



BARTON-UNDER-NEEDWOOD PARISH COUNCIL - Social Media Policy

Policy statement

- This policy is intended to help Councillors, employees and volunteers of Barton-under-Needwood Parish Council (BPC) make appropriate decisions about the use of Social Media.
- This Policy defines Social Media to encompass blogs, social networking websites, forums, messaging apps, boards, comments on web-articles and messages on platforms including X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.
- This policy outlines the standards we require Councillors, employees and volunteers to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which BPC will monitor your use of Social Media and the action we will take in respect of breaches of this policy.

The scope of the policy

- All Councillors, employees and, volunteers are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of BPC. Breach of this policy may be considered a breach of Code of Conduct and dealt with accordingly.
- Breach of this policy by employees may also be dealt with under the Disciplinary Rules referred to in the employee's contract of employment and, in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct leading to summary dismissal.

Responsibility for implementation of the policy

- The Council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.
- The BPC Clerk is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to our work or the reputation of BPC.
- All Councillors, employees and volunteers should ensure that they take the time to read and understand this policy.
- Any breach of this policy should be reported, in the first instance to the BPC Clerk. Where unavailable, to the BPC Chair or, in their absence to the BPC Vice Chair.
- Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the BPC Chair or the BPC Clerk or, in their absence to the BPC Vice Chair.

Using Social Media sites in our name

- Only the BPC Chair and the BPC Clerk are permitted to post material on a Social Media website in BPC's name and/or on behalf of BPC.
- There may be circumstances where the BPC Chair will give permission for Councillors, employees or volunteers to post material on a Social Media website in the BPC's name and/or on behalf of BPC. This would only be in accordance with this policy and within these rules for the use of Social Media

Using Social Media

- We recognise the importance of the internet in shaping public thinking about our Council and community. We also recognise the importance of our Councillors, employees and volunteers joining in and helping shape local government conversation and direction through interaction in Social Media.
- Before using social media on any matter which might affect the interests of BPC, Councillors, employees and volunteers must have read and understood this policy and have sought and gained prior written approval to do so from the BPC Chair.

Rules for use of Social Media

Whenever Councillors, employees, and volunteers are permitted to use Social Media in accordance with this policy, the following rules must be adhered to:

- Do not upload, post or forward a link with any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content;
- Any Councillor, employee or volunteer who feels that they have been harassed or bullied, or are offended by material posted or uploaded by a colleague onto Social Media should inform the BPC Chair or BPC Clerk;
- Never disclose commercially sensitive, personal private or confidential information. Any uncertainty regarding whether the information to be shared falls within one of these categories should be discussed with the BPC Chair or BPC Clerk;
- Do not upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party without that third party's written consent;
- Before including a link to any external material or content, check that permission is granted through the website's terms and conditions;
- When making use of any Social Media platform, read and comply with its terms of use;
- Be honest and open, but be mindful of the impact contributions might make to perceptions of BPC;
- Councillors, employees and volunteers are personally responsible for content published into Social Media tools;
- Do not escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations;
- Do not discuss employees without their prior approval;
- Always consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory e.g. politics and religion;
- Avoid publishing your contact details where they can be accessed and used widely by people you did not intend to see them;
- Never publish anyone else's contact details.

Monitoring use of Social Media websites

Councillors, employees and volunteers should be aware that any use of Social Media (whether or not accessed for Council purposes) may be monitored. Where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken against employees under the Disciplinary Rules referred to in the employee's contract of employment and for Councillors and volunteers under their respective Code of Conduct.

Misuse of Social Media can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against Councillors, employees and volunteers.

In particular, a serious case of uploading, posting or forwarding a link to any of the following types of material on Social Media, whether in a professional or personal capacity, will probably amount to gross misconduct (this list is not exhaustive):

- pornographic material (that is, writing, pictures, films and video clips of a sexually explicit or arousing nature);
- a false and defamatory statement about any person or organisation;
- material which is offensive or obscene;
- criminal, discriminatory, derogatory content or content which causes embarrassment to BPC and its employees;
- confidential information about the BPC or anyone else;
- any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, and whether for you or BPC); or
- material in breach of copyright or other intellectual property rights, or which invades the privacy of any person.

Any such action will be addressed under the Disciplinary Rules referred to in the employee's contract of employment and for employees may result in summary dismissal.

- Where evidence of misuse is found, BPC may undertake a more detailed investigation in accordance with the Disciplinary Rules referred to in the employee's contract of employment, involving the examination and disclosure of monitoring records to those nominated to undertake the investigation and any witnesses or managers involved in the investigation. If necessary, such information may be handed to the police in connection with a criminal investigation.

Monitoring and review of this policy

The BPC Chair and the BPC Clerk shall be responsible for reviewing this policy annually to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice.