

## **ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL PETITIONS POLICY, revised August 2023**

Essex County Council (ECC) values the opinion of its citizens. Responding to petitions is a way of promoting engagement and democracy. Under our policy, a petition may be raised by any person who lives or works within Essex to request that:

- ECC takes action or ceases taking action.
- A matter be looked at by the Chairman of the ECC Scrutiny Board.
- There be a debate at ECC Full Council or other ECC public meeting.

The person who starts a petition is known as the 'lead petitioner'. ECC recommends that, before starting a petition, the lead petitioner makes contact with their local Essex County Councillor. You can find out details of your County Councillor [here](#). Your County Councillor can tell you whether the Council is already acting on the matter and if the County Council is the most appropriate body to receive the petition. If the petition relates to another local authority or public body, they may suggest you contact them.

In all cases once ECC has received the petition, the lead petitioner will receive an acknowledgment and a subsequent email or letter informing them what action is to be taken within 20 days of its receipt.

### **There are various ways you can submit a petition:**

1. You can direct a petition directly to the service responsible. If, for example, your petition is about the roads in a particular part of Essex County Council's jurisdiction, you can send it to the Highways Service at County Hall.
2. You can submit a petition as part of a formal consultation exercise. In this case it must be received before the date that the consultation closes, or it may not be included in the consultation – but it will still be treated in accordance with this policy.
3. You can start or sign a [petition online on the ECC website](#). A copy of the response a petition on an ECC website will be sent to everyone who signed the petition online. If you start a petition online on the ECC website it will be open for no more than three months, the lead petitioner must decide on a time limit within this timeframe.
4. You can attach a scanned copy of your petition to an email to the ECC service directly or to [Democratic.services@essex.gov.uk](mailto:Democratic.services@essex.gov.uk)
5. You can submit a paper petition directly to: Head of Democracy and Transparency, Democratic Services, Essex County Council, County Hall, Market Road, Chelmsford, CM1 1LX.
6. You can ask your local County Councillor to submit your petition on your behalf. The Councillor may be able to present the petition at Full Council. You can [find the contact details of your County Councillor](#) on our website.
7. You can start a petition using another website or online resource, but ECC can only act upon a petition when it is closed and submitted to us. We cannot act upon on-going or 'rolling' petitions nor can we monitor or

intervene in these external petitions. Furthermore, if an external site is raising a petition, we will only consider it valid if, once submitted, we agree that it conforms to the principles of this policy.

### **What should a petition look like?**

If you wish to design and print your own paper petition, remember it is important that people understand what they are signing. Your petition should include:

- the name and contact details of the lead petitioner providing it is an Essex address;
- a clear, concise statement covering the subject of the petition;
- a statement explaining what action the petitioners wish ECC to take which must be within the criteria set out at the start of this policy; and
- the name, address and signature or printed name of the persons supporting the petition.

If a petition does not follow these broad guidelines, ECC may decide not to do anything further with it. If that happens, the lead petitioner will be provided with an explanation.

A suggested format is shown as an appendix 1 to this policy. You are welcome to use this version.

### **Who can sign a petition?**

The Council will accept a petition if it is signed by people who live, work or study within the administrative boundaries of Essex. A person signing should normally be at least 12 years of age and the lead petitioner must be over 18 years of age.

### **How many people need to sign a petition?**

To trigger any action under this policy a petition must have a minimum of 10 signatures.

### **What will the Council do with petitions?**

A petition with 10 signatures or more will always be acknowledged by email or letter to the lead petitioner within 10 working days of receipt. This acknowledgment will usually be from the service responsible but will always advise what we will be doing with the petition.

What action is taken will largely be determined by how many signatures there are.

- **Petitions signed by between 10 and 1,999 people:** A relevant Senior Officer will provide a written response to the Lead Petitioner. The Cabinet Member responsible may choose to respond instead.
- **Petitions signed by between 2,000 and 7,499 people:** The relevant Executive Director will provide a written response to the Lead Petitioner. The Cabinet Member responsible may choose to respond instead.
- **Petitions signed by between 7,500 and 13,999 people:** The relevant Cabinet Member will provide a written response to the lead petitioner.
- **Petitions signed by 14,000 or more people:** The relevant Cabinet Member will provide a written response to the lead petitioner. If the Cabinet Member does not agree to take the action requested by the petition, then the matter will be considered at a meeting of the Essex Full Council for noting or, if appropriate, debate at a meeting of the Council which is open to the public.

The lead petitioner may also be invited to address the meeting.

- In addition, **any petition of 2,000 signatures or more** will be referred to the Chairman of the relevant Scrutiny Committee of the County Council who will decide how the petition is reported to a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee. If a petition is considered by a Scrutiny Committee the Committee may require a Senior Council Officer or a Cabinet Member to attend a meeting of the relevant Scrutiny Committee for the purpose of considering the matter in public. If the Committee exercises this power, then the lead petitioner will also be invited to attend and may address the meeting.
- **Public Consultations:** If the petition is concerned with a matter that is currently in consultation, then every effort will be made to include it as a response to the consultation, if it is received before the end of the consultation period.

### **Petitions not covered by this scheme.**

The following petitions are not covered by this scheme:

- Those that the Head of Democracy and Transparency considers to be rude, frivolous, offensive, defamatory, scurrilous or vexatious; We will not consider petitions that are:
  - Petitions that contain offensive, intemperate or inappropriately provocative language or which may reasonably be considered to be defamatory.
  - Petitions relating to any individual or the personal circumstances of individual Councillors or employees of the Council or matters that should properly be dealt with under the Council's complaints procedure.
  - Petitions that are substantially the same as an existing petition or one that has been submitted within the last six months.
  - Petitions about any issues or areas for which ECC is not directly responsible.
  - Petitions that relate to any commercial promotion or endorsement of any service, publication or product
  - Petitions that request no action.
  - Petitions that are incomprehensible or where it is difficult to understand the action that is being requested.
  - Petitions without a contactable and identifiable lead petitioner.
  - Petitions relating to any court proceedings.
  - Petitions from employees of Essex County Council where the subject matter relates directly to their employment or immediate area of responsibility or work.
  - Petitions that relate to planning applications, planning policy or licensing matters– for which there are alternative arrangements ([See the ECC website for details](#));

If two or more petitions on the same subject are received at a similar time the lead petitioners may be contacted to determine if the petitions may be merged. Otherwise each petition will be treated separately.

If a petition relates to something which the Council has no direct control or influence an acknowledgement of receipt will still be sent to the lead petitioner. However, the acknowledgement will inform the petitioner that they should re-direct the petition to the body responsible. More information on the services for which the Council is responsible can be found at: [www.essex.gov.uk](http://www.essex.gov.uk).

If the Council decides that a petition does not fall within the scheme, the lead petitioner will be informed, and an explanation will be provided.

**What you can do if you think your petition has not been dealt with in accordance with this policy.**

The lead petitioner should in the first instance seek an informal review by the Monitoring Officer ([monitoring.officer@essex.gov.uk](mailto:monitoring.officer@essex.gov.uk)) who will inform the lead petitioner of any decision arising from the informal review.

Once the formal review has been undertaken the lead petitioner will be informed within seven working days.

**Other routes to raise matters with Essex County Council**

Petitions are not always the best way of raising an issue or making your feelings known. In addition to petitioning there are a variety of other ways in which you can bring a particular issue to our attention. You can contact your County [Councillor](#), speak at a [meeting](#) or contribute to a formal [consultation](#). Further information about how to contact us can be found on our [website](#).

Appendix 1 - suggested petition format (petitions can also be started on the Council's website or on third party websites)

## Petition to Essex County Council

**PURPOSE OF PETITION:** (e.g.) [We, the undersigned object to.../Wish the Council to.../ Wish for the following matter to be debated at a meeting of the Council... ]

**LEAD PETITIONER:** (organiser of the petition) Mr/s Name, Address, email contact, (name of organisation represented (if any) e.g.) Local residents.... Residents' Association name... Neighbourhood Watch...

**If you support this petition please sign below**

Print Name	Address	Signature