

BLAENAU GWENT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
PROTOCOL FOR PUBLIC PETITIONS

1. Background

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council wants to hear from people who live, work and study in the area about the things that matter to them.

Petitions are one way for people to let us know their concerns.

2. Who should a Petition be sent to?

You can send petitions electronically to:-
Committee.services@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

or present petitions to:-

The Head of Democratic Services
Democratic Services Section
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
Municipal Offices
Civic Centre
Ebbw Vale
NP23 6XB

or contact the Democratic Services Section on 01495 356139 to make arrangements to hand in a petition.

When the Council is going to make a key decision there is often a period of public consultation beforehand - if your petition is relevant to a particular decision it helps us if you can submit it during the consultation period (if you send it in later it can make it harder for us to take it into account).

Before submitting a petition you should first check with your local councillor or with the Council to see if the Council is already acting on your concerns and that the Council is the most appropriate body to receive your petition as sometimes your petition may be more appropriate for consideration by another public body.

We will treat something as a petition if it says it is a petition, or if it seems to us that it is meant to be one.

3. What should a Petition include?

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 (or stop taking)
- the name and address and individual signature of any person supporting the petition

Petitions should be accompanied by contact details, including an address, for the petition organiser. This is the person we will contact to explain what we will do in response to the petition. If the petition does not identify a petition organiser, we will contact the first signature on the petition to agree who should act as the petition organiser.

Please tell us if the petition has been sent to anyone else as well as the County Borough Council.

4. What happens next?

When the Council receives a petition we will send an acknowledgment within 10 working days of receipt.

The acknowledgment will set out what we plan to do in response to the petition, how you may be involved and when you can expect to hear from us again.

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

- holding an inquiry into the matter
- undertaking research into the matter
- holding a consultation
- holding a meeting with petitioners
- considering the petition at a council meeting
- considering the petition in a scrutiny committee

If we decide to do what your petition asks for, the acknowledgment may confirm what we are going to do and when we will do it.

5. How we categorise petitions

There are three types of category that we apply for petitions:-

5.1 Petitions

These must be signed by at least 10 people but the Council will use its discretion where there are fewer than 10 signatories in cases where there is clear local support for action (e.g. where the residents of a small community have petitioned for traffic calming measures).

5.2 Petitions which warrant evidence & debate at a Scrutiny Committee

If your petition contains at least 1,500 signatures, the relevant senior officer will give evidence at a public meeting of the relevant overview and scrutiny committee.

You should be aware that the Scrutiny committee may decide that it would be more appropriate for another officer to give evidence instead of any specific officer named in the petition - for instance if the named officer has changed jobs. The committee may also decide to call the relevant Executive member to attend the meeting.

Committee members will ask the questions at this meeting, but we will let you know the specific arrangements for the meeting and how you may be involved. The Scrutiny Committee will make a report on its findings which may include recommendations for action to the Executive Committee, or the Council.

5.3 Petitions requiring full Council debate

If a petition is signed by more than 5,000 people it will be debated by the full council (unless it is a petition asking for a senior council officer to give evidence at a public meeting). This means that the subject raised in the petition will be discussed at a meeting which all County Councillors can attend.

The council will usually 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.

We will let you know about the specific arrangements for the debate and how you may be involved.

The council may decide the response to the petition at this meeting or suggest what other steps should be taken. Where the council Executive Committee has to make the final decision on the response to the petition, the council may make recommendations to inform this decision.

5.4 Petitions relating to Planning Applications

In addition to the three types of petition referred to in this policy (paragraphs 5.1 – 5.3) the Council recognises that petitions are also submitted in support of or to object

to planning applications. For the avoidance of doubt, those petitions are not covered by this policy. Petitions submitted to the Development Management Team will continue to be a material consideration in the planning process and inform the decision whether to approve or refuse planning permission. However, they are not subject to the protocols outlined in this document.

6. Are there any petitions which the Council will not accept?

Where a person or organisation (or someone on their behalf) has submitted a petition which is the same or substantially the same as one submitted within the previous 12 months.

Employee matters will not be dealt with through the petitions process as they will be addressed via existing internal frameworks.

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, the council may decide not to do anything further with it. In this case, we will write to you to explain the reasons.

Petitions which we consider to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate are not acceptable.

7. How will the Council respond to petitions?

If your petition is about something over which the council has no direct control we will consider making representations on behalf of the community to the relevant body. Where possible will work with these partners to respond to your petition. If we are not able to do this for any reason, then we will explain this to you.

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.

So 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 on our website, together with the acknowledgment and notification of the response (except in cases where this would be inappropriate).