

To: Petitions Board

On: 8 November 2021

Report by: Director of Finance and Resources

Heading: Review of Petitions Process

1. Summary

- 1.1 The Council at its meeting held on 13 September 2007 agreed a procedure in relation to the submission of petitions, including parameters for determining valid petitions.
- 1.2 The petitions procedure is part of the Council's commitment to give people a more formal and direct involvement in decision making and to allow them to raise issues with the Council and potentially influence policy on issues which matter to their communities.
- 1.3 The Council originally agreed that the procedure for submission of petitions be reviewed on an annual basis. Following these reviews action plans were developed and implemented and a number of changes made to improve engagement with and participation of the public in the petitions process. The former Audit, Scrutiny and Petitions Board subsequently agreed that the petitions process be reviewed biennially. The previous review was in 2018 and a review should have taken place in 2020. However, this was not undertaken due to the Covid19 Pandemic.
- 1.4 As part of the current review, consultation was undertaken with elected members, senior officers within the Council, community council representatives and members of the public via a questionnaire to obtain feedback to further improve awareness of, access to and participation in the petitions process.

- 1.5 In total 16 responses were received compared with 26 in the previous survey. As a result of the current consultation an action plan has been developed, which forms the Appendix to the report, to address some of the issues raised.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the consultation responses be noted;
- 2.2 That the suggestions for improvement, in particular with regard to publicising the process in a variety of media, be noted;
- 2.3 That the action plan which forms the Appendix to the report be approved; and
- 2.4 That it be noted that the next review of the Petitions process should have been due to take place in 2022 but will now take place in 2023. _

3. Background

- 3.1 The petitions procedure was introduced in 2007 and has been reviewed on a regular basis, following which a number of changes have been made.

4. Consultation

- 4.1 The consultation was based around the undernoted questions.

(a) Are you aware of the Council's petitions process and how could we improve awareness?

From the responses received 68.75% were aware of the procedure compared to .38.46% previously.

(b) How can we improve processing of petitions?

Responses included by having a "tab" or flag on the council's website to take you directly to the relevant page on how to start a petition; more social media coverage; Council needs to make sure information is there for those who need it; without knowing what it is its difficult to suggest ways to improve awareness as I do not know who your target audience is; publicise the outcomes of submitted petitions; give out information to Councillors on outcomes; and greater visibility of process.

(c) Did you find the information about the process helpful, understandable and accessible?

In response to the above, 56.25% found the information about the process helpful, understandable and accessible, which compared favourably with

47.8% from the previous review.

(d) If not, how can we improve the information we make available?

Responses included making it easier to find information on the website; constituents finding the process dense and hard to penetrate even when aware of the process; making available to all Councillors; and the introduction of a prominent Petitions webpage.

(e) Thinking of the overall processing of petitions, how can we improve this

Responses to the above were: -

Actual outcomes so the petitioner is not left frustrated; ask teenagers if they like it; bring road traffic/speeding Petitions to the Infrastructure & Environment Policy Board to speed up decisions; the overall process works, as long as it's clearly stipulated what recommendation are made by the Petitions Board, so the deciding board have all relevant information before them.

(f) Has anything hindered your access to the process?

In relation to this section, respondents indicated that there were difficulties in finding the details and forms on the website, and insufficient information was provided.

Additional comments included the council website is labyrinthine and it is difficult for "occasional" users to navigate and find what they are looking for; too much of current political administration is about diverting reform or change while paying lip service to both. The current committee only exists to ape the Holyrood one and should be re-merged with the Audit and Scrutiny and given a meaningful budget; and open it to public.

5. Next Steps

Analysis of the responses received indicates that raising awareness is required to ensure that the petitions process is more easily understood and accessible.

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – none
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – none
3. **Community/Council Planning** – none
4. **Legal** - none.
5. **Property/Assets** – none
6. **Information Technology** - none
7. **Equality & Human Rights** - The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.
8. **Health & Safety** - none
9. **Procurement** - none
10. **Risk** - none.
11. **Privacy Impact** – none
12. **Climate Risk** - none
13. **Cosla Policy Position** – not applicable

List of Background Papers

Responses to consultation

The foregoing background papers will be retained within Finance and Resources for inspection by the public for the prescribed period of four years from the date of the meeting.

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Suggestions received	Proposed action	Completion date	Previous actions on similar Suggestions
Improve awareness of the Council's Petitions process	Arrange for appropriate publicity in local press and Council publications.	Dec 2021	This has already been done following a previous review but will be repeated
	Arrange to insert a "tab" or flag on the council's website to take you directly to the relevant page on how to start a petition.	Dec 2021	This will be implemented
Outcomes to be notified to the Petitioner	Email and letter to Petitioner following the Board decision together with any follow up action.		This has been implemented
Bring petitions to the Infrastructure & Environment Board to make decisions without delay	This would be a matter for the Administration Group		The role of the petitions board is to consider each petition, listen to the Petitioner, ask questions and take the relevant action for each petition. The options open to it are take no action, in which case the Petitioner will be given the reasons; pass the Petition to the relevant director or policy board to investigate, with or without any specific recommendation; or if the petition relates to another public organisation, pass it on to that organisation with or without any specific recommendation when the Board recommends that a petition be forwarded to a specific Board, it is submitted to the next relevant meeting of the

			relevant board, attaching the report which went to the Petitions Board, the outcome of the petition and any recommendations by the Petitions Board.
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