



Seaton Town Council Constitution

Chapter 32 Community Engagement Policy

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Background and principles

Seaton Town Council ('the Council') recognises the need to consider the impact of its actions on others and the surrounding environment. A key component of the Council's work is encouraging community participation and engagement wherever possible.

The Localism Act 2011 places considerable onus on increased involvement and therefore, initial guiding principles are required:

1. Guiding Principles

Involvement principles

- The Council cannot force any individual or group to become involved, but it will make it as easy as possible for those who choose to.
- It will always be clear, before the start of any participation or consultation activity, to what extent the result will inform a decision.
- If the outcome of a participation or consultation activity is intended to inform a decision and a different decision is taken, the reasoning behind that decision will be explained where necessary.
- Not every decision requires community involvement.

Engagement principles

- The Council will be clear at the start of any face-to-face engagement event what the aim is.
- Engagement events are not intended as an opportunity for individuals with an interest to lobby decision makers.
- While individuals may well have links with groups that have a vested interest, they should not represent those groups in informing the process.

Consultation principles

- If an event calls for wider public involvement, the event will be advertised locally allowing people time to organise their engagement with the event.
- Consultation events will sometimes be targeted at a particular group, such as the recent consultation on provision for young people in the town.
- Events will be time-limited.
- Specific, non-leading questions will be asked. Questions can be open (e.g. where do you think swings should be sited?) but not open-ended (e.g. what do you think should be done?).

2. Council aims and objectives

- Community engagement is central to the Council's objectives and a community consultation was last carried out in 2021 and subsequently supplemented by councillor surgeries, press releases, promulgation of the Council's activities via its social media platforms and website and close involvement with the town's many community organisations to deliver projects and events. A further consultation will be undertaken in 2023.

- The Council's aim is to encourage effective local community engagement across the town's demographic and ensure that there is a clear understanding of the for the need for communities to engage on decisions affecting them.
- Where practicable and financially viable, to enable the aspirations/comments/suggestions etc. obtained from community engagement to have an impact on the Council's decision making and the way in which services are delivered.
- Identify how the Council can enhance its profile by improving engagement with the wider community, including harder-to-reach groups.

3. Seaton Town Council and community engagement

The Council currently facilitates community engagement in the following ways:

- Allocation of public participation at the beginning of each Council and committee meeting. This provides an opportunity for residents to make representations to the Council or ask questions relating to items on the agenda.
- The publishing of agendas, minutes and supporting documents for all Council and committee meetings on the website, and the publication of the agenda on a notice board in the town.
- Preparation of an Annual Town Report to be presented at the Annual Town Meeting and active involvement in the Annual Town Meeting by way of public question time.
- The annual external audit provides the opportunity for questions to be asked about the latest Statement of Accounts. A summary of income and expenditure is published within the Annual Report.
- Making Seaton Town Councillors' contact details available on the website.
- News and events are publicised through the Council's website, Facebook page.
- Additionally, events and special projects are publicised via posters, leaflets and, where appropriate, advertising banners situated at prominent sites around the town.
- Councillors and officers hold regular meetings with community stakeholders in the town
- Councillor surgeries in busy locations within the town to talk to residents about any concerns they may have.
- The Annual Return and Statement of Accounts made available as printed copies and on the website.
- Consultation exercises and surveys and are undertaken with residents, young people and stakeholder organisations.
- Establishment of the Seaton Project Board working with East Devon District Council, Devon County Council and other stakeholders in the town to understand the needs of the town and prepare an evidence base to enable funding to be accesses as and when new funding streams become available.
- Regular press releases featured in local media keep the general public informed of community events, projects and other Town Council items of interest.
- The Council offices on the seafront are open from 9am to 1pm on weekdays providing information about the Council's projects and also information about Seaton and the wider area to tourists. The Council offices are also open from 9am to 1pm, Monday to Friday.

- Where and when appropriate, external resource maybe utilised for a large and time-consuming consultation or engagement exercise.
- Unlike other tiers of local government, town councillors always live or work within 3 miles of the town they serve and therefore have close ties to their constituents and local voluntary and community organisations on a day-to-day basis, making them uniquely placed in terms of informed representation.

4. Future improvements

The Council is committed to improving community engagement by adhering to the guiding principles set out in section 1 above and:

- Continuing all the above activities and services into the future, continuing to build on relationships with community groups, developing measures to harness the views and opinions of people and groups who are often missed out of community engagement activities.
- Identifying and embracing opportunities to work with other local community groups, as and when the need arises.
- Participating in local networks to share knowledge and experience of community engagement activities in other areas.
- Publicising the positive results that have been achieved from working relationships between the Council and other community groups (Seaton Summer Celebration) to encourage new relationships to be formed and raise community spirit.
- Ensuring that appropriate evaluation is carried out following consultation exercises to ensure that lessons learned are carried forward and an assessment of how effective and useful the consultation was.

Adopted by Council – 5 June 2023

