



Seaton Town Council Constitution

Chapter 15 Social Media & Electronic Communications Policy

Marshlands Centre, Harbour Road, Seaton EX12 2LT

01297 21388

townclerk@seaton.gov.uk

SEATON TOWN COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

The use of digital and social media and electronic communication enables Seaton Town Council to interact in a way that improves communications, both within the Council and between the Council and the residents and stakeholders it works with and serves.

The Council has a website (www.seaton.gov.uk), social media platforms (Facebook/Instagram/Twitter), and uses email to communicate.

The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. Over time the Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses, as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers. When these changes occur, this policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

The social media platforms and website are used to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within the town, highlight the work being done by the Council and promote the town's community positively.

Communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:

- be civil, tasteful, factual and relevant
- not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive
- not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which we do not own the copyright
- not contain any personal information
- if it is official Council business, it will be moderated by the Town Clerk to the Council
- not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising

In order to ensure that all discussions on the Council's social media platforms are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, contributors are asked to adhere to the following guidelines:

- be considerate and respectful of others - vulgarity, threats or abuse of language will not be tolerated
- differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including councillors or staff, will not be permitted
- share freely and be generous with official Council posts, but be aware of copyright laws and be accurate, giving credit where credit is due
- stay on topic

The Council's website and social media platforms cannot be used for commercial purposes or to advertise, market or sell products or services.

The site is not monitored 24 hours a day and the Council will not reply individually to all messages or comments received. However, it will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people or authorities. Please do not include personal/private information in your social media posts.

Sending a message or posting via social media will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and the Council will not monitor or respond to requests for information through this medium. Instead, please make direct contact with the Town Clerk (townclerk@seaton.gov.uk) and/or councillors by email, telephone or letter.

We retain the right to remove comments or content that includes:

- obscene or racist content
- personal attacks, insults, or threatening language
- potentially libellous or defamatory statements
- plagiarised material; any material in violation of any laws, including copyright
- private, personal information published without consent
- information or links unrelated to the content of the forum
- commercial promotions or spam
- allegations of a breach of a Council's policy or the law

If a communication is received that does not adhere to the above criteria, then the Council's response will be to either ignore, inform the sender of the Council's policy or send a brief response as appropriate. This will be at the Council's discretion based on the message received, given the limited resources available. Any information posted on social media - not in line with the above criteria - will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Those who repeatedly breach this policy will be blocked. The Council may post a statement that 'A post breaching the Council's Social Media Policy has been removed'. If the post alleges breach of a Council policy or the law, the person who posted it will be asked to submit a formal complaint to the Council or report the matter to the Police as soon as possible, to allow due process.

Council Website

Where necessary, the Council may direct those contacting it to the Council's website to see the required information or may forward the question to a councillor for consideration and response. The Council may not respond to every comment received.

Council Email

The Town Clerk has a specific email address – townclerk@seaton.gov.uk and response to enquiries will be sent as soon as practicable.

The Town Clerk and officers are responsible for dealing with email received and passing on any relevant mail to councillors or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Town Clerk, and/or otherwise will always be copied to the Clerk.

Individual councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners in relation to their personal views and, if appropriate, copy to the Town Clerk. Any emails sent to the Town Clerk or councillors in their official capacity will be subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act.

These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.

Do not forward personal information on to other people or groups outside of the Council, this includes names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookie identifiers.

Internal communication and access to information within the Council

The Council is continually looking at ways to improve its working and the use of social media and electronic communication is a major factor in delivering improvement.

Councillors are expected to abide by the Members' Code of Conduct and data protection legislation in all their work on behalf of the Council.

As more information becomes available electronically, it is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely. Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information that they have access to and not to share confidential information with anyone. Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Members' Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures (in extreme cases, this could lead to a criminal investigation).

Members should be careful only to cc essential recipients on emails i.e. to avoid use of the 'Reply to All' option if at all possible, but of course copying in all who need to know and ensuring that email trails have been removed.

Reviewed – 3 May 2022