



COUNCILLOR CARL RICE
Chair – Governance, Resources and
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Committee

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To: Members of the Council Business Management Committee

Dear Councillors

At its meeting of the 5th September 2014, the Governance, Resources and Customer Services O&S Committee discussed the handling of petitions to the City Council. This was prompted by concerns raised by members with regard to three issues: 1) how the threshold for debates at Scrutiny or City Council is dealt with; 2) the process for responding to petitions; and 3) the position of petitions on the City Council meeting agenda.

Petition Thresholds

With regards to the first of these, members were concerned that petitions with the same wording were coming into the City Council and were treated as separate petitions, and therefore not reaching the minimum thresholds for debates at Scrutiny or City Council (the example given was the petition on Perry Beeches pool earlier this year). It was felt that there was also confusion as to whether e-petitions and paper petitions with the same wording were being treated as one or separate petitions.

Members would therefore ask that CBM reissue guidance to officers clarifying the position in line with the following recommendations:

Recommendation 01: That e-petitions and paper petitions with the same wording are treated as one for the purposes of the threshold trigger for debates at Scrutiny or City Council;

Recommendation 02: That petitions received within a three-month rolling period (from the date of the submission of the first such petition) are treated as one for the purposes of the threshold trigger for debates at Scrutiny or City Council.

Responding to Petitions

Concern was expressed that some petitions may not be responded to or that the time taken to respond is too long. Members were reminded that the petitions

schedule is published on Democracy in Birmingham along with the City Council meeting agenda (although it is not sent out with the papers). However, members emphasised that the presenting councillor should receive both an acknowledgement and a substantive response to any petition presented, and make the following recommendation:

Recommendation 03: That CBMC remind all officers receiving petitions that the first and second named petitioner and the presenting councillor are sent an acknowledgement, and a substantive response to any petition presented.


Petitions at the City Council Meeting

The placing of petitions on the City Council meeting agenda was also discussed and members wish to see petitions put at the beginning of the agenda, to facilitate greater public engagement. When petitions were at the top of the agenda previously, petitioners and members of the public would attend to see the petition being presented. The recommendation, therefore, is:

Recommendation 04: That CBM Committee consider amending the agenda of future City Council meetings to place the petitions item at the top of the agenda.

Members also expressed a wish to discuss further the order and content of the City Council agenda (in particular motions for debate), and I look forward to working with you on how improvements can be made.

Yours sincerely,



Carl Rice
Chair, Governance, Resources and Customer Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee