

Forest Heath District Council

(This report is not a key decision. This report has been subject to appropriate notice of publication under the Council's Access to Information Rules)

Report of the Cabinet Member for Families and Communities

SPECIAL COUNCIL

25 SEPTEMBER 2013

COU13/641

PETITIONS SCHEME

1. Summary and reasons for recommendation(s)

- 1.1 The council is seeking approval to amend its petitions scheme following changes to how we make provision for the completion and submission of e-petitions.
- 1.2 This amendment has been prompted by the removal of the statutory duty to maintain e-petitions systems on council websites. Also, the contract for the council's current e-petitions software is due for renewal or cancellation in December 2013.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 It is recommended that Council amends its petitions scheme to reflect changes to how we make provision for the completion and submission of e-petitions; and
- 2.2 This amended petitions scheme should come into effect on 6 December 2013.

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3. How will the recommendations help us meet our strategic priorities?

3.1 The recommendation meets the following, as contained within the Strategic Plan:

- (a) Strategic priorities for Community Development and Efficient and Effective Council.

4. Key issues

4.1 The 2011 Localism Act revokes the 2009 requirement of councils to have a petitions scheme. However, the council will retain its petitions scheme as it is an important democratic tool. The 2011 Act also means that councils are no longer required to maintain e-petitions systems on their websites.

4.2 Forest Heath District Council has an existing e-petitions system with *mySociety* under a contract that expires in December 2013. The cost of the system is £2,231 (including VAT) per year. To date, the council has received two online petitions (with only one having enough signatures to be considered by full Council).

4.3 In this context, and given the *mySociety* contract is about to expire, the council has ended its contract with *mySociety* and from 6 December 2013 will accept e-petitions through free software that is available online through a number of providers.

4.4 In amending its petitions scheme the council is making it clear that it accepts e-petitions created using free online software. There will be no negative impact on local people wishing to submit an e-petition and there will no longer be a cost to the council for providing this facility.

5. Other options considered

5.1 The council considered creating a new e-petitions system by using existing software to provide the e-petitions function, however, this would not provide the functionality needed for an e-petitions system.

6. Community impact

6.1 **Crime and disorder impact** *(including Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998)*

6.1.1 Not applicable.

6.2 **Diversity and equality impact** *(including the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment)*

6.2.1 The change in software provider for the completion and submission of e-petitions will not have a negative impact on any groups. Furthermore, paper petitions are still accepted.

6.3 **Sustainability impact** *(including completing a Sustainability Impact Assessment)*

6.3.1 Not applicable.

6.4 **Other impact** (any other impacts affecting this report)

6.4.1 Not applicable.

7. **Consultation** (what consultation has been undertaken, and what were the outcomes?)

7.1 The Joint Leadership Team and the Cabinet Member for Families and Communities have agreed this approach.

8. **Financial and resource implications** (including asset management implications)

8.1 There will no longer be a cost to the Council for providing an e-petition system.

9. **Risk/opportunity assessment** (potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)

Risk area	Inherent level of risk (before controls)	Controls	Residual risk (after controls)
That local people will not be able to submit online petitions	Low	Through the petitions scheme the council will signpost petition creators to free online software and provide support with creating them where needed.	Low

10. **Legal and policy implications**

10.1 Council policy, through the petitions scheme, has been amended to reflect the change in how we make provision for e-petitions. The legality of e-petitions will not be affected by this change.

11. **Ward(s) affected**

11.1 All.

12. **Background papers**

12.1 Not applicable.

13. **Documents attached**

13.1 Appendix A - Amended Petitions Scheme