will be able to re-present the petition at the subsequent meeting of Cabinet at which the petition is considered.

1.1 What are the guidelines for submitting a petition?

Petitions submitted to the Council must include:

- A clear and concise statement covering the subject of the petition. It should state what action the petitioners wish the Council to take
- The name and address and signature of any person supporting the petition.

A petition proforma for paper petitions that will help you to collect the correct information is available to download on the Council's website at www.thanet.gov.uk.

If a petition has 25 or more, but less than 650, signatories, it must be submitted 10 working days in advance of a Council meeting in order for it to be considered at that meeting.

If a petition has 650 or more, but less than 1,000, signatories or has 1,000 or more signatories but requests that an officer gives evidence at an Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting it must be submitted to the Council at least 25 working days in advance of a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel in order for it to be considered at that meeting.

If a petition has 1,000 or more signatures and does not request that an officer gives evidence to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting it must be submitted at least 25 working days in advance of a Council meeting in order for it to be considered at that meeting.

If the deadlines are not met in paragraphs above, the petition submitted will be not be considered until the subsequent meeting of either Council or the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (as appropriate).

To be valid Petitions must be accompanied by contact details, including an address, for the petition organiser. This is the person we will contact to explain how we will respond to the petition. The contact details of the petition organiser will not be disclosed. If the petition does not identify a petition organiser, we will contact signatories to the petition to agree who should act as the petition organiser.

Petitions which the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel consider to be vexatious, abusive, otherwise inappropriate or substantially the same as one already received within the preceding twelve months will not be accepted and the reasons for this will be explained in our acknowledgement of the petition. The test that should apply in such circumstances would be the same as that used for Freedom of Information requests i.e. 'Is the request likely to cause distress, disruption or irritation without any proper or justified cause'.

In addition if the petition applies to a planning or licensing application, these may be rejected by the Monitoring Officer alone. ~~In addition~~Also if the petition is a statutory petition (for example requesting a referendum on having an elected mayor), or on a matter where there is already an existing right of appeal, such as Council tax banding and non-domestic rates, other procedures apply. Further information on all these procedures and how you can express your views is available here www.thanet.gov.uk.

Further to the above, the Monitoring Officer will also reject a petition if the matter has already been or is currently subject to an existing consultation exercise. In such a case the petition will be forwarded to the officer responsible for that consultation exercise and considered as part of that process.

If the Council receives a petition that is rejected because it is substantially similar to, or counter to, one already received and the original petition has not yet been presented to a Council meeting, then Democratic Services will ensure that the Council meeting that considers the original petition will be made aware of the existence of the rejected petition.

If the Council receives a petition, but it is rejected for any of the reasons outlined within this scheme, then the grounds for rejecting that petition must be reported to the next available meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

In the period immediately before an election or referendum we may need to deal with your petition differently – if this is the case we will explain the reasons and discuss

the revised timescale which will apply. If a petition does not follow the guidelines set out above, the Council may decide not to do anything further with it. In that case, we will write to you to explain the reasons.

1.2 What will the Council do when it receives my petition?

An acknowledgement will be sent to the petition organiser within 10 working days of receiving the petition. It will let them know what we plan to do with the petition and when they can expect to hear from us again. The petition will also be published on our website

If we can do what your petition asks for, the acknowledgement may confirm that we have taken the action requested and the petition will be closed. If the petition needs more investigation, we will tell you the steps we plan to take. Otherwise, if the petition can be presented at a Council or Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting because it falls into one of the categories described in the introduction to this scheme, we will advise you of the date of the meeting, where the meeting will take place, and what you can expect to happen at the meeting.

Further, if your petition has 1,000 or more signatures and relates to an issue for which the executive (Cabinet) has responsibility, we will let you know. Council is unable to take a decision on something that is the responsibility of the executive and may, therefore, decide, following presentation of the petition at the Council meeting, to refer the petition to Cabinet with or without debate. If the petition is referred to Cabinet without debate, you will be able to re-present the petition at the subsequent meeting of Cabinet at which the petition is considered. We will inform you of the date of that Cabinet meeting and what you can expect to happen when you attend to make your presentation.

We will not take action on any petition which we consider to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate as determined above.

When we receive a paper petition we will inform relevant Ward Councillor(s) if it is about a specific issue relevant to one or more Wards, or if your petition affects the whole of Thanet then we will inform all of our Councillors.

1.3 How will the Council respond to petitions?

Our 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:

- taking the action requested in the petition
- considering the petition at a committee meeting
- holding an inquiry into the matter
- undertaking research into the matter
- holding a public meeting
- holding a consultation
- holding a meeting with petitioners

- referring the petition for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel*
- writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition
- requiring a Senior Officer to attend a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel to give evidence*
- Holding a debate at that full Council meeting

* The Overview and Scrutiny Panel is a committee of Councillors who are primarily responsible for scrutinising the work of the Council in other words, the overview and scrutiny panel has the power to hold the Council's decision makers to account.

In addition to these steps, the Council will consider all the specific actions it can potentially take on the issues highlighted in a petition.

If your petition is about something over which the Council has no direct control (for example the local railway or hospital) we will consider making representations on behalf of the community to the relevant body. The Council works with a large number of local partners and where possible will work with these partners to respond to your petition. If we are not able to do this for any reason (for example if what the petition calls for conflicts with Council policy), then we will set out the reasons for this to you. You can find more information on the services for which the Council is responsible at www.thanet.gov.uk .

If your petition is about something that a different Council is responsible for we will give consideration to what the best method is for responding to it. This might consist of simply forwarding the petition to the other Council, but could involve other steps. In any event we will always notify you of the action we have taken.

The Council will publish on its website the results of petitions with 25 or more signatories.

Total time devoted to the consideration of Petitions at any single Council meeting will not exceed 30 minutes in total. If there are insufficient petitions to fill the time allocated then Council business shall proceed automatically.

The order of reports on petitions received shall be printed within the agenda papers in the order in which they were received by the Council.

1.4 Smaller Petitions

If a petition has 25 or more, but less than 650, signatories it will be presented to Council and referred to the Cabinet or another appropriate committee without debate, for report to the Council within three ordinary meetings. The report will include the number of signatories providing a Thanet address and the number providing an outside of Thanet address.

The petition organiser will be offered three minutes to present the petition at the meeting.

1.5 Officer evidence

If your petition contains 650 or more, but less than 1,000, signatures, or contains 1,000 or more signatures and specifically requests officer evidence, the Chief Executive, Director, Head of Service or 3rd tier Manager will give evidence at a public meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

The petition organiser will be offered five minutes to present the petition at the meeting and the petition will then be discussed by Councillors. The accompanying report will include the number of signatories providing a Thanet address and the number providing an outside of Thanet address.

You should be aware that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel may decide that it would be more appropriate for another officer to give evidence instead of any officer named in the petition. The Panel may also decide to call the relevant Councillor Portfolio Holder to attend the meeting. Panel members will ask the questions at this meeting, but you will be able to suggest questions to the chair of the committee by contacting the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel up to three working days before the meeting. Confirmation of an officer giving evidence at a public meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel will also be published on our website.

When the Overview and Scrutiny Panel considers a petition it will make a report back to the next available (ordinary) Council meeting.

1.6 Full Council debates

If a petition contains 1,000 or more signatures it will be debated by the Council unless it falls into the categories described at paragraphs (a) and (b) below. The report will include the number of signatories providing a Thanet address and the number providing an outside of Thanet address.

This means that the issue raised in the petition will be discussed at a meeting which all Councillors can attend. Council will endeavour to consider the petition at the meeting following receipt of a petition, although on some occasions this may not be possible and consideration will then take place at the following meeting.

The petition organiser will be offered five minutes to present the petition at the meeting and the petition will then be discussed by Councillors.

Council will then decide how to respond to the petition at that meeting. They may decide to take the action the petition requests, not to take the action requested for reasons put forward in the debate, or to commission further investigation into the matter, for example by a relevant committee. Where the issue is one on which the Council executive are required to make the final decision, the Council will decide whether to make recommendations to inform that decision. The petition organiser will receive written confirmation of this decision. This confirmation will also be published on our website.

Exceptions:

(a) if a petition with 1,000 or more signatures asks for a senior Council officer to give evidence at a public meeting, it will be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel, as described at Clause 1.5 above;

(b) If the petition with 1,000 or more signatures relates to an issue for which the executive (Cabinet) has responsibility, it may following presentation be referred by Council to Cabinet without debate.

1.7 Re-presentation of petitions at meetings of Cabinet

If a petition with 1,000 or more signatures that relates to an issue for which the executive (Cabinet) has responsibility is referred by Council to Cabinet without debate, the person who presents the petition at the meeting of Council will be able to re-present it at the subsequent meeting of Cabinet at which it is considered and will have up to five minutes to do so.

1.8 What can I do if I feel my petition has not been dealt with properly?

If you feel that we have not dealt with your petition properly, the petition organiser has the right to request that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel review the steps that the Council has taken in response to your petition. It is helpful to everyone, and can improve the prospects for a review if the petition organiser gives a short explanation of the reasons why the Council's response is not considered to be adequate.

The Panel will endeavour to consider your request at its next meeting, although on some occasions this may not be possible and consideration will take place at the following meeting. Should the Panel determine we have not dealt with your petition, it may use any of its powers to deal with the matter. These powers include instigating an investigation, making recommendations to the Council executive and arranging for the matter to be considered at a meeting of the full Council.

Once the appeal has been considered the petition organiser will be informed of the results within five working days. The results of the review will also be published on our website.

2.0 E Petitions

The council welcomes e-petitions which are created and submitted through our website www.thanet.gov.uk. E-petitions must follow the same guidelines as paper petitions as outlined above. The petition organiser will need to provide us with their name and email address.

You will also need to decide how long you would like your petition to be open for signing.

When you create an e-petition, it may take five working days before it is published online. This is because we have to check that the content of your petition is suitable before it is made available for the public to sign. If we feel we cannot publish your petition for some reason, we will contact you within this time to explain why this is the case. You will then be able to change and resubmit your petition if you wish.

When an e-petition has closed for signing, it will automatically be submitted to Democratic Services In the same way as a paper petition, you will receive an acknowledgement within 10 working days. It will let you know what we plan to do with the petition and when you can expect to hear from us again.
If you would like to present your e-petition to a meeting of the council, please contact Democratic Services and they will advise you how to do this.

If your e-petition reaches one of the Council's thresholds as set out in para 1.0 above, we will inform the relevant Ward Councillor(s) if it is about a specific issue relevant to one or more Wards, or if your petition affects the whole of Thanet then we will inform all of our Councillors.

2.1 How do I 'sign' an e-petition?

You can see all the e-petitions currently available for signature at www.thanet.gov.uk.

When you sign an e-petition you will be asked to provide your name, postal address and a valid email address. When you have submitted this information you will be sent an email to the email address you have provided. This email will include a link which you must click on in order to confirm the email address is valid. Once this step is complete your 'signature' will be added to the petition. People visiting the e-petition will be able to see your name in the list of those who have signed it, but your contact details will not be visible.

2.2 Can I run an e-petition and a paper petition at the same time?

Yes, you can run an e-petition and a paper at the same time, but there are a number of rules that you must adhere to.

The clear and concise statement covering the subject of the petition stating what action the petitioners wish the Council to take, often known as the "petition prayer", must be identical for both your e-petition and paper petition. If they are not then they would be treated as separate petitions.

The end date of your e-petition and the date that you submit your paper petition must the same, if not then they would be treated as separate petitions.

It is important to note that any petition treated as "separate" because of failure to comply with the above two rules would almost certainly be ruled out on the "substantially similar" to a previous petition rule outlined in paragraph 1.1 of this scheme.

The number of signatories to both the e-petition and to the paper petition would then be reported separately but within the same report to either a Council meeting or a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel. The Council will take a course of action based on the largest threshold met by either petition.

For example, if the Council received an e-petition with 250 signatures and an accompanying paper petition with 1,500 then the Council would treat the petition as reaching the threshold for a debate at Council. The report to Council would state the number of signatories to both the e-petition and the paper petition, but it would not add them together.