

BARNT GREEN PARISH COUNCIL

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PRESS, MEDIA & SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

PART 1: PRESS AND MEDIA

Introduction

1. Barnt Green Parish Council ("the Council") is committed to the provision of accurate information in respect of its functions, decisions and actions.
2. The purpose of this policy is to set out the procedure for dealing with media enquiries and for making use of social media.
3. The Parish Council welcomes the opportunity to talk to the media and understands it plays an important role in the democratic process. Both the media and Social Media can be useful for promoting the Parish Council and encouraging community engagement.
4. The 'media' can be anything related to written periodicals, newspapers, television and audio radio transmission. Social Media relates to social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Youtube, podcasts, blogs and discussion forums.

Legal position

5. This policy is subject to the Council's various statutory obligations such as those set out in:
 - Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960,
 - Local Government Act 1972 (the holding of parish council meetings),
 - Local Government Act 1986 (rules on local authority publicity),
 - Freedom of Information Act 2000,
 - Data Protection Act 1998 and subsequent General Data Protection Regulation,
 - The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 and
 - the Council's standing orders. Relevant standing orders referenced to or explained in this policy can be accessed via the Council's website.
6. The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (2011) includes the following relevant information:
 - Publicity by local authorities should:-
 - be lawful
 - be cost effective
 - be objective
 - be even-handed
 - be appropriate
 - have regard to equality and diversity
 - be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity
7. The Council, its councillors and staff must always consider the long-term reputation of the Council when dealing with the media. Information which is confidential or where disclosure of information is prohibited by law must not be disclosed. Some but not all of the relevant obligations that councillors are subject to are contained in the Members' Code of Conduct, a copy of which can be accessed via the Council's website.

Meetings

8. All meetings are open to the public, unless an item of discussion relates to a confidential matter when the public will be asked to leave. During the allocated time for public participation, the media may speak and ask questions. Public participation is regulated by the Council's standing orders.
9. The Parish Council's Standing Order 3N relates to the presence of the press in meetings:
3(n) The press shall be provided with reasonable facilities for the taking of their report of all or part of a meeting at which they are entitled to be present.
10. The Parish Council's Standing Orders 3L and 3M relate to the recording of meetings by the general public:
3(L) A person who attends a meeting is permitted to report on the meeting whilst the meeting is open to the public. To "report" means to film, photograph, make an audio recording of meeting proceedings, use any other means for enabling persons not present to see or hear the meeting as it takes place or later or to report or to provide oral or written commentary about the meeting so that the report or commentary is available as the meeting takes place or later to persons not present.
3(M) A person present at a meeting may not provide an oral report or oral commentary about a meeting as it takes place without permission.

Recording of a meeting following the exclusion of the public to allow for the discussion of confidential matters is not allowed. (The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014).

Interviews, statements and articles

11. The media shall contact the Council's Executive Officer if they want to (i) interview councillors or staff about its business decisions and actions and/or (ii) obtain a verbal or written statement from the Council about its business decisions and actions.
12. Any verbal or written statement given by the Council's Executive Officer to the media represents the corporate position and views of the Council, not the individual views of its councillors or staff held in their official capacity.
13. The intention by the media to interview councillors or staff in their official capacity about the Council's business, decisions and actions must be circulated to all members of the Council prior to any such interview. Questions by the media about the personal views of the councillors or staff in their private capacity will not be acceptable. Councillors and staff cannot communicate their personal views about the Council's business, decisions and actions, other than the views they hold in their official capacity. Councillors and staff are not permitted to misrepresent the corporate position and views of the Council, or to damage the reputation of others in the Council or the Council itself.
14. The Council's Executive Officer may contact the media if the Council wants to give an interview, provide a verbal or written statement to the media or publish an article using the media about its business, decisions and actions.
15. Councillors and staff, other than the Executive Officer in accordance with paragraph 11 above, cannot in their official capacity, provide verbal or written statements to the media, or write articles for publication using the media about the Council's business decisions and actions without the Council's prior knowledge.

16. Personal views held councillors or staff cannot be communicated whilst acting in their official capacity, thus councillors are not permitted to use their title "Councillor" and staff are not permitted to use their job title when communicating in a private capacity.
17. Prior to any press or media interview the interviewer will be given a copy of this policy.

PART 2: SOCIAL MEDIA & ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Introduction

1. The use of digital and social media and electronic communication provides a way for the Parish Council to interact in a way that improves the communications both within the Council and between the Council and the residents, businesses and agencies it works with and serves.
2. The Council currently has a website and Facebook page, and uses email to communicate. It is also a member of the Barm Green Village WhatsApp group. 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.
3. The Council Facebook page is intended to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within our Parish and promote our community positively.
4. **Communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:**
 - Be civil, tasteful 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;
 - Will be moderated by either the Chairman, Vice-Chairman or the Executive Officer;
 - No political advertising will be allowed.
5. If the Council's Facebook page is opened up to discussion, then to ensure that all discussions on the page are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, participants will be asked to follow these 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 the Council members or staff, will not be permitted.
 - Share freely and be generous with official Council posts but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.
 - Stay on topic.
 - Refrain from using the Council's Facebook page for commercial purposes or to advertise market or sell products.
6. The site is not monitored 24/7 and it is not always possible to reply individually to all messages or comments received. However, we will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people or authorities. Participants are asked to exclude any personal or private information in social media posts to the Parish Council.

7. Sending a message/post via Facebook will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and the council will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through these channels. Instead, please make direct contact with the Executive Officer and/or members of the council by emailing.
8. We retain the right to remove comments or content that includes:
 - Obscene or racist content
 - Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language
 - Potentially libellous 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 spamOr where the information would be a breach of a Council's policy or the law
9. The Council's response to any communication received not meeting the above criteria will be to either ignore, inform the sender of our policy or send a brief response as appropriate. This will be at the Council's discretion based on the message received, given our limited resources available.
10. Any information posted on the Facebook page not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Repeat offenders will be blocked from the Facebook page. The Council may post a statement that '*A post breaching the Council's Social Media Policy has been removed*'. If the post alleges a breach of a Council's 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.

Parish Council Website.

11. In line with our Freedom of Information policy and Publication Scheme, we may direct those contacting us for our information to our website, or we may forward their question to one of our Councillors for consideration and response. We may not respond to every comment we receive particularly if we are experiencing a heavy workload.

Parish Council email

12. The Executive Officer has their own council email address: exec@barntgreen.org.uk
The email account is monitored mainly during contracted hours, and we aim to reply to all questions sent as soon as we can.
13. The Executive Officer is responsible for dealing with email received and passing on any relevant mail to members or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Executive Officer, and/or otherwise will always be copied to the Executive Officer. All new emails requiring data to be passed on, will be followed up with a data consent form for completion before action is taken with that correspondence.
14. Individual councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners in relation to their own personal views, if appropriate, copy to the Executive Officer. NB any emails copied to the Executive Officer become official and will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act. These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.
15. 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.

SMS (texting)

16. Members and the Executive Officer may use SMS as a convenient way to communicate at times. All are reminded that this policy also applies to such messages.

Video Conferencing e.g. Skype

17. If this medium is used to communicate please note that this policy also applies to the use of video conferencing.

Internal communication and access to information within the Council

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

Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct and the Data Protection Act in all their work on behalf of the Council

19. It is vital that all privileged information is treated sensitively and securely. Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of some of the information to which they have access and not to share confidential information with anyone. Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures.
20. Members should also be careful only to cc essential recipients on emails i.e. to avoid use of the 'Reply to All' option, but of course copying in all who need to know and ensuring that unnecessary email trails have been removed.

This policy was approved at the Barnt Green Parish Council meeting held 18 November 2019

Signed:  18/11/19
Chairman, Barnt Green Parish Council

Date of Review: November 2020