

UNDERSTANDING AND PREPARING TO MOVE TO A .GOV.UK DOMAIN

This advice note was last updated on 28 March 2025 and was issued by the Parish Council Domains Helper Service at the Government Digital Service.

Background

The Practitioners' Guide 2025 has received updates to Section 1 of 'Digital and Data compliance' and Section 5, which details the actions councils should take to follow best practice when it comes to websites and email.

Parish and town councils are expected to have a legitimate and trusted online presence so citizens can find and communicate with them easily. Having a .gov.uk domain supports your community's expectations.

Best practices

To ensure professionalism, transparency, and compliance in council communications, parish and town councils should follow these best practices:

- Parish councils must have a role-based email account hosted on an authority owned domain for example, clerk@abcparishcouncil.gov.uk. You must migrate any personal email accounts for example, abcparishclerk@gmail.com. This ensures information is handled with appropriate security measures, aligning with GDPR principles.
- Council-owned email accounts provide a clear record of communications, which is essential for transparency and communication. All councillors should also use one for council business.
- Parish Council's need to have a council-owned website that complies with the accessibility guidelines.

- In the SAPP Practitioners' Guide for 2025, it is best practice to use a .gov.uk domain, email, and website to maintain a consistent and professional image, and ensure all communications are identifiable as coming from the parish or town council.
- Anyone visiting a .gov.uk website or receiving emails from a .gov.uk address will know the communication is safe, legitimate and can be trusted. This is increasingly important as cyber scams are on the rise.
- Using a .gov.uk domain and email supports data protection compliance and makes managing data subject access requests and freedom of information requests easier.

Taking action to comply with the Practitioners' Guide

The Parish Council Domains Helper Service has helped over 1000 Parish Councils move to a .gov.uk domain, and are on hand to help you take action.

- There is comprehensive guidance on [moving your parish council to a .gov.uk domain](#) on the .gov.uk website. Set out in easy-to-follow steps, this guidance takes you through the whole process, from getting approval to move to a .gov.uk domain and understanding the services your council needs, to choosing a registrar to set up your domain and be your point of contact if you need help.
- You can fill out this form to [sign up to a free 60 minute virtual workshop](#) if you need more help and advice about moving to a .gov.uk domain.
- You do not have to buy a new website to get a new domain or comply with accessibility laws if it places a disproportionate burden on the authority. You must include an [accessibility statement](#) on your website and review it regularly.

Roles

While the parish or town council must decide to move to a .gov.uk domain, it is the clerk's role to facilitate and manage the move. This is because the clerk is a permanent council staff member, and only they have the authority to complete some of the steps required, such as being named the domain registrant.

Useful links

- [GOV.UK - Guidance for moving your parish or town council to a .gov.uk domain](#)
- [GOV.UK - Follow the rules for using a .gov.uk domain name](#)
- [Parish Council Domains Helper Service - Virtual workshop](#)

Security best practice when using your council-owned email

To comply with privacy and data protection rules, council staff must securely operate their email account. Here is some crucial advice on keeping your email account secure:

- Do not share your password with anyone else or write it down where others can find it.
- Choose a strong password - the National Cyber Security Centre recommends combining three random words to create a strong password.
- Use multi-factor authentication (MFA). This means providing additional information alongside your password to login, providing the best security.
- Ensure your computer is password protected and automatically locks if you are away from it for more than 5-10 minutes. You can also lock it manually: on Windows devices, this is usually done by pressing CTRL + ALT + DELETE at the same time.
- Do not routinely redirect council emails automatically from one account to another.
- Make sure other staff (where these exist), or the chair, know the process and who to contact in an emergency, such as a sudden absence. This is best achieved through contacting the IT/email provider and arranging for an

out-of-office, with alternative contact details to be added to the inaccessible account, or by forwarding emails to someone else for a very limited period. As a precaution, you should not store crucial information that colleagues may need within your email system.

- [NALC offers online courses](#), such as basic cyber security, password management, and phishing.

Need help deciding your email address or website name?

- Website: acmeparish.gov.uk, acmeparishcouncil.gov.uk or acme-pc.gov.uk
- Councillor email addresses: cllr.firstname.lastname@xyz.gov.uk
- Clerk email addresses: clerk@xyz.gov.uk