

# **Barnsley Chronicle Ltd Annual IPSO report April 2022**

## **Introduction:**

The Barnsley Chronicle is a weekly newspaper that has covered the geographical and municipal borough of Barnsley since 1858.

It is owned and operated by the Hewitt family and is part of the wider Acredula Group which has business interests in book publishing, B2B magazine production, public relations, graphic design and social media management.

The Chronicle is the largest-circulating weekly newspaper in Yorkshire and remains one of the biggest-selling weeklies in the UK.

The paper covers local news for the Barnsley audience – there is no regional content for South Yorkshire or the wider region.

As well as the Chronicle, the company also publishes the Holme Valley Review, a free monthly publication, although this has not been published so far during 2022 while a review into its long-term future is carried out.

## **Our editorial standards:**

The Barnsley Chronicle sets out to be an authoritative, trustworthy journal and takes an independent position on the material it carries.

Stories are verified as much as possible by the editorial team before publication. Over the last few years, the newspaper has substantially increased its audiences on social media (the Facebook page is approaching 50,000 likes, and we have almost 20,000 followers on Twitter).

We use these extensive online connections to search out

story ideas, follow up leads and make contact with people.

However, we have a strict policy that we do not publish a story obtained from social media sources without first checking its accuracy and authenticity - we do not copy and paste comments made on Facebook/Twitter and insist on speaking to the person who made the post over the phone or in person.

When we follow up a story garnered from social media, our general procedure is to contact the original source and ask for their co-operation - if it is not granted, we don't use their information and instead seek to make the story 'stand up' via alternative sources such as councillors, police contacts or others.

We do not share content or re-tweet posts where we are unable to confirm authenticity.

This is the responsible stance to take and do not envisage this changing while I remain as editor.

In simple terms, our policy is to treat social media leads as nothing more than tip-offs that may or not turn out to be true - much like the traditional 'overheard conversation in a pub'.

Dealing with social media - particularly users' comments - has proved one of the most time-consuming aspects of the editorial department's out-of-hours role in the last year as we attract a large following and often use debate-worthy stories online.

We are grateful to IPSO for issuing guidance on the whole issue of social media in 2019 and this guidance has proved particularly helpful.

It has given us something tangible to refer to and our reporters feel much more confident in dealing with

complaints about social media than they did a couple of years ago.

Council-related stories - particularly about local authority spending or councillors' remarks - often generate intensively diverse opinions and we've worked alongside Barnsley Council on their 'No Place For Hate' campaign which aims to tackle online trolling.

As the operator of two of the biggest Facebook presences in the town, it is only right that we play our part in stopping Facebook comments pages becoming disrespectful free-for-alls and upsetting to people whose stories appear on them.

The Covid-19 pandemic saw many meetings we would normally cover either cancelled or move online, so we adapted to that. As things are getting back to normal, reporters often cover these in person, and attend court hearings and inquests when required.

If the issues being discussed are contentious, it is expected that our reporters contact both sides to ensure a story is balanced and fair. For example in recent months, we've had controversial stories regarding the council, hospital and schools, and while the statistics we gather are thoroughly checked, we always offer a right of reply.

If people choose not to speak to us, we always make it clear in the story that they have been offered the opportunity but chose not to take it rather than leave readers in any doubt.

In previous reports to IPSO, I have highlighted the difficulties we face in dealing with comments on social media and the fact that these had become one of the major sources of frustrations for our readers – and complaints to us.

In last year's report, I mentioned that to support our efforts, we had been lead signatories in a campaign due to be launched in Barnsley in the summer of 2021 called 'No Place For Hate'.

This brought together all the organisations in the borough with major online audiences and we agreed ground rules on acceptable behaviour that could, if ignored by users, lead to them facing a collective ban from all member sites.

This has helped reduce the problem somewhat - although there is no quick fix to the issue of complaints arising from inflammatory comments on social media feeds, given how easy it is for banned users to create new profiles and resume their activities.

We supported the campaign by offering top-of-the-page banner presence on all our news pages promoting the campaign in the launch week and supported this with extensive coverage within the paper and our online channels.

A sample of one of the pages promoting the launch is attached for reference.

The Chronicle continues to cover things such as council meetings and public meetings in the traditional way by having a reporter in attendance, whether that be in person or, as necessity has dictated during the last year via Zoom, Teams or other online platforms..

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**Our responsible person(s):**

As editor, the paper's nominated responsible person for IPSO compliance is Andrew Harrod. In the event of his absence, this responsibility would pass to the deputy editor, Josh Timlin.

### **Our complaints handling process:**

Any minor complaints will generally be dealt with initially by the reporter involved in preparing the original story.

Our editorial staff are instructed not to shy away from making a correction where it is warranted.

Occasionally, a complainant may make contact via phone or in person and ask to speak to someone 'in charge'.

These calls would initially be dealt with by the news desk and the deputy editor who works on the news desk will often assess the seriousness of the complaint.

If it can be resolved promptly and amicably then he is empowered to draft and arrange publication of a suitable correction.

It is our aim to keep the complaints process as simple as possible.

Occasionally, a complainant may insist on speaking to the editor – bypassing the reporter and news desk – and our staff are not instructed to put anyone off contacting me directly.

My phone number and direct email address is on our website and if readers contact the switchboard, they are readily put through to me.

A copy of our complaints procedure is on the website and also appears regularly in the newspaper on the letters page.

The IPSO compliance artwork features both in-print and online.

The wording for such is:

At the Barnsley Chronicle, we try to get things right but occasionally, we make mistakes.

If you have a complaint about a story featured in our newspaper or on our website, please contact the news desk on Barnsley 734262 or [email\\_editorial@barnsley-chronicle.co.uk](mailto:email_editorial@barnsley-chronicle.co.uk).

If we are unable to resolve your complaint to your satisfaction, the matter can be referred to the Independent Press Standards Organisation of which we are a member. We abide by the Editors' Code of Practice as demanded by IPSO.

For details on the code and what you should do should you be unsatisfied with the way we handle your complaint, please visit their website – [www.ipso.co.uk](http://www.ipso.co.uk).

We accept complaints in most formats – phone, letter, email or in person.

By virtue of its public nature, if a complaint is posted on one of our social media channels, we would normally request direct contact details so we can investigate the matter further.

### **Our training process:**

All staff have been briefed on our policy regarding complaints handling. A copy of the Code of Editors has been included in the handbook given to all members of the editorial team on their first day.

A copy is posted on the office notice board and a fresh copy is distributed to every member of the team when they join the company.

All copies of IPSO guidance booklets such as recent ones

covering social media and dealing with children in the news are retained in the office and readily available for staff to refer to.

We now have quite an inexperienced team of journalists - although they have all completed NCTJ-approved training courses.

Consequently, they already have a good understanding of the 'theory' of media law, privacy and ethics, but we work with them constantly to ensure they quickly grasp how all this theory translates into the working world. This will only improve over time.

While a considerable part of 2020 and large chunks of 2021 involved people working from home more, we took steps to ensure all reporters still had access to help and advice from me and other senior members of the editorial team.

We did this by creating a WhatsApp group - still an active, valuable tool if reporters have opted to work from home - where story ideas continue be shared and any potential pitfalls could be discussed.

This practice works well and gives the reporters a chance to ask any questions they may have in an open, relaxed environment.

Throughout the pandemic, I was working largely in the office and all reporters knew I was easily contactable in the event of them having any concerns which needed a judgement call from me.

Any additional legal advice we receive from bodies such as the NMA is shared with colleagues, as are updated versions to the Editors' Code etc.

We still see shorthand as one of the most valuable skills our

reporters have and they are instructed to be methodical when it comes to taking notes in shorthand.

Secure cabinets are provided where reporters' notebooks and any other relevant material can be stored for reference and are used solely for that purpose.

### **Transparency:**

As part of our general recruitment and conduct guidelines, all editorial staff are asked to divulge any involvement with external organisations which could compromise their integrity and impartiality.

Since introducing this policy, no-one has declared any interests which, in my opinion, could expose our newspapers to any conflict in this regard.

In the period relevant to this report, we have not had cause to seek pre-publication guidance from IPSO advisors. However, all staff are aware that such guidance is available.

I would normally expect that approach to IPSO to be made by either myself or the deputy editor although reporting staff would not be discouraged from making such an approach themselves if it was felt necessary.

### **Summary:**

In my last report, I outlined my concerns regarding case confidentiality. I felt this was necessary given that a complainant had been very vocal on social media about the progress of his complaint with IPSO, suggesting the formal process of an IPSO investigation meant we must, therefore,



have broken the rules.

For the record, his complaint was rejected after investigation.

I did suggest that IPSO reminds complainants of the need for confidentiality on both sides during the complaints process and I hope some steps have been taken to stress this when people register complaints.

It is clear from a matter that has just been referred to IPSO that, in my report next year, I will have to comment on the general conduct of people who register complaints - and perhaps IPSO may need to offer guidance to would-be complainants which, if ignored, should be taken into account when making judgements.

One of our reporters was subjected to a brief - but very intense - period of intimidation by someone who then went on to register a formal complaint with IPSO.

Had my reporter subjected the complainant to the same kind of treatment in pursuit of a story, I have no doubt that she would have been accused of harassment.

But as the matter has only been raised at the time of writing my report for 2021, I will reserve further comment on this for next year's report.



**NEWSLINES**

**Walkers put their best foot forward**

MACMILLAN cancer charity has thanked a group of walkers who raised more than £1,000 through their efforts.

In May, five walkers walked 32 miles from Birdsedge to Mexborough in memory of one of the team's sisters who had recently died from cancer.

The team was comprised of Darren Houghton, Jason Gregory, Brooks Riddiough, Angie Houghton and Craig Skelton.

Together they raised £1,070 – and the cash is still coming in.

"From everyone here at Macmillan I just want to thank the team for their efforts," said Eileen Jones, Macmillan corporate ambassador for South Yorkshire.

"Their walk was a huge challenge and the donation money is still coming in. Unfortunately their Macmillan shirts didn't get to them in time for the walk, but we are very impressed with their dedication to their fundraising effort."

**No waiting order for village road**

A TRAFFIC order has been proposed to stop vehicles from waiting on both sides of Barugh Lane and Higham Common Road.

The order will affect traffic on the northern side of Barugh Green Road, at the Higham crossroads.

The 'no waiting at any time' restrictions have been upgraded on all roads around the Barugh Green crossroads but inconsiderate parking further away from the pedestrian crossing has required the extension to be made.

The move will improve visibility and maintain unobstructed access for larger vehicles and buses.

Further details of the order are available on the council website at the Library @ the Lightbox.

Any objections should be submitted in writing to traffic@barnsley.gov.uk.

**Thousands taking tests every day**

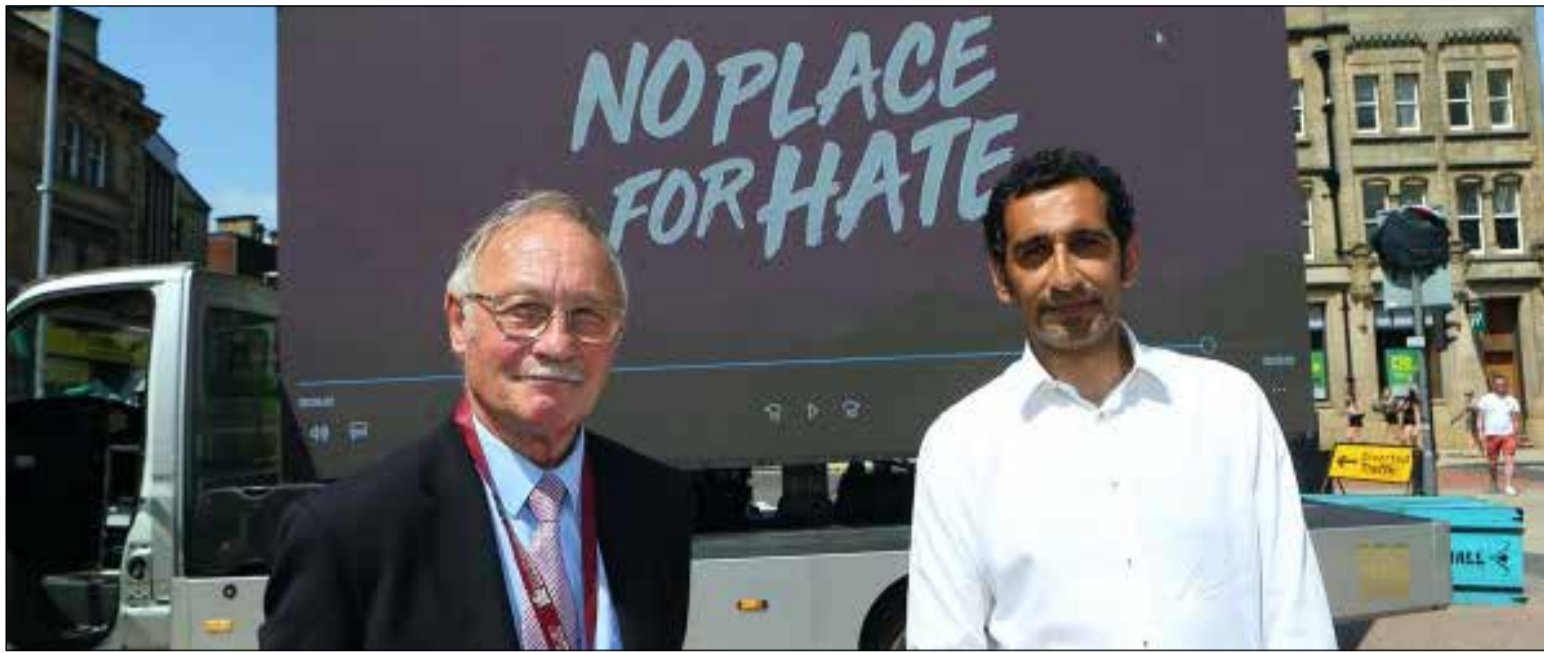
MORE than 40,000 lateral flow tests have been conducted in Barnsley this month – with thousands taking a test every day.

The total number conducted since the start of the pandemic is 473,441.

Barnsley Council is encouraging residents to take the tests to keep friends and family safe before meeting up.

A spokesperson said: "Regular lateral flow testing helps you make sure you are okay, as well as protecting those around you."

Organisations such as the council, the Chronicle and other local social media sites support campaign



LAUNCH EVENT: Coun Robin Franklin and Shokat Lal at Monday's launch of No Place For Hate. Picture: Shaun Colborn.



**Making our town no place for hate**

By Charlotte Hutton

KEY organisations from across the borough are coming together to take a stand against trolls behind online abuse on social media platforms.

The No Place For Hate campaign was formally approved at last week's cabinet meeting after a six-month planning process.

It hopes to highlight online abuse and hate comments in the attempt to eradicate hate speech from social media platforms.

The idea was championed following a series of reports made by Barnsley Council employees who revealed the abuse they had received online.

Most notably is former mayor, Coun Pauline Markham, when she was physically assaulted and had her car's tyres slashed following her work campaigning against off-road bikers.

Shokat Lal, the council's leading officer on the project, said he hopes the project will make social media much safer for everyone.

"The thing about online abuse is that the person directing the comments would never say it to the other person's face," he said.

"In a sense, they feel protected behind their computer screen and then feel like they can go on



Terry Kay  
All these comments will be removed shortly once the bent councillors see them all

to say vile and horrible things to people who are just trying to do their job.

"Within the council, just like any job, there are proper procedures to go through if you take issue with something that was said or done and I think that the rise of social media has really blurred the lines between what is an acceptable comment and hate speech.

"Since trialling the No Place For Hate campaign across the council's social media sites, we have noted around 160 instances of abuse that have since been dealt with – either the person has removed their comment, or apologised for their actions.

"Going forward we want to see more businesses across the borough take up this mantle to let people know that there is a person at the other end of their comment."

The campaign has been joined by eight other businesses and organisations across the borough including Barnsley College, South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue, Barnsley LGBT+ Forum, South Yorkshire Police, and the Barnsley Chronicle who, between them, have a social media audience of more than 200,000.

Many of the administrators managing these social media pages have to deal with abuse from

trolls at all hours of the day and night.

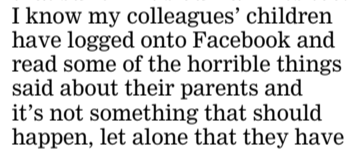
Hoyland Milton's Coun Robin Franklin said he hopes the campaign will be taken to Westminster to help tackle online abuse on a wider scale.

"Over the past two years we as council employees have been attacked on social media and been

unable to fight back but this campaign should help us to be able to get rid of quite nasty comments.

"We understand not everyone might agree with what we are doing or how we go about things, but I think there's a difference between complaining about a policy or decision and targeting a person directly.

"It's not just us as councillors that suffer – it's our families too. I know my colleagues' children have logged onto Facebook and read some of the horrible things said about their parents and it's not something that should happen, let alone that they have



to read. I am really hoping that a lot of Barnsley businesses get behind this and help to make a difference. We want to take this to Westminster because we feel that it's not just a Barnsley issue – you only have to look at what happened with the three footballers after the Euros to understand that online abuse is everywhere and we want to play our part in putting an end to it."

The campaign was backed by council leader, Sir Steve Houghton, who praised the initiative in the cabinet meeting.

"I support this campaign 110 per cent," he said.

"There is no place for hate in Barnsley and it's not acceptable in any form.

"The vast majority of residents are great but it's the small minority that needs to be aware that their actions have consequences.

"If we can't provide a safe space for our staff online then we have failed. Hopefully this campaign will also give people the power to 'call-out' abusive behaviour when they see it, to let others know that that sort of language won't be tolerated."

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"The vast majority of residents are great but it's the small minority that needs to be aware that their actions have consequences.

**'Impossible balancing act'**

By Andrew Harrod Editor

SOME might say that high profile organisations such as Barnsley Council, South Yorkshire Police – even the Barnsley Chronicle – are there to be shot at...

Keyboard warriors – seemingly with little else to occupy their time – love to while away a few hours on social media, instigating arguments with people they don't actually know that much about.

They have an opinion – and they will insist on sharing it with the rest of the world.

And while we at the Chronicle and our sister website wearbarnsley.com welcome healthy debate on the content we share, what we don't welcome is abuse, insults and inflammatory language.

Social media users are like everyone else. We enjoy something called 'freedom of speech'.

We also have laws to protect people from making false allegations.

Just like Barnsley Council and the other organisations who have

signed up to support No Place For Hate, our staff who populate and monitor social media have to deal with this online bile day in, day out.

It may come from people who probably wouldn't dare say boo to a goose in the 'real' world.

But put them in front of a keyboard and hide them behind an anonymous social media profile and suddenly they want to take on the world.

Just like other organisations, our staff are constantly being accused of being 'incompetent', 'suppressing free speech' or of 'taking back handers'.

Behind every organisation's social media presence are ordinary people just trying to do their jobs.

In the newsroom of the Chronicle, we don't employ people whose role is 'just' to make sure people play nicely on our social media channels.

Few organisations can afford such luxuries in today's challenging economic climate.

Used correctly, social media can be a wonderful thing. In the hands of trolls, it's like the Wild West.



**Boathouse expansion is floated**

PLANS worth £300,000 to expand Manvers Lake's boathouse have been sent to Rotherham Council.

With almost 2,000 members, Manvers Waterfront Boat Club is 'bursting at the seams' and the lake's charity – alongside local residents – have announced that they are planning to provide additional space at the boathouse.

The application seeks an additional ground floor bay, and the £300,000 scheme also includes the conversion of

space above the boat store into a multi-sport club room and storage.

Members have been backed by a number of organisations, including South Yorkshire Sport and Sport England, and are able to submit the application after more than £100,000 in donations from the public, private and other charities.

Chris Hawkesworth, president of the club, said: "I am extremely proud of what we are achieving.

"We have received over £100,000 in donations from public, private, other charities and various not for profit organisations already.

"We are backed by Sport England, the Environment Agency, South Yorkshire Sport, Dearne Valley College, Sheffield Hallam University, South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue to name but a few.

"I am sure we will get there with the money to enable a build later in this coming winter."



PEACEFUL: The Big Green Space protest will be held tomorrow in the town centre.

**Carlton care home plan gets approval**

A NEW care home is set to be brought to Carlton after plans were approved by Barnsley Council's planning board.

The application was originally submitted by Esland Group, who operate care homes for children aged eight to 18 throughout the UK, in June for the home to operate on Church Street.

Plans have now been given the green light and the property will be used as a home for one child and two staff members – both of whom would sleep at the home overnight.

In Esland Group's planning statement, they state the child

will be placed in a 'safe and homely environment' – and that allegations into behaviour is 'scaremongering'.

"This application should not automatically be considered to bring additional issues into the area due to the fact the children are very closely monitored and assessed before being placed in any of the homes to ensure that they themselves are placed in a safe homely environment," the statement said.

"Such allegations are pre-determining the children's behaviour and should be treated as scare-mongering.

"The proposal will offer employment to local people and provide a discrete and quiet location where children can be provided with a robust plan for their road to resilience to becoming valued members of society."

Plans have also been submitted by the same group for a new care home on Cliff Lane in Brierley.

The company want to use the property as a home for one child and seven staff members six full-time and one part-time.

No decision has been made on that application – though public consultation ends on July 29.

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**Campaigners plan 'peaceful protest' to defend countryside**

A PEACEFUL and 'family-friendly' event reacting towards the Barnsley masterplans will take place tomorrow.

The 'Barnsley Big Green Space' protest will be held at 11am at the Churchfield Peace Gardens, and members from the Extinction Rebellion Samba band will also be joining local residents.

Speakers from local campaigns such as Stop MU2 and MU3, REACH, and the Dearne Residents Action Group will also make their voices heard as the protest makes its way down to May Day Green.

A spokesperson for the event told the Chronicle: "Due to the minimal advertising of the local plan people are now heartbroken to finally hear about the destruction planned for their areas, and with little or no time left to object against it, uniting our communities to fight this devastation is the only way that we can guarantee all our wildlife will be protected.

"Recent research indicates that a quarter of our native mammals are at some kind of risk of extinction.

"Hares, water voles, hedgehogs live in Barnsley, along with many other at risk insects and birds.

"A massive 41 per cent of our species are in decline since the 70s because we haven't safeguarded their wellbeing like we as humans have done for ourselves.

"Without people making this stand our wildlife will just continue to be pushed aside for profit.

"Nature cannot tell us to stop, and the developers won't give in, so the time is now to come together, unite our villages and our voices to ensure all our wildlife in Barnsley is prioritised, protected and looked after not just for us but for future generations, too."

**IF you have an opinion on a story you've been reading, email your views to: editorial@barnsley-chronicle.co.uk**