

CABINET

19 JUNE 2014

REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR OPERATIONS AND ASSETS

PETITIONS

Purpose

To advise members of proposed changes to the Petition Policy which provides for public participation in the democratic process and is a method by which residents can let the Council know their concerns and receive a response in relation thereto.

Recommendations

To approve and publish the Petition Policy operable forthwith as the Scheme for handling paper and electronic petitions submitted by the public to the Council for consideration.

Executive Summary

The Council has always welcomed petitions from the public and in 2009 the then existing legislation required a formal process to be set up to receive petitions including a facility for electronic petitions. This has now been in operation for five years and a review of the Petition Policy was required. Appendix 1 sets out how the authority will respond to petitions which it receives.

The changes whilst in the main housekeeping and a tidying up of sections ensure that the policy correlates with the Constitution thus ensuring that anomalies which existed between the two are corrected. This has resulted in a more streamlined and customer friendly process to deal with a petition. It will provide a better experience and service for users and make participation in the local democratic process more inclusive and available for citizens.

Resource Implications

The costs of setting up an e-petition facility have already been met, and the Council's website can receive electronic petitions, and actions taken on them can be viewed. The administrative costs are absorbed by Legal and Democratic Services.

Legal/Risk Implications

The risks associated with not having a scheme could lead to increased challenge by the public by utilising other methods of democratic participation. The authority has put measures in place to ensure the terms of the policy can be complied with by utilising existing software and publishing provision to submit a web based petition.

Sustainability Implications

It is essential that the authority operates in a manner that is open, transparent, inclusive and embodies good governance. By adopting this revised policy the authority is ensuring public participation can take place now and in the future.

Background Information

There is no longer a statutory duty to provide a petitions scheme, however it has long been recognized as a method to encourage public participation in local issues, and although Section 46 of the Localism Act 2011 repealed Chapter 2 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 and The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (commencement No.3) Order 2010 (the 2009 Act) no longer applies, it would fall short of an open, transparent and inclusive authority's responsibilities to remove this method of public participation.

Equalities Impact

None directly arising.

APPENDIX 1

Petitions Policy

REPORT AUTHOR

If members would like further information or clarification prior to the meeting please contact Jane Hackett, Solicitor to the Council & Monitoring Officer on ext. 258.