New Forest
DISTRICT COUNCIL

PETITIONS SCHEME

1. PETITIONS

The Council welcomes petitions from people who live, work or study in the area. We recognise that petitions are one way in which people can let us know their concerns. All petitions sent or presented to the Council will receive an acknowledgement from the Council within 10 working days of receipt. This acknowledgement will set out what we plan to do with the petition. We will treat something as a petition if it is identified as being a petition, or if it seems to us that it is intended to be a petition, and is signed by at least 10 people who live, work, or study in the area.

The Council encourages members of the public to create and sign petitions online, by following this link to the Council's e-petitions page:-
https://democracy.newforest.gov.uk/mgEPetitionListDisplay.aspx?bcr=1

Paper petitions may be sent to:-
The Service Manager – Democratic and Support Services
New Forest District Council,
Appletree Court,
Beaulieu Road,
Lyndhurst, SO43 7PA

Petitions that contain the required number of signatures as set out in paragraph 5 below can also be presented to a meeting of the Council. These meetings take place approximately every 2 months, dates and times can be found on the Council's Meetings Calendar. If you would like to present your petition to the Council, or would like your councillor or someone else to present it on your behalf, please contact a member of the Democratic Services team on 023 8028 5072, or by emailing Democratic@nfdc.gov.uk at least 10 working days before the meeting and they will provide you with guidance.

2. WHAT ARE 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. These should be people who live, work or study in the area.

Petitions should 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 placed on our website. 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 are considered to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate will not be accepted. 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 timescales 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.

3. 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. It will also be published on Petitions Received.

If we can do what your petition asks for, the acknowledgment may confirm that we have taken the action requested and the petition will be closed. If the petition has enough signatures to trigger a Council debate, or a senior officer giving evidence (see paragraph 6), then the acknowledgement will confirm this and tell you when and where the meeting will take place. If the petition needs more investigation, we will tell you the steps we plan to take.

If the petition applies to a planning or licensing application, 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.

We will not take action on any petition which we consider to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate and will explain the reasons for this in our acknowledgement of the petition.

To ensure that people know what we are doing in response to the petitions we receive, the details of all the petitions submitted to us will be published, unless it is considered inappropriate to do so.

4. 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:

a. taking the action requested in the petition
b. considering the petition at a council meeting
c. holding an inquiry into the matter
d. undertaking research into the matter
e. holding a public meeting
f. holding a consultation
g. holding a meeting with petitioners
h. referring the petition for consideration by the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Panel*
i. calling a referendum
j. writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition

* Overview and Scrutiny Panels are committees of councillors who are responsible for scrutinising the work of the Council - in other words, they have the power to hold the Council's decision-makers to account.

If your petition is about something over which the Council has no direct control (for example the local railway or hospital) we may 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.

If your petition is about something that a different council is responsible for we will consider 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.

5. FULL COUNCIL DEBATES

If a petition contains more than 1,700 signatures (approximately 1% of the population of the District) it will be debated by the full Council unless it is a petition asking for a senior officer to give evidence at a public meeting. This means that the issue raised in the petition will be discussed at a meeting which all councillors can attend. The Council will endeavour to consider the petition at its next meeting, although on some occasions this may not be possible and consideration will then take place at the following meeting. The petition organiser will be given

5 minutes to present the petition at the meeting and the petition will then be discussed by councillors for a maximum of 15 minutes. The Council will decide how to respond to the petition at this 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 in to the matter, for example by a relevant committee. Where the issue is one on which the Cabinet is required to make the final decision (the Cabinet is responsible for the executive functions of the Council), the Council will refer the matter to the Cabinet. The Council will decide whether to make recommendations to the Cabinet to inform that decision. The petition organiser will receive written confirmation of this decision. This confirmation will also be published on our website.

6. OFFICER EVIDENCE

Your petition may ask for a senior council officer to give evidence at a public meeting about something for which the officer is responsible as part of their job. For example, your petition may ask a senior council officer to explain progress on an issue, or to explain the advice given to elected members to enable them to make a particular decision.

If your petition contains at least 850 signatures (approximately 0.5% of the population) and gives grounds for your request (which must relate to the discharge of functions for which the officer is responsible), the relevant senior officer will give evidence at a public meeting of the relevant *Overview and Scrutiny Panel. Senior staff who can be called to give evidence are the Council's Chief Executive, the Strategic Director or the Service Manager as considered appropriate by the Chairman of the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

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 a relevant councillor to attend the meeting. Councillors will ask the questions at this meeting, but you will be able to suggest questions to the chairman of the Panel by contacting the chairman up to three working days before the meeting.

(*Overview and Scrutiny Panels are committees of councillors who are responsible for scrutinising the work of the Council - in other words, they have the power to hold the Council's decision-makers to account.)

7. 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 a relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel reviews 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 relevant 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 adequately, it may use any of its powers to deal with the matter. These powers include instigating an investigation, making recommendations to the council executive (Cabinet) 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 5 working days. The results of the review will also be published on our website.