

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

This matter is not a Key Decision within the Council's definition and has not been included in the relevant Forward Plan

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CORE SERVICES TO CABINET ON 14 JULY 2021

No Place for Hate in Barnsley

1. Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to raise awareness of the No Place for Hate campaign for Barnsley, championing for our borough to be the place of possibilities, where nobody faces abuse, online or in their community.

2. Recommendations

It's recommended that Cabinet:

- 2.1 Champions the zero-tolerance approach to online abuse;
- 2.2 Supports the launch of the No Place for Hate campaign taking place from July 2021;
- 2.3 Acknowledge the work to strengthen our social media guidance to staff and elected members; and
- 2.4 Work with place partners to support the campaign.

3. Introduction and background information

- 3.1 Digital platforms have revolutionised our ability to connect with many people. While more traditional communication and engagement methods are closely regulated by gatekeepers, digital channels allow anyone and any content to reach millions instantly. This has been an excellent development for the council, and we'll continue to harness the benefits of digital channels to reach and engage with our residents.
- 3.2 Unfortunately, the rise in intimidation, defamation, disinformation and hate speech on digital channels is rapidly growing. The lack of governance and regulation makes it easy for accounts, page and profiles to be created with the

purpose of spreading hate, abuse and misinformation with little accountability.

3.2 **Barnsley Council owned social media pages**

Since February 2021, we've revised and strengthened our processes for dealing with abuse on our online channels.

People are free to express their opinion and the majority of people who follow our accounts do this in a balanced way. The challenges we face are when opinions cross into and unacceptable, defamatory, inciting or intimidatory behaviour. We are also seeing a rise in misinformation (false, misleading or out of context material regardless of the motivation behind it) and disinformation (a deliberate attempt to mislead using material that the deceiver knows is untrue, designed to be widely shared). We've acted on our council social media platforms to inform social media users about what is acceptable on our pages.

We've updated our Social Media Acceptable Use policy (social media house rules - <https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/media-and-advertising/barnsley-council-social-media-acceptable-use-policy/>). This covers all of the council's accounts and outlines the standards that we expect on our social media channels; it's a key enforcement step in establishing a positive behaviour change.

Since the start of February 2021, we've made over 160 interventions, including asking people to amend or remove their comments or removing people's access to our accounts. Overall, this has had a positive result with the overwhelming majority of people following the policy.

3.3 **Support to staff and elected members**

Unfortunately, our staff and elected members are subjected to online abuse. What might just be seen as just a comment or someone showing their frustrations, is still directed at someone who just doing their role and spreading misinformation and disinformation.

██████████ Barnsley Council report it yourself. You've read the f***ing post! Better yet why not consider getting someone to empty the tw*tting thing from time to time 🤔

Putting council tax up every year so he can get a big fat bonus. --

big brown envelopes does wonders in Barnsley Council 🙄

Barnsley Council, what idiots you are.

The continual lies spread by these idiots...

We have a zero-tolerance approach to this, and we have a duty of care to our staff and elected members. Where there's evidence that abuse has been directly targeted at staff, account administrators have been asked to immediately remove any defamatory posts, and in two cases, Legal Services have issued cease and desist letters.

3.4 Community and news pages across Barnsley

Although we've taken steps to set the standards that we expect people to treat each other on our council-owned pages, we know that worldwide, including on many platforms associated with Barnsley, the unregulated use of social media is having a significant impact on separating communities and negatively impacts people's health and wellbeing.

Just as with our own pages, we're starting to raise awareness of this with local community and news pages. Where we're alerted to comments that are unacceptable, defamatory, inciting or intimidatory behaviour, misinformation or disinformation we will aim to contact the administrator of the page to ask them to encourage positive behaviour on their sites and to highlight inappropriate comments and ask them to take action to remove or correct them.

4. Proposals and justification

4.1 No Place for Hate behaviour change campaign

The campaign seeks to educate people on positive online behaviour and establish shared values in our communities.

The campaign will:

- raise awareness of online abuse on social media and highlight the hidden harm behind it
- share stories of how progress can be made when online abuse is eliminated.

For this campaign we have a range of stakeholders. For some, it will be a hard but essential sell; for others, we'll be championing their beliefs and giving them a platform to share their stories.

This is the first part of a long-term plan. Initially, we plan to focus on online abuse. This can be diversified in the future to explore the different categories of hate crime:

- disability
- age
- gender

- gender identity/reassignment
- race
- religion, faith or belief
- sexual orientation
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity.

This list is not exhaustive, hate crime can be motivated by many different types of prejudice.

We propose to launch the campaign in July 2021. The initial phase will include:

- an engaging video shared on social media and cross-promoted by partners highlighting the hidden harm behind online abuse, showcasing the positive results of engaging with each other in a respectful manner
- updated webpage to focus on online abuse (linking in with wider information about reporting hate crime), with information on how changing behaviours will benefit our borough
- communications to our staff and elected members
- communications to partners to encourage a place-led approach with partners to pledge to support the campaign
- media opportunities to share our ambition
- both digital and traditional paid advertising.

4.2 Update of the council's social media guidance for employees and elected members

The council's social media policy is still current and up to date, but in light of this campaign we will strengthen:

- our zero-tolerance approach to online abuse
- the information and guidance for our employees and elected members on proactively reporting online abuse and the support available to them, including wellbeing support
- responsibilities regarding their role as an employee or elected member of the council and their behaviour on their own online presence.

4.3 Working with the promoting community tolerance and respect subgroup of the Barnsley Safer Partnership

We're linking in with the subgroup to inform and support this campaign in the longer term, as it develops and support them in achieving their outcome for communities to be safer, cohesive and more resilient.

4.4 Working with our partners to promote positive online behaviour across the whole borough

For the campaign to have a positive impact for Barnsley, we will ask our partners across the borough to support this campaign. We will ask them to promote the campaign and get involved in developing this further, make sure their staff are supported, and that their online platforms are safe places for their customers.

Definitions:

Hate crime

Any incident which constitutes a criminal offence that is perceived by the victim, or any other person, as being motivated by prejudice or hate.

Hate incident

Any incident which may or may not constitute a criminal offence that is perceived by the victim, or any other person, as being motivated by prejudice or hate.

Misinformation

Not deliberately intended to deceive. Instead, it aims to shape or change public opinion on a given topic – this is false and misleading info such as conspiracy theories, click bait headlines etc.

Disinformation

Created to deceive. People spread disinformation for a variety of reasons – to increase their followers, to incite an emotional response, or create a distraction.

5. Consideration of alternative approaches

- 5.1 The alternative approach is to continue the work the Communications and Marketing team are doing to manage behaviours on the pages we own. Although this will have some impact it won't provide the opportunities to change the way in which residents feel it is appropriate to engage with each other online.

6. Implications for local people and customers

- 6.1 This work will result in positive results for residents and customers as we support people to play their part in developing supportive, inclusive communities.

By giving people to confidence and courage to challenge and report online abuse, this campaign is linked to making our communities safer places for people live, linking to the Council Plan's Healthy Barnsley theme.

7. Financial impacts

- 7.1 Consultations have taken place with representatives of the Service Director – Finance (S151 Officer).

Any additional costs associated with the campaign will be met from within existing resources.

8. Employee impacts

- 8.1 Being the victim of targeted abuse is not part of someone's job or role, whatever sector they work in.

Our work on the campaign and social media guidance provides clear support to employees and elected members in dealing with online abuse. We have a clear process where people can raise any concerns or ask for advice about online abuse, as well as health and safety support. Both the campaign and the social media guidance will be promoted via our internal channels.

- 8.2 We want employees and elected members to support the campaign, so they feel confident to challenge online abuse if they see it in their work or personal life.

9. IT impacts

- 9.1 No initial impacts. Support and advice may be sought from IT Services in relation to abuse posted on digital channels.

10. Communications activity

- 10.1 The Communications and Marketing team will continue work to develop key messages and campaign materials. This involves working with local and regional partners, as well as the Barnsley Tolerance and Respect Group.

11. Promoting equality, diversity and social inclusion

- 11.1 The campaign considers the effect of harassment, bullying, violent or aggressive behaviour, or discriminatory/hate crime comments on social

media. It supports the aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

12. Consultations

12.1 The following people have been consulted in the development of the campaign:

- Communications and Marketing service
- Senior Management Team
- Business Improvement, Human Resources and Communications business unit
- Equalities and Inclusion
- Directorate DMTs
- Tolerance and Respect Group.
- Financial Services

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Financial Implications/Consultation



Nicola Mason 29/06/2001.

(To be signed by senior Financial Services officer)