



Seaton Town Council Constitution

Chapter 15 Communications Policy

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SEATON TOWN COUNCIL

COMMUNICATIONS OVERVIEW

The use of digital and social media and electronic communication enables Seaton Town Council ('the Council') to interact in a way that improves communications, both within the Council and between the Council, residents and other stakeholders. However, the Council is cognisant of the fact that, due to the demographic of Seaton, not all residents have access to electronic communication channels, so endeavours to communicate in other ways as well.

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.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEBSITE

The Council has a website (www.seaton.gov.uk), social media platforms (Facebook/Instagram/Twitter) and uses email and face to face events to communicate. The Council's social media platforms and website are used to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within the town, to highlight the work being done by the Council and promote the town's assets positively.

Communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:

- be civil, 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 the Council does not own the copyright
- not contain any personal information
- if it is official Council business, it will be moderated by the Town Clerk
- 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 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 and will be removed
- 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 social media platforms 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.

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.

EMAILS

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 Town Clerk.

Councillor Emails

Individual councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners in relation to their personal views and, if appropriate, copy to the Town Clerk. It should be made clear that any such views expressed are made in an individual capacity and not on behalf of the Council. 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.

Personal information must not be sent 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.

FACE TO FACE

Surgeries & Meetings

Councillors will meet residents and others with an interest in the town, in their everyday lives and work and at events organised by the Council. As the Council reaches its decisions collectively, Councillors should be mindful of the Council's position when they discuss any issues with residents. In order to reach those individuals who may not have access to social media, the Council will hold surgeries, from time to time, in accessible locations such as on Thury Harcourt or on the seafront in an effort to engage with all elements of the community.

The Town Clerk is available by appointment to meet with any residents or other stakeholders who wish to understand or obtain further information about any decision that the Council has made.

Council & Committee Meetings

The Council holds regular meetings, in line with the law, which are scheduled well in advance and detailed on the Council's website. Any member of the public may attend such meetings and make representations in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders.

Community Champions

The Council has appointed local 'champions' such as the Disability Champion to advise and engage with specific sectors of the community, where the Council has powers to improve the town in small ways to assist those sectors. Other local champions such as a youth champion are being considered.

COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

From time to time, the Council will engage in a public consultation and this will be promulgated as widely as possible via traditional and electronic means to ensure the widest level of engagement across the community. The last consultation was in August 2021.

Reviewed – 5 September 2022