

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO RESULTS OF CONSULTATION ON LOCAL PETITION AND COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION

Introduction

1. In December 2007, the Government launched a consultation on how arrangements for local petitions could be strengthened and how a new system could operate in practice. At the same time it also sought views on the implementation of the Councillor Call for Action introduced under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The closing date for consultation was 20 March.
2. The Government has now considered the response to the consultation and has set out its intentions.

Local Petitions

3. The Government now propose:-
 - to place a statutory duty on local authorities to respond to all local petitions, including electronic petitions
 - the subject of a petition must relate to the functions of the local authority, or other public services for which the local authority has shared delivery responsibilities, through for example the LAA. It will not include planning. Local Authorities will not need to respond to frivolous, vexatious or discriminatory petitions.
 - local authorities will act as community advocates for petitions related to Primary Care Trusts
 - local authorities must respond to all valid petitions, signed by those who live, study or work within the local authority boundary (including children and young people aged under 18), and those who are from outside the area
 - to be valid, a petition must contain a call for action, must be clear to which local authority it relates, should include the name, address and date of all signatories
 - the local authority's response to all valid petitions must be proportionate and substantive; thresholds should be in place for triggering debates in Full Council
 - overview and scrutiny committees will act as appeal mechanisms when petitioners are not satisfied with the local authority response.

Councillor Call for Action

4. The Government now propose:

- to implement by the end of 2008 the provisions in the LGPIH Act 2007 empowering all councillors to refer local government matters for consideration by the relevant overview and scrutiny committee
- other than matters for which there are already statutory processes, (including complaints), exclusions to the scope of the power will be kept to the minimum
- to issue guidance before the end of 2008 on the principles of CCfA explaining to councillors how they can use the power and advising the local authority on how the deal with CCfAs.