

Organising a petition

Petitions are one of the many ways in which a group of people can make their views known. They can:

- ★ Show the strength of opinion on an issue
- ★ Influence decision making
- ★ Increase awareness

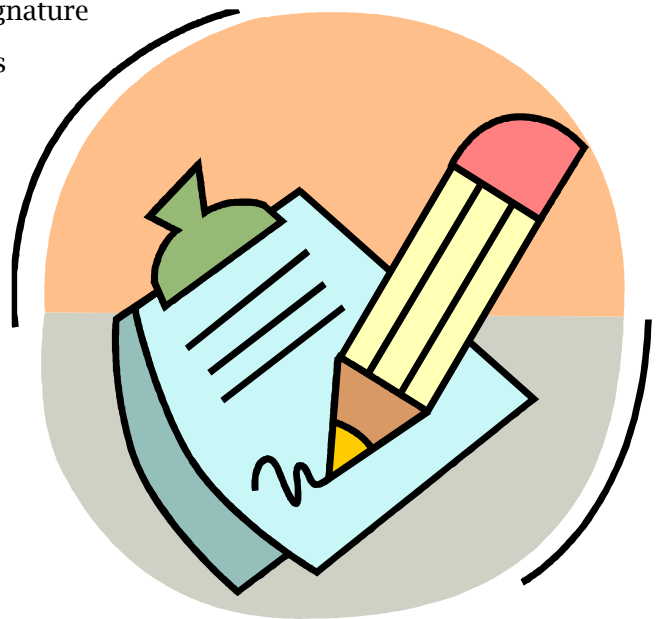
Writing your petition

Before drawing up a petition you need to decide:

- ★ Who your petition should be sent to
- ★ What you want them to do
- ★ When and where you want to present the petition

Make sure your petition is clear, accurate and concise. Do not use overly formal or legalistic language. It is useful to include the following:

- ★ Who is being petitioned
- ★ Who is doing the petitioning
- ★ A statement of what the petition is about (if your petition is about a particular place or area then state this clearly)
- ★ A statement of the action you want to be taken
- ★ Columns for name, address and signature
- ★ Numbered lines



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Example:

We, the undersigned, residents of Flower Park area, object to the plans to build a skate park on the land adjacent to Rosy Villas Retirement Home at 32 Marigold Villas Road, Brighton.

We call upon the council to:

1. reject this proposed plan
2. investigate other possible uses for the land
3. fully consult with local residents on any future proposals

Name	Address	Signature
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

Please return to: Flower Park Residents Association, c/o The Corner Shop, 5 Flower Park Road, Anytown by 31st December 2009

Getting signatures

Collecting signatures is a great opportunity to discuss the issues and raise awareness. It is also very time consuming. Whether you are going to talk to passers by in the street or go door to door, we suggest you:

- ★ Have as many volunteers as possible
- ★ Produce a briefing sheet for volunteers so they can respond to any queries (see State your Case)
- ★ Print flyers to give to everyone who you ask to sign the petition, explaining what the petition is about, giving the contact details for your group and inviting them to get in touch and get involved
- ★ Have a separate form for the contact address/email of people who are interested in receiving more information or getting involved, so you can add them to your mailing list
- ★ Have a date by which the petitions have to be returned to a central person or place (give yourselves time to chase up anyone who does not return them on time)
- ★ Make a large sign if you are petitioning in the street so people know why you are there

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Submitting the petition

When you post or hand in the petition you will want to know what happens to it.

Speak to the organisation it is directed at and ask who will be responsible for dealing with it.

Send a covering letter with the petition with the full contact details of a member of your group who can be contacted for further information or discussion.

Presenting a petition to Brighton and Hove City Council

You can present paper petitions and e-petitions to the City Council. It is your choice which method you use, or you can do both at the same time.

If you think your local councillor will support your petition it is worth asking them to present it on your behalf. This can be useful as they will:

- ★ Understand the internal workings of the council
- ★ Know which Committee your petition should be presented to
- ★ Be able to act as an advocate for you
- ★ Be able to follow up any decisions the committee makes.

However, any local person, or group of people, can present a petition to any Council Committee on any issue that comes under the jurisdiction of the council. You do not have to contact the council in advance, but it may be worth speaking to Democratic Services to discuss which committee would be most appropriate for your petition.

If your petition is about a planning application it is helpful if you give the planning application number, but it is not essential.

Be aware that a petition of thousands of names will be considered as ONE representation to the Planning Applications Sub Committee. Asking people to sign individual letters may be a more useful tactic in this situation.

For advice and guidelines on how to present e-petitions see the City Council website at www.brighton-hove.gov.uk

Democratic Services, Brighton and Hove City Council: 01273 291066

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What will happen to your petition?

If your petition is about an issue that the committee is already aware of, it will be taken as additional information.

If it is about an issue that the committee has not previously discussed they will probably request that an officer investigates the issues and brings further information to the next meeting for discussion.

If the council receives a petition about an issue that is not their responsibility, (eg the closure of a Post Office or Doctors' Surgery, or trees on land owned by a private company) they will usually pass on the wording of the petition and the number of signatories to the organisation which is responsible (the Post Office, the Primary Care Trust or the company).

Presenting a petition to the Government

If your petition is about a national issue, you may want to present it to the Government. You can contact your local MP to find out if s/he will support your petition and ask for advice on who to present the petition to.

Alternatively, you can start your own internet petition to the government at: <http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/>

Internet Petitions

There are several websites, such as www.petition.co.uk, where you can log on, set up a petition, and then provide a link to it on your website, or by emailing potential supporters of the petition. You will then need to download the list of signatories when you are ready to present your petition.

Advantages of internet petitions:

- ★ Quick and easy to set up and use
- ★ You can get a lot of signatories very quickly if you are part of a network of people or organisations that are likely to support your petition

Disadvantages of internet petitions:

- ★ As the petition only requires a name and email address they are not always considered to be as valid as paper petitions
- ★ You will have less opportunity to speak to people and build support for your campaign

To find out who your local MP is go to <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/mp/> and enter your postcode, or phone the House of Commons Information Office on 020 7219 4272.

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Petitions, letters or emails?

If you're confident that a large number of people will support you, but that each of them will not want to commit much time, then a petition is a good option. People also like to sign petitions as they then feel that they have made a contribution to your campaign.

However, a large number of personally written letters can have a greater impact, and those receiving them will be aware that personal letters take more time and effort for your supporters to write. If you have few supporters, it may be better to use this option.

Letter writing or petitions can be combined with emails.

If you are asking people to send emails or letters it is advisable to provide them with:

- ★ Some background information
- ★ The address of the person you want them to write to, and their email address or a link to: www.writetothem.com
- ★ A sample letter or email (but encourage them to write the letter in their own words)
- ★ Advice to provide their name, address or email address so the person they are writing to can send a reply
- ★ Stamped, addressed envelopes - you could ask for a small donation to cover the cost.

*Messages can be sent to
Councillors, MPs and MEPs via
www.writetothem.com.*