



Reigate & Banstead
BOROUGH COUNCIL
Banstead | Horley | Redhill | Reigate

SIGNED OFF BY	Head of Legal and Governance
AUTHOR	Annette Wiles, Deputy Democratic Services Manager
TELEPHONE	Tel: 01737 276607
EMAIL	annette.wiles@reigate-banstead.gov.uk
TO	Council
DATE	Thursday 28 July 2022
EXECUTIVE MEMBER	Leader of the Council

KEY DECISION REQUIRED	N
WARDS AFFECTED	(All Wards)

SUBJECT	Petition: Condemn Crispin Blunt MP for saying people didn't follow Covid lockdown rules
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RECOMMENDATION
(i) That Full Council considers the petition received seeking to condemn Crispin Blunt MP for saying people didn't follow Covid lockdown rules.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
<p>Under the Council's Petition Scheme, any petition with more than 400 signatures is referred to the Council for debate.</p> <p>The Council has received a petition of 419 signatures relating to comments made by Crispin Blunt MP regarding a widespread public failure to follow Covid-19 restrictions. The petition requests the Council to condemn Crispin Blunt MP for these comments.</p>

STATUTORY POWERS
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The Council approved a revised Petition Scheme in May 2013 taking account of the Localism Act 2011. The scheme sets out how the Council will respond to petitions.2. The Localism Act 2011 revoked requirements placed on Councils in relation to petitions. However, the Executive agreed to retain its Petition Scheme to which Procedure Rule 11 requires adherence.

BACKGROUND

3. The Petition Scheme sets out the type of response the Council will provide, based on the number of signatories to the petition.
4. The table below summarises the Council's approach:

Number of signatories	Response
Less than 20	Response from Officer (treated as standard correspondence)
20 – 199	Response from the relevant Member of the Executive
At least 200	Referred to the Executive
At least 400	Debated at a meeting of the Full Council

KEY INFORMATION

The Petition

5. An e-petition was accepted on 17 March 2022 which requests Reigate & Banstead Borough Council:
“to condemn the offensive, dismissive and potentially dangerous media statements recently made by Reigate MP Crispin Blunt about widespread public failure to follow Covid-19 restrictions and about their lack of importance”
6. It also calls on:
“Reigate and Banstead Borough Council to pass and execute a motion at the earliest opportunity to: 1. Publicly declare in writing its thanks and respect for the people of Reigate and Banstead for their sacrifice and neighbourly behaviour since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic; and 2. Write, deliver and publish a letter to Crispin Blunt MP stating that the Council condemns the undermining of trust in public health measures caused by his recent, unsupportable remarks that “probably inside most homes and inside most businesses, and inside most places of public administration, people may not have kept absolutely to the rules” and that criminality under the Covid-19 public safety law was like a speeding offence.”
7. The petition notes that:
“...available evidence shows that the people across the UK were highly compliant with Covid-19 lockdown and other safety measures, often at great personal cost and out of respect for the safety of others. This contradicts what Crispin Blunt said.”
8. The petition closed on 17 March 2022, and at its close had received 419 signatures, meaning that the threshold for reporting to Council (400) has been exceeded.
9. In line with the Petition Scheme, details of the petition have been published and are available from the Council's website along with the e-signatories. The Petition Scheme indicates that the Council will decide how to respond to the petition. It may decide to support the action the petition requests, or not, or refer the matter to the Executive (or the Executive decision maker) for further consideration. The petition organiser will receive written confirmation of the Council's decision.

10. Under the Petition Scheme, a spokesperson for the petitioners may present the petition and speak at the Council meeting for up to 5 minutes. A representative of the Petitioners will be attending the meeting to address Council.

Statement from Crispin Blunt MP

11. Crispin Blunt MP has requested the opportunity to provide a written statement, which is published here in full:

“This e-petition is regrettably misleading and its recommendations ignore and misrepresent the language carefully used by me to mean precisely what I said. That most households, businesses, and places of public administration will have found it almost impossible to have kept absolutely to the rules in no way contradicts the very commendable compliance of the British public overall with the purpose of the Covid-19 lockdown measures and other safety measures.

It is also factually accurate to point out the enforcement measures were police issued fixed penalty notices, as are most speeding penalties. This political point scoring is a regrettable use of everyone’s time which could have been used towards something more constructive.”

OPTIONS

12. The Petition Scheme provides that Council will decide how to respond to the petition at this meeting. The options for the Council in relation to the petition are:
1. Refer the petition to the Executive decision maker for consideration.
 2. To support the action requested on the petition; or
 3. Note the request of the petitioners and take no further action.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

13. The statutory position is set out in paragraphs 1 and 2 of this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

14. There are no direct financial implications in respect of this report.

EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

15. The Council has a statutory duty to consider equalities implications in all of its decisions.
16. The activities suggested by the petition are not considered to disadvantage any equality target groups.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

17. The activities suggested by the petition are not considered to have any direct environmental implications.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

18. E Petition (<https://reigate-banstead.moderngov.co.uk/mgEPetitionDisplay.aspx?ID=50&RPID=2697651&HPID=2697651>)