

Manchester City Council Report for Resolution

Report to: Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee – 20 June 2019

Subject: Petition for Debate – Add Public Space Protection Orders around all abortion-providing clinics to end harassment of service users and staff

Report of: Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit

Summary

This report provides the Committee with the details of a petition to add Public Space Protection Orders around all abortion-providing clinics.

The report also outlines the procedure for the Committee to debate this petition in accordance with the Council's Petitions Scheme.

Recommendation

The Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee is invited to recommend how to respond to this petition.

Wards Affected: All

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Background Documents:

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

- Manchester City Council Petitions Scheme 2014

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report set out the details of a petition that was received by Manchester City Council's ('the Council') to add Public Space Protection Orders around all abortion-providing clinics within the city boundary.
- 1.2 It also describes the options that are available to the scrutiny committee under the Petitions Scheme and explains the process that can be followed by the Committee when considering the petition. The Committee is invited to recommend how the Council should respond to the petition.

2. Petition: Add Public Space Protection Orders around all abortion-providing clinics

- 2.1 During the period which fell between 23 March 2018 until 21 February 2019, the Council hosted an online petition to add Public Space Protection Orders around all abortion-providing clinics that attracted 1152 electronic signatures. A copy of the supporting statement for the petition is attached at Appendix 1. The Petition Organiser indicated that a supplementary paper petition would be submitted to be counted in conjunction with the numbers associated with the online petition.
- 2.2 Manchester City Council's Petitions Scheme states that anyone who lives works or studies in Manchester can organise or sign a petition (including those under 18 years of age). However, a clearly identifiable Manchester address is required so that all petitions are considered on a fair and consistent basis. Attached at Appendix 2 to this report is a document that sets out the criteria which deems a signature to be 'valid' under the Petition Scheme. This document is available for members of the public to download from the Manchester City Council Petitions Scheme webpage (http://www.manchester.gov.uk/downloads/download/3980/petitions_scheme)
- 2.3 As the Council's petitions software is designed in such a way that all users are prompted to verify that they either live, work or study at an address within the city boundary, all electronic signatures may be considered 'valid' under the scope of the Scheme.
- 2.4 On 5 March 2019, a supplementary paper petition was received by the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit which contained a gross figure of 950 signatures requiring adjudication (the process by which a signature is determined to be valid or otherwise.)
- 2.5 As result of the adjudication process, a significant number of the signatures were discounted and the number of valid signatures was determined as 521. This was due to a mixture of factors; some signatories provided addresses with sufficient detail to enable the Council to clearly establish that the address given was outside of the city boundary; some omitted to provide their full name (instead giving only a first name), and a significant number of signatories provided only a partial extract of an address (eg the first line of their address

only, or simply a postcode). The Committee is asked to note that the outcome of the adjudication process has not negatively affected the way in which the petition is being considered.

3. Proposed Procedure at a Scrutiny Committee

- 3.1 Manchester City Council’s Petitions Scheme sets out how the Council will deal with petitions that fall within the scope of the scheme. Copies of the scheme are available online at www.manchester.gov.uk/petitions or on request from the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit.
- 3.2 The number of signatories that are associated with subject matter determines how a petition will be responded to. There are three categories of petition in the Council’s Scheme. The parameters for each category are set out in Table 1 (below).

Table 1

Category	Brief description	Signatory Threshold
Petition ‘requiring debate’	Any petition with 4000 valid signatures (or more) will trigger a debate at full Council	4000
Petition ‘calling an officer to account’	Any petition with 1000 valid signatures (or more) will summon a senior Council officer to give evidence at a public meeting	1000
‘Standard’ Petition	Any petition with 100 or more valid entries or (if less than 100 entries) where there is clear local support for action	100

- 3.3 The Council’s response to a petition is dependent on the number of valid signatures. As over 1000 valid signatures were attached to this petition, it qualifies for a debate at a scrutiny committee. The Petition Organiser has therefore been invited to this meeting of the scrutiny committee to contribute to the petition debate.
- 3.4 The Scheme sets out a process for scrutiny committees to follow when considering a petition. The Petition Organiser will be given 5 minutes to present the petition at the meeting. The relevant council officer or Executive Member will then be given 5 minutes to outline the Council’s response to the petition. The Committee will then make appropriate recommendations about how to respond to the petition. Any deviation from this format will be at the discretion of the committee.

4. Recommendations

- 4.1 At the end of the debate, the Committee will be able to make recommendations to the decision maker about how the Council should respond to the petition. When considering how to respond to the petition, the Committee should take account of the number of petition signatures, the representations made by the Petition Organiser and the responses from Council officers and the Executive Member. The Committee is invited to consider the following options:
- a) Recommend that the Decision Maker take's the action requested in the petition's supporting statement (Appendix 1);
 - b) Note the petition, and recommend that no action is taken;
 - c) Recommend to the Decision Maker that an alternative course of action is taken.
- 4.2 The Committee's recommendations will be reported to the Decision Maker for consideration.
- 4.3 The Committee should also be aware that in January 2018 the Council adopted a resolution that relates to this issue. A copy of the minute of that resolution is appended to the report (Appendix 3)

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The Committee's recommendations will be reported to the Council through the minutes of the scrutiny committee. At an appropriate juncture after the committee meeting, the Petition Organiser will be provided with a copy of the committee's recommendations detailing any actions that the Council intends to take over the petition, and any follow up action.