

Gov.uk Domains Webinar Report

Overview of Gov.uk Domains for Local Government

This report summarises key information from the recent Gov.uk Domains webinar, which covered the importance of acquiring a gov.uk domain for town and parish councils, benefits associated with it, and the process of obtaining and managing this domain. As outlined in the webinar, a gov.uk domain is an official government domain that serves as an online address specifically for government bodies. The domain name is only available to recognised government entities, including town and parish councils, offering increased legitimacy, security, and administrative control.

Key Benefits of a Gov.uk Domain

1. Enhanced Cybersecurity

Gov.uk domains are considered more secure than standard domains. They are available only through registered companies that meet stringent security criteria, providing greater protection against cyber threats. The central government actively monitors all gov.uk domains, supported by dedicated cyber security teams. While no system is completely immune to risk, the constant monitoring of gov.uk domains significantly reduces vulnerability, particularly to phishing attacks.

2. Professionalism and Legitimacy

Adopting a gov.uk domain aligns the council with official government bodies, adding credibility and making it easier for the public to verify authenticity. It establishes a professional online presence that enhances transparency and trust.

3. Administrative Control and Ownership

A gov.uk domain provides councils with clearer administrative control over email accounts and offers clear ownership. Unlike standard domains that may expire and be resold if not renewed on time, a gov.uk domain remains the council's property as long as the annual renewal fee is paid. This prevents the risk of losing the domain to another entity.

4. Compliance and Best Practices

The new Practitioners' Guide from the Joint Panel for Accountability in Government recommends holding a gov.uk domain as part of best practices for transparency. While it is not mandatory, this recommendation highlights the importance of a gov.uk domain for improved operational standards in local government.

Costs and Financial Support

Acquiring a gov.uk domain does involve a fee, but the wholesale cost has recently decreased to approximately £10 + VAT annually, making it comparable to the cost of .org domains. Financial assistance of £100 + VAT is currently available on a first-come, first-served basis for councils seeking to switch to a gov.uk domain.

The main expense related to a gov.uk domain typically involves email provisioning, which varies depending on the number of email addresses needed by the council. However, as our council already uses a free Microsoft email account, this cost would not be relevant to us. Additional expenses can often be minimised by comparing service providers.

Process and Support for Transitioning

To assist councils in setting up a gov.uk domain, the Parish Council Domains Helper service provides guidance, resources, and practical support. An **introduction session to guide councils through the process of switching to a gov.uk domain is scheduled soon**, offering councils the opportunity to assess the benefits and requirements for the change. For councils interested in moving forward, the **standard transfer time to a gov.uk domain is approximately three weeks**.

The Parish Council Domains Helper service currently offers webinars and face-to-face sessions that act as “fact-finding missions” for councils considering this transition. They have also shortlisted 24 approved providers from a pool of 160 registered companies who offer hands-on support, including acting as technical points of contact to ensure compliance and provide continuity throughout the setup process. Next year, more online guidance will become available, and the face to face guidance will be slowly phased out. The Helper service aims to streamline the transition for councils, providing a reliable resource for addressing questions and concerns about gov.uk domain setup and management.

Debunking Common Myths about Gov.uk Domains

Several myths surrounding gov.uk domains were clarified during the webinar:

- **Myth: A gov.uk domain is mandatory for councils.**
Fact: While recommended in the new Practitioners' Guide, a gov.uk domain is not legally required; it is suggested as best practice.
- **Myth: Councils cannot keep existing websites and email providers.**
Fact: Councils can retain their current website and connect it to the new gov.uk domain, as well as keep their current email providers.
- **Myth: Costs of a gov.uk domain are prohibitively high.**
Fact: The primary cost factor is email provision, dependent on the number of accounts. Many councils, like ours, already have low-cost or free email solutions that can reduce this expense.
- **Myth: A new website is required to comply with updated legislation.**
Fact: No new website is necessary if the existing site meets current standards. Councils only need to ensure compliance with the latest accessibility and transparency requirements, which may already be met.

Conclusion

Switching to a gov.uk domain offers numerous benefits for town and parish councils, including enhanced security, greater legitimacy, and improved administrative control. While there are associated costs, they can be managed, particularly with available funding options. The Parish Council Domains Helper service and its shortlisted providers offer valuable support for councils, making the transition feasible and straightforward. Adopting a gov.uk domain is an investment in the council’s credibility and a step toward aligning with best practices for local government.