

Cabinet

7 April 2026

Review of the Council's Petitions Scheme – Addendum Report

1. Business Support and Digital Overview and Scrutiny Committee
 - 1.1. The report was previously considered by the Business Support and Digital Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 26 March 2026. The draft minutes of this discussion and officer response to a recommendation made by the Committee are set out below.
 - 1.2. The Head of Democratic Services introduced the report, he highlighted the proposed changes to the scheme which included acceptance of e-petitions from third party websites. He added that the scheme would also be considered by Cabinet and Full Council.
 - 1.3. The following issues were discussed:
 - 1.3.1. **Third Party websites** – A Member commented that some third-party websites reflected particular political views and provided push notifications promoting petitions which contained factually incorrect information. He asked whether the purpose of the change was to increase choice for the public or a decision made by the administration to promote a political stance. The Head of Democratic Services stated that the request to review the scheme had been made by the Committee in June 2025, the purpose of allowing petitions from third party websites was to widen choice, though it was for Members to consider whether this would be supported.
 - 1.3.2. A number of Members welcomed the proposed changes to the scheme, it was commented that the addition of third-party websites was a sensible and helpful way to expand choice for the public and enable more engagement with the public. A Member commented that she had previously assisted a group of residents to organise a petition which was then refused, so anything which made the process easier for the public was positive.
 - 1.3.3. A Member commented that he believed the proposals exposed the Council to frivolous national and international talking points instead of issues of local concern and further consideration was required to protect the Council from this risk.

- 1.3.4. **Petition thresholds** – The Committee discussed whether the threshold for petitions to be considered by Full Council and Overview and Scrutiny of 5% and 2% of signatures of Medway’s population was too high a bar. A Member commented that the number of signatures required for a petition to reach Full Council could only be met by petitions which received national attention. The Head of Democratic Services stated that that the threshold for review by Full Council and Overview and Scrutiny had remained at 5% and 2% of Medway’s population since the scheme was introduced in 2010. It was proposed that the Committee provide a comment to Council for a review of thresholds in 12 months, and this was agreed. In response to a question whether children were included in the population figure, it was confirmed that the population threshold included all Medway residents.
- 1.3.5. **Lead petitioner** - A Member commented that the scheme proposed if the lead petitioner was not known then the first signature would be contacted as the lead petitioner, but it was also stated that that the lead petitioner had to be a Medway resident, further clarity was sought by the Committee whether this meant the lead petitioner could be someone from outside the area. The Head of Democratic Services stated that the lead petitioner must be a Medway resident, in practice difficulties regarding the identification of the lead petitioner only arose for paper petitions. He added that the current scheme did not restrict all signatories to Medway residents, signatories could be from anywhere, however, the change ensured that lead petitioners would be Medway residents.
- 1.3.6. A Member commented that petitions were a good way to engage residents, however, there was a risk that the Council would be overwhelmed with petitions. The Head of Democratic Services stated that when petitions came in the Service checked that they met the criteria and ensured there was a response from the relevant department, this was the end of the process in most cases. In the event of the lead petitioner being unhappy with the outcome of the petition, they could request a review from the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This meant that all petitions received a response and petitioners had the right to request a review by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee independent of the thresholds for consideration by the Full Council and Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.3.7. **Security** – A Member proposed a comment to Cabinet that the Council give further consideration to enhanced security for e-petitions on the Council system. This would include a captcha to ensure that all signatories to a Council e-petition were valid. The Head of Democratic Services undertook to discuss this with the Council’s software provider.
- 1.4. **Decisions:**
- a) The Committee considered the revised petition scheme as set out in Appendix B to the report and submitted comments to Cabinet as set out in the minutes.

- b) The Committee requested Cabinet consider adding a review of signature thresholds contained within the scheme a year from final approval of the new scheme.
- c) The Committee requested Cabinet consider whether further ICT security measures such as a captcha be added to the Council's e-petition system to enhance security.

2. Head of Democratic Services' comments

- 2.1. With regards to the recommendation to Cabinet regarding further ICT security measures such as a captcha being added to the Council's e-petition system to enhance security, officers have contacted the software supplier on this matter and an update will be provided once the supplier has provided a response.

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