

Business Support and Digital Overview and Scrutiny Committee

20 June 2024

Annual Review of the Council's Petitions Scheme

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Summary

This report provides an annual review of the Council's Petitions Scheme.

1. Recommendations

- 1.1. The Committee is asked to note the annual review of the Council's Petitions Scheme.

2. Budget and policy framework

- 2.1. The Petitions Scheme forms part of the Council's Constitution and is attached as Appendix B to the report.

3. Background

- 3.1. Full Council adopted its current Petition Scheme on 25 November 2010 in response to provisions in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. The Act placed a new duty on local authorities to respond to all petitions and to establish a scheme for handling petitions including provision of a facility for electronic petitions (e-petitions).
- 3.2. With effect from 1 April 2012 the provisions relating to petitions in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 were repealed by Section 46 of the Localism Act 2011. The Government considered this would provide more discretion for local authorities to decide how to approach petitions locally. Full Council was advised of this at its meeting on 26 July 2012 and took the view that no change was required to Medway's Petition Scheme as it was working effectively.
- 3.3. The Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report reviewing e-petitions on 30 January 2018 and recommended to Full Council to consider an amendment to the Council's Petition Scheme to accept e-petitions

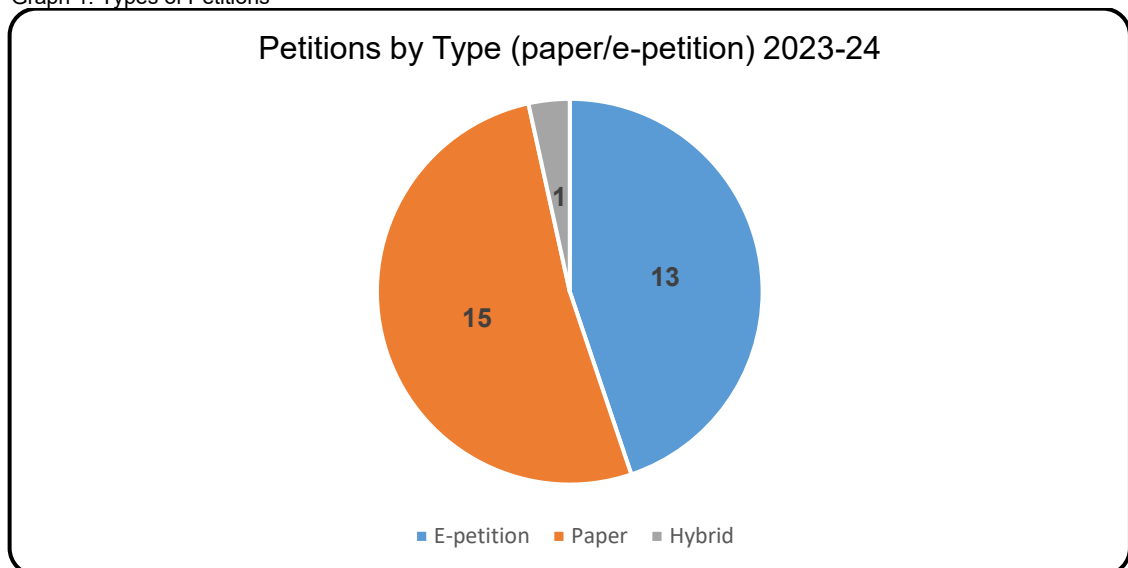
which did not include all of the personal details currently required by the scheme.

- 3.4. Full Council considered this recommendation on 26 April 2018 and resolved only to accept e-petitions which fully comply with the existing requirements of Medway Council's constitution, i.e. where an e-petition hosted on an alternative platform is received by the Council, the petition will only be accepted when the Council is able to see a name, postal address, a valid postcode and email address for the lead petitioner as well as each signatory.
- 3.5. The Committee has previously considered annual reviews of the Petitions Scheme for the 2021 and 2022 calendar years; this report covers the period 1 January 2023 – 31 March 2024.

4. Annual review

- 4.1. Information on the number of petitions received each year, their subject matter, the Council's response and the outcome of the review is published on the Council's website. The information available on the website dates back to 2011 (following Full Council approval of the current scheme at the end of 2010) and is regularly updated. This information with reference to January 2023 – 31 March 2024 is set out in full at Appendix A to the report.
- 4.2. 29 valid petitions were received during the period, compared to 19 in the 2022 calendar year. 15 were received via paper petitions, 13 were received via e-petitions and 1 petition was a mixture of both.

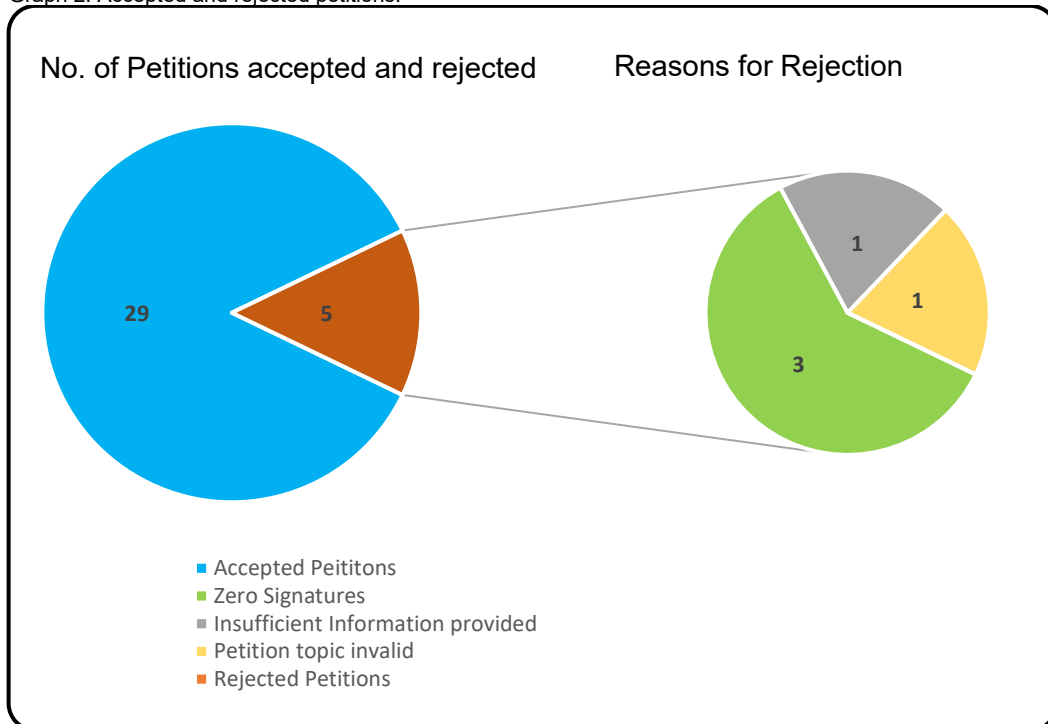
Graph 1: Types of Petitions



- 4.3. Five petitions were rejected in the period. One request to host an e-petition on the Council's website were not accepted as it related to a matter where there was already an existing right of appeal in place. One petition was not accepted because not all of the required information was included in the petition. The Lead petitioner was contacted and further information requested, however, no further response had been received. Another three e-

petitions did not progress as they attracted no signatures. They were therefore referred to the relevant Directorate as service enquiries. The graph below highlights, rejected petitions and the reason for the rejection.

Graph 2: Accepted and rejected petitions.



- 4.4. Members will also note that a number of petitions were submitted for which other formal processes were in place, specifically planning or licensing applications. Such petitions were dealt with under those other formal processes instead of the Petitions Scheme. 4 of the 29 petitions received in 2023 fell into this category, compared to 3 of the 19 in the 2022 calendar year. All of the petitions received under the petition scheme were requests relating to the Place Directorate.
- 4.5. In total over 2,800 signatures were received during the period. Graph 3 shows the distribution of signatures for petitions. There were 10 petitions in the period which attracted over 100 petitions, including three e-petitions.

Graph 3: Number of signatures for petitions



- 4.6. Once a petition has been received by the Council, the lead petitioner will receive a response from the relevant Directorate. Where a lead petitioner is dissatisfied with the response from the Directorate, the matter can be referred to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee for further consideration.
- 4.7. 25 petitions received responses from the relevant Directorate during the period. However, four lead petitioners did state they were dissatisfied with the responses that they received, compared to seven in 2022, and these were therefore referred to, and considered by, the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as set out in Appendix A. The three further reviews were heard by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees in the period 1 January 2023 – 31 March 2024 following requests that had been made in the previous year.

5. Outcomes from Petitions

- 5.1. The Council has undertaken to complete a number of actions following petitions from residents either through responses to the petition or via a referral to the relevant Committee. Below are some outcomes from petitions received during the period.
- 5.2. In January 2023 the Council was asked to consider a petition regarding the A230 Maidstone Road, Chatham between the Ridgeway and A229 Junction. it was requested that the design of a traffic island and the associated feasibility study should be treated as a priority.
- 5.2.1. The original response from the Council explained that it was unable to propose significant alterations on safety grounds but that engineers would review the signing and lining at the location with the aim of seeing if any improvements could be made. Ultimately some improvements were made to verge markers and lining. Following a referral to the Regeneration, Culture and Environment Committee a scheme was instigated to design a pedestrian refuge island. This is a live scheme and a pedestrian refuge is under consideration.

- 5.3. In September we agreed to undertake a review of the safety of the Ratcliffe Highway, St Mary Hoo in the vicinity of Shakespeare Farm Road. A separate petition regarding Ratcliffe highway was considered by the RCE Committee in December and the Committee asked officers to undertake a speed survey on the Highway.
- 5.3.1. Visibility improvements and warning signs were arranged for Shakespeare Farm Road junction and the RCE Committee resulted in the request for speed surveys, which were duly carried out.
- 5.4. In May 2023 a petition was submitted which requested double yellow lines to be installed at the junction of Cavendish Road and Cecil Road, Rochester. Following careful consideration of the petition this was added to the work programme for 2023/24 and double yellow lines have now been installed as requested.
- 5.5. In August 2023 following receipt of a petition the Parking Team undertook to review parking restrictions in Carpeaux Close, Chatham during the second half of 2023/24 or the first half of the current year. The residents were consulted, and parking restrictions have been reviewed and amending parking restrictions from permit holders 8am -7pm Monday-Saturday to permit holders only this change is programmed for the work for 2024-25.

6. Risk management

- 6.1. The publication of clear arrangements for handling petitions ensures transparency and consistency of approach.
- 6.2. Clear advice is set out on the Council's website strongly advising anyone wishing to start an e-petition to use the Council's e-petition facility to ensure the petition meets the requirements of the Council's Petitions Scheme. A template for paper petitions is also available to download from the Council's website for the same reason.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1. The cost of administering and processing petitions is met from within existing budgets.

8. Legal implications

- 8.1. Since the repeal of the provisions relating to petitions in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 local authorities have discretion to put in place locally determined arrangements for handling petitions. Any changes to the Council's Petition Scheme would require approval by full Council as the scheme forms part of the Council's Constitution.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Summary of petitions 1 January 2023 – 31 March 2024

Appendix B – Council Petition Scheme

Background papers

None