

**RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL
REPORT TO
POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE**

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 8 June 2010
 title: The Duty to Respond to Petitions
 submitted by: Chief Executive
 principal author: Michelle Haworth – Principal Policy and Performance Officer

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To inform committee of the new Duty to Respond to Petitions which comes into effect on 15th June 2010 and to seek approval for the elements of the Ribble Valley Petition Scheme that have been modified when tailoring the model scheme to meet our needs.

2 RELEVANCE TO THE COUNCIL'S AMBITIONS AND PRIORITIES:

- Council Ambitions: A Corporate Strategy Objective is:
- Community Objectives:
- Corporate Priorities: To increase participation in communities
- Other Considerations:

3 INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act) aims to reinvigorate local democracy – putting local authorities at the forefront of the drive to reconnect people with public and political decision-making.
- 3.2 The Place Survey shows that whilst, on average, 80 per cent of people are happy with their area, satisfaction with the way the council runs things is low at 45 per cent. The perception in communities that people can influence decisions that affect their local area is even lower. The duty to respond to petitions is an important step towards addressing this.
- 3.3 Signing a petition is one way for citizens to express their concerns and priorities to their local authority and the Citizenship Survey shows that petitions are the most popular and recognised form of civic action. Some local authorities already have well developed processes for responding to petitions and approach them as an opportunity to listen to the community and demonstrate strong local leadership. However, this is not the case across the board. CLG examined all English local authority websites in April 2008, and found that only one in five councils make details about how to submit a petition publicly available. In a climate where only 39% of people feel they can influence decisions in their local area and in some areas only 48% feel that their council keeps them well informed about the services it provides, it is essential that we ensure people can easily find out how to send their views about public services to local decision makers. If not, people will continue to feel that their views are not welcome, and will be discouraged from trying to get involved in local decisions in the future.
- 3.4 The statutory guidance to which local authorities will be required to pay regard can be found at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/dutyrespondpetitionguidance>. This guidance sets out the key principles and key requirements of the petitions duty and gives guidance to which local authorities must have regard when designing and complying with their petition scheme.
- 3.5 It gives information about the role of Overview and Scrutiny committees under these requirements. It also contains, at Annex A, a model scheme which local authorities may choose to adopt or to adapt to local circumstances. The guidance does not replicate the provisions set out in the legislation.

- 3.6 The petitions duty in the 2009 Act means that for the first time councils will be required to respond to petitions and tell local people what action is going to be taken to address their concerns. Petitions can no longer be ignored because they raise a difficult or challenging issue in the local area.

4 WHAT DOES THE DUTY SAY? - SUMMARY OF REQUIREMENTS

- 4.1 The 2009 Act requires all principal local authorities in England to establish a scheme for handling petitions made to the authority. The scheme:

- must be approved by a meeting of the full council before it comes into force;
- must be published on the principal local authority's website and by any other method appropriate for bringing it to the attention of those who live, work or study in its area
- can be revised at any time but the revised scheme must be approved and publicised as detailed above; and
- the authority must comply with its petition scheme.

- 4.2 The 2009 Act requires petition schemes to meet some minimum standards in order to ensure minimum entitlements which all citizens can expect. Beyond this small number of requirements local authorities have a high level of flexibility about how they approach the duty – leaving a lot of scope for local determination. The requirements are:

- anyone who lives, works or studies in the local authority area, including under 18's, can sign or organise a petition and trigger a response
- a facility for making electronic petitions is provided by the local authority
- petitions must be acknowledged within a time period specified by the local authority
- among the many possible steps that the local authority may choose to take in response to a petition, the following steps must be included amongst the options listed in the scheme:
 - Γ taking the action requested in the petition
 - Γ considering the petition at a meeting of the authority
 - Γ holding an inquiry
 - Γ holding a public meeting
 - Γ commissioning research
 - Γ giving a written response to the petition organiser setting out the authority's views on the request in the petition
 - Γ referring the petition to Overview and Scrutiny committee
- petitions with a significant level of support trigger a debate of the full council. Councils will determine this threshold locally but it must be no higher than 5 per cent of the local population (see Chapter 2 of guidance)
- petitions with a requisite level of support, set by the local authority, trigger a senior local government officer to give evidence at a meeting of the authority's Overview and Scrutiny committee (see Chapter 3 of guidance)
- petition organisers can prompt a review of the local authority's response if the response is felt to be inadequate (see Chapter 4 of guidance)

- 4.3 The requirements listed above are the minimum set by the 2009 Act and defined by the guidance. Local authorities are encouraged to consider designing a scheme which is wider than these requirements, for example, responding to petitions from those who do not live, work or study in the local area or e-petitions which are not made through the authority's own e-petition facility.

- 4.4 Once published the local authority must comply with its petition scheme but can revise it at any time by taking the steps set out in Section 11 of the 2009 Act.

5 DESIGNING A PETITION SCHEME

5.1 Local authorities, when designing their petition scheme, are expected to:

- Take into account local circumstances to ensure that the scheme is locally appropriate; for example, the same thresholds set in a densely populated urban area may not be suitable for a rural authority, the same thresholds may not be appropriate for a ward-specific issue in comparison to one affecting a county.
- Ensure that the scheme is accessible to all; for example, the e-petitions facility is compliant with web accessibility standards.
- Ensure that the process is easy for citizens to use; for example, that the scheme sets thresholds which are achievable for petitions on very local, as well as authority wide, concerns.
- No previous knowledge of council procedure is needed in order to submit a petition, the scheme is written in Plain English, people know what they have to do in order to receive a response.

6 RESPONDING TO PETITIONS

6.1 As a minimum, a local authority's petition scheme must apply if a petition meets all of the following criteria:

- It calls for the authority to take or cease to take action,
- It is signed by the requisite number of people who live, work or study in the local area,
- It is made under another enactment but does not qualify under that enactment (see paragraph 34),
- If made electronically, it is made through the authority's e-petition facility.

6.2 The legislation does not define what constitutes a petition – in virtually all cases it will be immediately obvious whether something is or is not a petition. It is however important that we make sensible judgements about whether to deal with an item of correspondence under the petition scheme or under some other procedure, such as the internal complaints procedure. The Government's view is that authorities should treat as petitions for the purposes of their scheme anything which identifies itself as a petition, or which a reasonable person would regard as a petition.

7 EXCLUSIONS

7.1 *Petitions which are vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate*

7.2 The guidance states that local authorities should approach the petitions they receive positively and not assume that the motivation is one which is vexatious, abusive or inappropriate.

7.3 However, petitions, which are in the opinion of the authority vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate, do not qualify under the Section 14 requirement to take steps in response to the petition. Local authorities must acknowledge these petitions, and this acknowledgement should explain why the authority will not be taking action. (When considering whether a petition is vexatious a principal local authority should use as a starting point the guidance under the Freedom of Information Act 2000¹.)

7.4 Particular care must be taken when considering petitions which call for an officer to give evidence so as to ensure that these petitions relate to the role of the individual in delivering public services and not to matters relating to officer's personality or private life.

7.5 The types of petitions which local authorities may consider inappropriate include those relating to matters which are part of ongoing legal proceedings or those which target individual members of a community. However, the decision on what constitutes an inappropriate petition is ultimately for the local authority to decide considering the circumstances of the individual case.

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http://www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/library/freedom_of_information/detailed_specialist_guides/awareness_guidance_22_vexatious_and_repeated_requests_final.pdf

7.6 In addition, it may be inappropriate for councils to deal with certain petitions during periods when they are subject to restrictions immediately before elections or referendums. A description of what may happen in these circumstances should be set out in the authority's petition scheme.

7.7 *Petitions under other enactments*

7.8 Petitions made under other enactments, such as petitions under the Local Government Act 2000 asking for referendum on whether the area should have an elected mayor, should be dealt with according to the procedures set out in those enactments. If such a petition fails to meet the requirements of the enactment in question, for example a petition under the 2000 Act does not achieve the requisite number of signatures, it should be addressed through a local authority's petition scheme in exactly the same manner as any other petition.

7.9 *Matters excluded by order*

7.10 In order not to duplicate procedures where established processes exist for communities to have their say, Government has excluded the following matters from the scope of the petitions duty:

- any matter relating to a planning decision, including about a development plan document or the community infrastructure levy
- any matter relating to an alcohol, gambling or sex establishment licensing decision,
- any matter relating to an individual or entity in respect of which that individual or entity has a right of recourse to a review or right of appeal conferred by or under any enactment

7.11 However, failure to deliver services in these areas remains within the scope of the duty. For example, a petition on an individual planning application is excluded from the duty but a petition about the local authority's failure to deliver an effective service for planning applications would be within scope.

8 E-PETITIONS

8.1 The 2009 Act applies the same requirements to electronic petitions as to paper petitions, except for the following:

- principal local authorities are only required to respond to e-petitions made through their e-petition facility
- principal local authorities must decide, when a request to host an e-petition is received, whether the petition is appropriate for publishing on their facility
- principal local authorities will decide what equates to a signature on an e-petition
- principal local authorities are required to provide a facility for people to submit petitions to the authority electronically. In addition to this, local authorities can choose to respond to e-petitions submitted by other means and should indicate in their petition scheme how they will deal with these types of petitions.

8.2 The petition scheme must ensure that the authority's e-petition facility allows citizens to create a petition which can be published online and made available to others for electronic signature. Government does not consider that mere acceptance of emailed petitions meets this requirement.

8.3 The guidance states that local authorities should consider how best to integrate their e-petition process with relevant online information and existing online functions, for example, linking petitions to council meetings or decisions, to the minutes or webcast of the relevant meeting, to online forums and most importantly, to the authority's published response to the petition.

8.4 When taking the decision whether to host an e-petition we should, in addition to following the guidance above on vexatious, abusive and otherwise inappropriate petitions, consider those issues pertinent when publishing any information on our website. For example, issues such as data protection, libel and the statutory requirement, as a public body, to comply with equalities and antidiscrimination legislation.

9 CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1 Ribble Valley Borough Council's Petition Scheme has been based on the model scheme provided by CLG. We have decided not to consider designing a scheme which is wider than the requirements at the present time.
- 9.2 The following factors have been considered when tailoring the scheme to meet our needs:
- The Council will respond to all petitions it receives² and in accordance with standing orders these shall be referred to the next meeting of the committee which deals with the subject matter of the petition, together with a report to the committee addressing the subject matter of the petition. The receipt of the petition and the resolution taken shall be referred to in the minutes of that committee.
 - Petitions with a significant level of support trigger a debate of Full Council. Councils can determine this threshold locally but it must be no higher than 5 per cent of the local population – our scheme suggests a threshold of 585³ signatures.
 - Petitions with a requisite level of support trigger a senior local government officer to give evidence at a meeting of the authority's Overview and Scrutiny committee. This is set by the local authority – our scheme suggests a threshold of 293⁴ signatures.
 - Section 16(5) of the 2009 Act requires that, as a minimum, petition schemes provide that the head of paid service (Chief Executive of the authority) and the most senior officers responsible for the delivery of services can be required to provide information on their activities at public meetings of Overview and Scrutiny committee. Petition schemes should apply to senior officers responsible for delivering council functions and public services and not junior members of staff. This information should include the names and job titles of the officers in question . It is proposed that our scheme lists the following:
 - The Chief Executive – Marshal Scott
 - The Director of Resources – Jane Pearson
 - The Director of Commercial Services – John Heap
 - The Director of Development – Stewart Bailey
 - When a senior local government officer is asked to give evidence at a meeting of the authority's Overview and Scrutiny committee, the committee members will ask the questions. The guidance states that petition organisers will be able to suggest questions to the chair of the committee by contacting Committee Services. Our scheme states that we should receive these questions up to three working days before the meeting.
 - Petitions must be acknowledged within a time period specified by the local authority – this is set out in the scheme as within 10 days.
 - The guidance and the model scheme suggest that the petition organiser be given five minutes to present the petition at the meeting of Full Council and the petition will then be discussed by councillors for a maximum of 15 minutes. Our scheme gives the petition organiser three minutes as this is consistent with the time allowed for members of the public to speak at committee. (Petitions which are signed by at least ten residents of the borough, shall be referred to the next meeting of the committee which deals with the subject matter of the petition and these may be presented informally to the chairman of that committee.)
 - The guidance specifically states about paper petitions: "An acknowledgement will be sent to the petition organiser within 10 working days of receiving the petition. It will let them know what we plan to do with the petition and when they can expect to hear from us again. It will also be published on our website". It is suggested that we keep all the petitions on the feedbackonline website (to keep it consistent and all in one place) with any paper petitions that are received being uploaded to the current petitions page so that users can monitor and track the Council's response to the petition.

² A Petition will be classed as such if it calls itself a petition and is signed by at least ten residents of the borough

³ Based on 1 per cent of the local population of RVBC - 58,500 (ONS 2008 mid year population estimate)

⁴ Based on 0.5 per cent of the local population of RVBC - 58,500 (ONS 2008 mid year population estimate)

- When an e-petition is created, our petition scheme makes it clear that it may take five working days before it is published online – to allow time to check that the content of the petition is suitable before it is made available for signature.
 - The guidance states that petition organisers can make an appeal if they are unhappy with the outcome of the petition debate and that Overview and Scrutiny committee will discuss this. Once the appeal has been considered the petition organiser will be informed of the results within 5 working days.
- 9.3 The 2009 Act states that a facility for making electronic petitions is to be provided by the local authority by December 2010. About 12 months ago the six partners in the Collaborative Research and Consultation Service (five East Lancashire Local Authorities, and the PCT) plus LCC agreed that there was a strong need to improve the ability to engage and consult with residents across East Lancashire and that one of the mechanisms to improve this was via the internet. In preparedness for the duty to respond to petitions, and the requirement to provide an e-petition facility the partnership has developed a Consultation/Engagement website (feedbackonline) which includes an e-petition facility. An internal launch for this website has been organised for 7th June. Functionality includes Events, News, Video Diary, Decisions affecting you (current decisions, past decisions etc...), Have your say (incorporating Consultations, Discussion forums, Community noticeboards, Petitions, and Blogs), and Local Interest groups.
- 9.4 A meeting of the Full Council must now approve the petition scheme before it comes into force.
- 9.5 Once approved the petition scheme must be published on our website and the feedbackonline website.
- 9.6 Amendments will be required to be made to the Council's constitutional documents, and, in particular, to its standing orders to reflect our petition scheme.

10 RISK ASSESSMENT

- Resources: To be identified.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal: None.
- Political: None
- Reputation:.

11 RECOMMENDATION

- 11.1 It be a recommendation to Council to approve the Council's Petitions Scheme, as attached, subject to approving the proposals outlined in section 9 above.

Michelle Haworth
Principal Policy and Performance Officer

For further information please ask for Michelle Haworth, extension 4421

Ribble Valley Borough Council's Petition Scheme

Petitions

The Council welcomes petitions and recognises that petitions are one way in which people can let us know their concerns. All petitions sent or presented to the Council will receive an acknowledgement from the Council within 10 working days of receipt.

This acknowledgement will set out what we plan to do with the petition. We will treat something as a petition if it is identified as being a petition, or if it seems to us that it is intended to be a petition.

Paper petitions can be sent to:

*Committee Services
Ribble Valley Borough Council
Council Offices
Church Walk
Clitheroe
Lancashire
BB7 2RA*

Or be created, signed and submitted online by following this link www.feedbackonline.org.uk

A petition may gather signatures, names and addresses (postal or email) in both forms ie you can have a paper version and an online version running simultaneously, although repeat names will be removed. Both forms should run for the same period of time and must be submitted together. Please inform Committee Services on 01200 414408 if you are running a combined paper and electronic petition so that these can be submitted together.

Petitions, which have been signed by the requisite number of people, may be presented at Full Council during the public participation session by delegations of not more than 3 persons. Only one person from the delegation shall be permitted to speak for a maximum of 3 minutes.

These meetings take place on a 6 weekly basis, dates and times can be found at http://www.ribblevalley.gov.uk/info/200216/council_meetings/299/meeting_cycle.

If you would like to present your petition to the Council, or would like your Councillor or someone else to present it on your behalf, please contact Committee Services on 01200 414408 at least 10 working days before the meeting and they will talk you through the process.

Petitions completed online, handed in or sent by post to the council offices, which are signed by at least ten residents of the borough (ie not meeting the threshold to be debated at Full Council), shall be referred to the next meeting of the committee which deals with the subject matter of the petition. These may be presented informally to the chairman of that committee. A report will be prepared for the committee addressing the subject matter of the petition. The receipt of the petition and the resolution taken shall be referred to in the minutes of that committee.

If your petition has received 585¹ signatures or more it will also be scheduled for a Full Council debate and if this is the case we will let you know whether this will happen at the same meeting that your petition has been presented to or a later meeting of the Council.

Aims and Objectives

These are to:

- Allow communities to have direct influence in the democratic process;
- Provide direct access to elected members and other key policy makers;
- Allow citizens to raise awareness of a particular campaign and put issues on the agenda which might not otherwise be considered by the accountable body;
- Stimulate council debate;
- Result in policy changes; and
- Give accountable bodies more access to opinion and feedback on policy decisions.

What are the guidelines for submitting a petition?

Your Petition should be relevant to some issue on which the Council has powers or duties or on which it has shared delivery responsibilities through a partnership arrangement. It should also be submitted in good faith and be decent, honest and respectful. An effective petition should contain a well thought out request i.e. what it is that the petitioner wants the Council to do, or stop doing.

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
- the name and address and 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 how we will respond to the petition.

The contact details of the petition organiser will not be placed on the website. If the petition does not identify a petition organiser, we will contact signatories to the petition to agree who should act as the petition organiser.

Your Petition may be rejected if the Council considers it:

- Contains inflammatory, abusive or provocative language;
- Is defamatory, frivolous, vexatious, discriminatory or otherwise offensive; or contains a false statement;
- Is too similar to another petition submitted recently;
- Discloses confidential or exempt information, including information protected by a court order or government department;
- Discloses material which is otherwise commercially sensitive;
- Names individuals, or provides information where they may be easily identified, e.g. individual officers of public bodies, or makes criminal accusations;

¹ Based on 1 per cent of the local population of RVBC - 58,500 (ONS 2008 mid year population estimate)

- Contains advertising statements;
- Refers to an issue which is currently the subject of a formal council complaint, Local Ombudsman complaint or any legal proceedings; or
- Is otherwise inappropriate.

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 set out above, the Council may decide not to do anything further with it. In that case, we will write to you to explain the reasons.

What will the council do when it receives my petition?

An acknowledgement will be sent to the petition organiser within 10 working days of receiving the petition. It will let them know what we plan to do with the petition and when they can expect to hear from us again. It will also be published on our website.

If we can do what your petition asks for, the acknowledgement may confirm that we have taken the action requested and the petition will be closed. If the petition has enough signatures to trigger a council debate, or a senior officer giving evidence, then the acknowledgment will confirm this and tell you when and where the meeting will take place. If the petition needs more investigation, we will tell you the steps we plan to take.

If the petition applies to a planning or licensing application, is a statutory petition (for example requesting a referendum on having an elected mayor), or on a matter where there is already an existing right of appeal, such as council tax banding and non-domestic rates, other procedures apply. Further information on all these procedures and how you can express your views is available from Committee Services, Ribble Valley Borough Council, Council Offices, Church Walk, Clitheroe, Lancashire, BB7 2RA, 01200 414408.

Your Petition may be rejected if the Council considers it unacceptable (see above), for example, we will not take action on any petition which we consider to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate and will explain the reasons for this in our acknowledgement of the petition.

To ensure 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 the feedbackonline website, except in cases where this would be inappropriate. When you sign an e-petition you can elect to receive this information by email. We will not send you anything which is not relevant to the e-petition you have signed, unless you choose to receive other emails from us.

How will the Council respond to petitions?

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

- taking the action requested in the petition
- considering the petition at a council meeting
- holding an inquiry into the matter
- undertaking research into the matter
- holding a public meeting
- holding a consultation

- holding a meeting with petitioners
- referring the petition for consideration by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny committee*
- calling a referendum
- writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition

**Overview and scrutiny committees are committees of councillors who are responsible for scrutinising the work of the Council – in other words, the Overview and Scrutiny committee has the power to hold the Council's decision makers to account.*

In addition to these steps, the Council will consider all the specific actions it can potentially take on the issues highlighted in a petition. The paragraphs below gives some examples.

Alcohol related crime and disorder

If your petition is about crime or disorder linked to alcohol consumption, there are a number of interventions which the Council can use including checking whether there is a contravention against an already existing designated public place order, talking to individual landlords through Pubwatch, working with the Police on Fixed Penalty Notices for alcohol related disorder and with Trading Standards targeting proxy sales of alcohol and test purchasing for under age sales. The Council's response to your petition will set out the steps we intend to take and the reasons for taking this approach.

Anti-social behaviour (ASB)

As the elected representatives of your local area and as the licensing authority, the Council plays a significant role to play in tackling anti-social behaviour. When responding to petitions on ASB, we will consider in consultation with our local partners, all the options available to us including the wide range of powers and mechanisms we have to intervene as part of our role. For example, we will work with the police in the affected area to identify what action might be taken including what role CCTV might play and, where appropriate, we will alert the community safety partnership to the issues highlighted in the petition.

Under-performing schools

The petition will be passed to the education authority (Lancashire County Council) for them to consider, in consultation with partners, all the options available to them when working with schools to secure their improvement.

Under-performing health services

We will work with local health partners to consider the matter raised in the petition including, where appropriate, exploring what role the Local Involvement Network (LINK) might have in reviewing and feeding back on the issue (the LINK is run by local individuals and community groups and independently supported – their role to find out what people want in terms of local health services, monitor those services and to use their powers to hold them to account). The Overview and Scrutiny committee will also be alerted to the petition and where the matter is sufficiently or potentially serious, the issue will be referred to them to consider for review.

If your petition is about something over which the Council has no direct control (for example the local railway or hospital) we will consider making representations on behalf of the community to the relevant body. The Council works with a large number of local partners and where possible will work with these partners to respond to your petition. If we are not able to do this for any reason (for example if what the petition calls for conflicts with Council policy), then we will set

out the reasons for this to you. You can find more information on the services for which the Council is responsible here www.ribblevalley.gov.uk .

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.

Full Council debates

If a petition contains more than 585² signatures 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 issue raised in the petition will be discussed at a meeting which all councillors can attend. The Council will endeavour to 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. The petition organiser will be given three minutes to present the petition at the meeting and the petition will then be discussed by councillors for a maximum of 15 minutes. The Council will decide how to respond to the petition at this meeting. They may decide to take the action the petition requests, not to take the action requested for reasons put forward in the debate, or to commission further investigation into the matter, for example by a relevant committee. The petition organiser will receive written confirmation of this decision. This confirmation will also be published on the feedbackonline website.

Officer evidence

Your petition may ask for a senior council officer to give evidence at a public meeting about something for which the officer is responsible as part of their job. For example, your petition may ask a senior council officer to explain progress on an issue, or to explain the advice given to elected members to enable them to make a particular decision.

If your petition contains at least 293³ signatures, the relevant senior officer will give evidence at a public meeting of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny committee. The following senior staff can be called to give evidence:

- The Chief Executive
- The Director of Resources
- The Director of Community Services
- The Director of Development.

You should be aware that the Overview and Scrutiny committee may decide that it would be more appropriate for another officer to give evidence instead of any officer named in the petition – for instance if the named officer has changed jobs. The committee may also decide to call a relevant councillor to attend the meeting. Committee members will ask the questions at this meeting, but you will be able to suggest questions to the chair of the committee by contacting Committee Services on 01200 414408 up to three working days before the meeting.

E-petitions

The Council welcomes e-petitions which are created and submitted through our partnership website www.feedbackonline.org.uk. E-petitions must follow the same guidelines as paper petitions.

² Based on 1 per cent of the local population of RVBC - 58,500 (ONS 2008 mid year population estimate)

³ Based on 0.5 per cent of the local population of RVBC - 58,500 (ONS 2008 mid year population estimate)

An ePetition is a petition posted online that can be signed electronically through a website. Members of the community will be able to create a petition on the site and other people can then add their details to the petition to sign it. The format makes it easy for signatures to be collected and responded to.

To submit an ePetition you will need to be a registered user of the feedbackonline website. On the ePetitions homepage, select 'Start a new petition' option. You will be prompted to enter:

- A title;
- An area (the area that the petition relates to);
- Interest (the topic that the petition relates to);
- Which local authority you would like to petition;
- When the petition is to begin;
- How long the petition is to run for; and
- Background information (this could be a statement explicitly setting out what action you would like the Council to take (a "call for action") or any other information which you feel is relevant to the ePetition and reasons why you consider the action requested to be necessary. You may include links to other relevant websites and/or forum topics).

You will also need to decide how long you would like your petition to be open for signatures. Most petitions run for six months, but you can choose a shorter or longer timeframe, up to a maximum of 12 months.

When you create an e-petition, it may take five working days before it is published online. This is because we have to check that the content of your petition is suitable before it is made available for signature.

If we feel we cannot publish your petition for some reason, we will contact you within this time frame to explain. You will be able to change and resubmit your petition if you wish. If you do not do this within 10 working days, a summary of the petition and the reason why it has not been accepted will be published under the 'rejected petitions' section of the website.

When an e-petition has closed for signature, it will automatically be submitted to Ribble Valley Borough Council. Following the close of an ePetition, a report is produced setting out the number of signatures, their reliability and summarising discussion comments for and against.

In the same way as a paper petition, you will receive an acknowledgement within 10 working days. If you would like to present your e-petition to a meeting of the Council, please contact Committee Services on 01200414408 within 10 working days of receipt of the acknowledgement.

Your local councillor will be notified when a petition is received which is relevant to his/her ward.

A petition acknowledgement and response will be published on the feedbackonline website.

The Council accepts no liability for the petitions on its web pages. The views expressed in petitions do not necessarily reflect those of the Council.

How do I 'sign' an e-petition?

An ePetition can be signed by a person of any age who lives, works, or studies in the borough. To submit or sign an e-petition you have to be a registered user of the feedbackonline website.

Registration is a simple process that just requires you to provide us with a few details in case we need to contact you about the ePetition. You will be asked to supply your full name, year of birth, postcode, borough and a valid email address, for verification purposes.

Once this step is complete your 'signature' will be added to the petition. People visiting the e-petition will be able to see your name in the list of those who have signed it, but your contact details will not be visible. (i.e. email address, postcode etc...)

You can only sign an ePetition once. Officers will check the list of signatories and any obviously frivolous responses will be removed.

What can I do if I feel my petition has not been dealt with properly?

If you feel that we have not dealt with your petition properly, the petition organiser has the right to request that the Council's Overview and Scrutiny committee review the steps that the Council has taken in response to your petition. It is helpful to everyone, and can improve the prospects for a review, if the petition organiser gives a short explanation of the reasons why the Council's response is not considered to be adequate.

The committee will endeavour to consider your request at its next meeting, although on some occasions this may not be possible and consideration will take place at the following meeting. Should the committee determine we have not dealt with your petition adequately, it may use any of its powers to deal with the matter. These powers include instigating an investigation, making recommendations to the Council and arranging for the matter to be considered at a meeting of the Full Council.

Once the appeal has been considered the petition organiser will be informed of the results within 5 working days. The results of the review will also be published on our website.