



Seaton Town Council Constitution

Chapter 31 Community Engagement Strategy

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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 community involvement and therefore, 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.
- 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 appropriate.
- 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 of the engagement 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.
- The process should encourage people to take the wider view, and to ensure that those people unable to be at an event have their views expressed by others.

Consultation principles

- If an event calls for wider public involvement, such as participatory budgeting, 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, for example, the recent consultation on provision for young people in the town.
- Events will be time-bound.
- Specific 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 2023 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.

- 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 the community to engage on decisions affecting the town.
- 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 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 meetings on the website, and the agenda on a notice board in the town.
- Preparation of an Annual Town Report of summary of activities during the preceding year 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 the financial accounts is published on the Council's website.
- Making Seaton Town Councillors' contact details available on the website.
- News and events are publicised through the Council's website and social media feeds.
- 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 concerns they may have
- The Annual Return and Statement of Accounts made available as printed copies and on the website.
- Consultation exercises and surveys are undertaken with residents, young people and stakeholder organisations.
- Establishment of the Seaton Regeneration 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 accessed 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 activities being delivered by the Council
- 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. When volunteers are available, the office is also open from 10am to 2pm on weekends and bank holidays.
 - Where and when appropriate, external resource maybe utilised for a large and time-consuming consultations or engagements.
 - 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 local 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, where appropriate and practicable.
- 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 (for example, Seaton Summer Celebration) to encourage the formation of new working relationships.
- 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 any consultation has been.

