



Barrowby Parish Council

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Media Publicity and Communications Policy

Document control

- **Owner:** Full Council
- **Responsible officer:** Clerk / Proper Officer
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- **Next review due:** January-March 2027 at Full Council for formal adoption at Parish Council May 2027

1. Purpose

This policy sets out Barrowby Parish Council's approach to:

- communications with the press and media;
- publicity issued in the name of the Council;
- public reporting, filming and recording of Council meetings;
- communications by or on behalf of the Council on contentious or high-profile matters;
- political neutrality and balanced treatment;
- use of Council land, buildings, noticeboards, website, social media channels and other Council resources for campaign or advocacy materials; and
- public communications relating to planning matters, parish polls, consultations and similar issues.

Its purpose is to support lawful, accurate, balanced and responsible communication while protecting the Council's role as a public authority and preserving public confidence in the Council's fairness and integrity.

2. Relationship with other Council documents

This policy should be read alongside the Council's:

- Communications Protocol;
- Social Media Policy;
- Councillor Code of Conduct;
- Standing Orders;
- Data Protection Policy / Privacy Notice;
- Publication Scheme; and
- Complaints Procedure.

The **Communications Protocol** governs the day-to-day operational and governance arrangements for communications on Council business, including who sends correspondence, when the Clerk should be copied in, records management, and councillor/officer communication boundaries.

This policy is intended to deal with the Council's external-facing communications framework, including media relations, publicity, public reporting of meetings, political neutrality, contentious issues, and the use of Council communication channels or Council property for campaign or advocacy purposes.

Where there is any overlap, the two documents should be read consistently. If there is any uncertainty, the Clerk will advise and, where necessary, refer the matter to the Council.

3. Scope

This policy applies to:

- all councillors;
- the Clerk and any other officers or employees;
- anyone authorised to issue communications on behalf of the Council;
- all committees, sub-committees, working groups and meetings of the Council where applicable;
- all Council-issued publicity;
- all Council-managed communication channels, including website and social media; and
- requests to use Council land, buildings, noticeboards or other Council property for banners, posters, signs or similar materials connected to public issues or campaigns.

This policy does not seek to regulate councillors acting clearly in a private capacity, provided they do not imply that they speak on behalf of the Council and do not misuse confidential information or Council resources.

4. Legal and governance framework

This policy shall be applied in accordance with:

- the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960;
- the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014;
- the Local Government Act 1986 and the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity;
- the Freedom of Information Act 2000;
- the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR;
- the law relating to confidentiality, defamation, equality and safeguarding;
- the Council's Standing Orders and Code of Conduct; and
- any other legislation or statutory guidance relevant from time to time.

The Council will not disclose confidential, exempt, privileged or personal information unless there is a lawful basis to do so.

5. General principles

The Council will seek to ensure that communications and publicity issued in its name are:

- lawful;
- accurate and factual;
- clear and proportionate;
- objective and balanced;
- respectful and professional;
- relevant to the Council's functions;
- politically neutral;
- consistent with Council decisions and adopted policy; and
- mindful of confidentiality, data protection and reputational risk.

The Council will not normally comment publicly on:

- confidential or exempt business;
- staffing matters relating to identifiable employees;

- personal data about identifiable individuals where there is no lawful basis to disclose it;
- allegations, rumours or speculation;
- matters subject to live legal proceedings or legal advice; or
- matters where public comment could prejudice a fair process.

6. Authorised communications on behalf of the Council

6.1 General

Communications made on behalf of the Council should reflect the Council's agreed position, decisions or adopted policy unless issued under delegated authority.

6.2 Clerk

The Clerk / Proper Officer is the normal point of contact for:

- factual and procedural media enquiries;
- official statements about Council decisions, meetings, services or processes;
- publication of approved press releases or formal responses; and
- communications requiring administrative, legal, records, information governance or procedural oversight.

6.3 Chair and authorised councillors

The Chair, or another councillor expressly authorised by the Council, may act as spokesperson on behalf of the Council where appropriate.

Where a councillor comments publicly without specific authority to speak for the Council, they must make clear that the comments are personal and not necessarily the formal view of the Council.

6.4 Personal views

Nothing in this policy prevents councillors from expressing personal views in a private capacity, but councillors must not:

- imply that they speak for the Council when they do not;
- disclose confidential, exempt or personal data unlawfully;
- misrepresent the Council's decisions or position; or
- use Council resources for personal or party-political campaigning.

7. Media enquiries and press statements

All formal media enquiries intended for the Council should normally be directed to the Clerk in the first instance.

The Clerk, in consultation with the Chair where appropriate, will determine:

- whether a response should be issued;
- who should respond;
- whether the matter is routine, sensitive or contentious;
- whether legal, data protection or reputational issues arise; and
- whether the matter should be referred to the Council.

Press releases and media statements issued in the Council's name should:

- be accurate, balanced and relevant to Council business;
- avoid unnecessary personalisation;
- avoid inflammatory or emotive language;
- avoid party-political content; and
- be checked, where necessary, for confidentiality, defamation and data protection risks before issue.

8. Publicity, neutrality and contentious issues

Where the Council is dealing with a controversial, high-profile or disputed issue, including planning matters, parish polls, consultations, neighbourhood planning matters, campaigns or

other public controversies, the Council must act in a lawful, objective, transparent and even-handed manner.

The Council may:

- publish factual information;
- explain legal process or procedure;
- publicise meeting dates, deadlines and routes for representations;
- summarise decisions lawfully taken by the Council;
- correct factual inaccuracies in a balanced way; and
- communicate the Council's formally resolved position where one exists.

The Council must not use Council resources, officer time, Council land, buildings, noticeboards, website, social media channels or other Council facilities to unfairly promote or oppose one side of a live campaign or disputed matter.

The Council's role is to act fairly and lawfully as a public authority. This does not prevent residents, campaign groups, developers, applicants, objectors or other third parties from expressing their own views in their own name, subject to the law and any applicable meeting rules.

9. Planning matters and parish polls

In relation to live or potential planning matters, the Council must take particular care to distinguish between:

- the Council's formally resolved position;
- factual or procedural information;
- comments made by individual councillors in a personal capacity; and
- campaigning by third parties.

Nothing in this policy authorises the Council to campaign improperly or to act in a way that could reasonably give rise to an appearance of bias, predetermination or misuse of public resources.

Where the Council is involved in or commenting on a parish poll or other public vote, the Council must take care that any publicity issued in its name is factual, balanced and relevant to Council functions and does not improperly favour one side of the argument through use of Council resources.

Councillors may hold predispositions and may lawfully take positions on issues, but must remain mindful of their obligations under the Code of Conduct and, where relevant, planning probity principles.

10. Meetings, reporting, filming and recording

Meetings of the Council and its committees are open to the public and press except where the Council lawfully resolves to exclude the public for confidential or other lawful reasons.

Members of the public and media may report on, film, photograph, audio-record or otherwise communicate information about a public meeting, provided that this does not disrupt proceedings and does not relate to business from which the public has been lawfully excluded. Reasonable facilities may be made available where practicable, but the Council is not obliged to provide equipment, technical support, live-streaming or dedicated media facilities.

The Chair may give reasonable directions to preserve order and ensure the effective conduct of the meeting.

Particular care should be taken where children or vulnerable adults are present, and those reporting should be asked to act responsibly and with due regard to privacy and safeguarding considerations. Any action taken by the Council must remain lawful and proportionate.

Public participation at meetings remains subject to the Council's Standing Orders and any public participation scheme adopted by the Council.

11. Campaign banners, posters and advocacy materials on Council land or property

No banner, poster, sign, leaflet stand, display or other campaign or advocacy material may be placed on Parish Council land, buildings, fences, noticeboards or other Parish Council property without prior written permission from the Council or from an officer acting under delegated authority.

Any request for permission should include:

- the applicant's name and contact details;
- the wording or content proposed;
- the proposed location;
- the size and method of fixing;
- the dates for which permission is requested; and
- any other information reasonably required by the Council in order to consider the request.

The Council may grant or refuse permission and may impose reasonable conditions, including conditions relating to:

- size;
- design and appearance;
- location;
- duration;
- fixing and removal;
- safety;
- maintenance;
- indemnity;
- damage to Council property; and
- compliance with any legal or practical requirements.

Where the material relates to a contentious local issue, the Council will apply the same criteria to all requests and will act in an even-handed and non-discriminatory way.

If the Council permits campaign or advocacy material for one side of such an issue, it will in principle allow the same opportunity for the other side to request equivalent use of Council property, subject to the same criteria, conditions and practical constraints.

Permission may be refused where, in the Council's reasonable opinion, the display would:

- create a safety risk;
- obstruct visibility, access or maintenance;
- damage property;
- be unlawful, defamatory, threatening, abusive or obscene;
- conflict with planning, highways or other legal restrictions;
- create a significant risk of the Council appearing improperly biased; or
- otherwise be unsuitable for Council property.

Any unauthorised material placed on Council property may be removed by or on behalf of the Council.

12. Council website, noticeboards and social media

Council-managed website content, noticeboards and social media channels must be used in accordance with the Council's adopted policies and management arrangements.

In relation to contentious issues, these Council channels should normally be used only for:

- factual information;
- procedural updates;
- meeting notices;
- publication of decisions and minutes;
- lawful consultations;

- neutral signposting to official sources; and
- corrections of material factual inaccuracy where appropriate.

They should not normally be used to host or circulate partisan campaign material in the name of the Council.

Where the Council decides exceptionally to permit material connected to a contentious issue on a Council channel or platform, the Council must act in a balanced and even-handed way and record the basis on which that decision was taken.

13. Pre-election period and political neutrality

The Council must ensure that publicity issued in its name is lawful, objective, balanced, relevant to its functions and not party-political.

Council resources must not be used to publish material intended or likely to affect public support for a political party, candidate or political viewpoint.

During any pre-election period, the Council will take particular care to ensure that publicity is factual, balanced, necessary for Council business, and not capable of being perceived as seeking to influence voters or support or oppose any candidate or political party.

This does not prevent the Council from continuing to discharge its normal functions, publish necessary notices, or provide factual information.

14. Confidentiality, data protection and records

All media and publicity activity must comply with data protection law, confidentiality duties and the Council's records management arrangements.

Particular care must be taken in relation to:

- complaints;
- staffing matters;
- legal advice;
- personal contact details;
- sensitive personal data;
- safeguarding matters; and
- confidential commercial or contractual information.

Significant press statements, publicity decisions, permissions granted under section 11, and formal responses to contentious issues should be retained as part of the Council's corporate record.

15. Breaches of this policy

Concerns about non-compliance with this policy should normally be raised with the Clerk and Chair in the first instance, unless the concern relates to the Clerk, in which case it should be raised with the Chair.

Serious or repeated breaches may be dealt with under the Council's Code of Conduct, complaints process, disciplinary procedure or other relevant governance arrangements, depending on the nature of the issue.

16. Review

This policy will be reviewed regularly by the Council and updated as required to reflect current legislation, guidance and operational needs.