



BARTON-LE-CLAY PARISH COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION POLICY

Introduction

The use of digital and social media and electronic communication enables Barton-le-Clay Parish Council to interact in a way that improves the communications both within the Council and between the Council and the people, businesses and agencies it works with and serves.

Policy

The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to staff and members in the use of online communications, to minimise the risks to the Council.

The Council has a website, Facebook page, Twitter account and uses email to communicate. 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.

The Council Facebook pages and Twitter account intends to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within our Parish and promote our community positively.

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.
- If it is official Council business it will be moderated by either the Chair/Vice Chair of the Council or the Clerk to the Council;
- Social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

In order to ensure that all discussions on the Council page are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, we ask you 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 or Twitter site for commercial purposes or to advertise market or sell products.

An official account on any social media website may only be set-up with consent from the Parish Council. Once approved, each account will be set up by the Parish Clerk. Only authorised administrator staff or Councillors may use these accounts to post online and access to the account is strictly limited. The Parish Council's social media accounts are managed and monitored by the Parish Clerk. In addition, up to two councillors will be nominated to monitor the social media accounts to ensure they are operated in accordance with this policy and to manage the account when the Clerk/Assistant Clerk are on leave.

Councillors should not use their own personal social media accounts when posting or commenting on posts with regard to Parish Council business, or anything that may be construed as such. Councillors using their own social media accounts or any other form of communication for community or other purposes do so as private individuals and should not use any privileged material gained from their position as a Parish Councillor.

The site is not monitored 24/7 and we will not always be able 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. Please do not include personal/private information in your social media posts to us.

Sending a message/post via Facebook or Twitter will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and we will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through these channels. Instead, please make direct contact with the council's Clerk and/or members of the council by emailing.

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 spam
- Alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law

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. 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

The Parish Council's website is an integral part of the Parish Council. Its purpose is to communicate with residents, local clubs, societies and organisations as well as external bodies including Central Bedfordshire Council and Local and/or Central Government organisations. The Parish Council will aim to ensure that all information within the website is up to date and relevant.

The following items may be included:

- Information on village clubs, societies and organisations and events
- Links to Unitary Council external websites:

- Links to approved charities (as requested)
- Parish Council agendas
- Parish Council minutes
- Parish Council Committees minutes
- Parish Council Financial Information as permitted under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (as amended)
- Parish Council policies and Procedures
- Parish Council members information

Other items may be included at the Clerk's discretion, and any items for publication on the website should be emailed to the Clerk to the Council at: theparishclerk@bartonleclay-pc.gov.uk

The following will NOT be included:

- Articles affiliated to, or promoting any political organisation
- Commercial advertisements
- Publicity for any non-charitable fund-raising event

The Clerk to the Council and Members will treat all information confidentially, securely and sensitively. Failure to observe this may be seen as a breach of the Parish Councils code of Conduct and dealt with through its prescribed procedures.

Where necessary, we may direct those contacting us to our website to see the required information, or we may forward their question to one of our Councillors for consideration and response. We may not respond to every comment we receive via social media, particularly if we are experiencing a heavy workload.

The Council may, at its discretion, allow and enable approved local groups to have and maintain a presence on its website for the purpose of presenting information about the group's activities. The local group would be responsible for maintaining the content and ensuring that it meets the Council's 'rules and expectation' for the web site. The Council reserves the right to remove any or all of a local group's information from the web site if it feels that the content does not meet the Council's 'rules and expectation' for its website. Where content on the website is maintained by a local group it should be clearly marked that such content is not the direct responsibility of the Council.

Parish Council email

The Clerk to the council has their own council email address (theparishclerk@bartonleclay-pc.gov.uk). The email account is monitored mainly during office hours, Monday to Friday, and we aim to reply to all questions sent as soon as we can. An 'out of office' message should be used when appropriate.

The Clerk 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 Clerk, and/or otherwise will always be copied to the Clerk. 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.

Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners in relation to their own personal views, if appropriate, copy to the Clerk. NB any emails copied to the Clerk 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. 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)

Members and the Clerk 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. Zoom

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

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.

As more and more information becomes available at the press of a button, 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 Council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures (at the extreme it may also involve a criminal investigation).

Members should also 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.

Any computer, mobile or other devices used to communicate, should be secured using a strong password – this includes any online accounts such as social media account passwords. A strong password should contain a mixture of letters, number and punctuation and should not contain names or words associated with you.

Use of the Council's systems and emails may be monitored and where breaches of policy or legislation are found to have taken place, action may be taken under the Council's Disciplinary Policy, the Code of Conduct or any such legal mechanism as is deemed appropriate.

Review Process.

This Policy will be reviewed by the Policies & Resources Committee bi-annually before being submitted to the Council for adoption.