

Investigation into Standard Email Addresses for Councillors

Recommendation

It's recommended that Freshford Parish Council sets up standard email addresses for all councillors as soon as possible. Ten email addresses would be needed for the Clerk and Councillors and one for communications.

Background

According to the Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance, Practitioners' Guide, March 2024, all Parish Councils are advised and eligible to use a .gov.uk domain for websites and emails (see Appendix 1 for details).

Freshford PC moved to a .org.uk website domain about 3 years ago so there is an argument that moving to a .gov.uk domain at this point would be an unnecessary expense and upheaval, although costs and time involved have not yet been investigated.

Moving to .org.uk email addresses would improve the situation and would be sufficient at this current time (as .gov.uk addresses are not currently mandatory).

Possible options for standard .org email addresses

1) Use Zonkey, who host the Parish Council website

They say: "Essentially there is a monthly (or annual) fee per mailbox, but this also gives the user access to Google Workspace apps like Docs, Sheets etc.. and the Google Drive for online storage (in which you can share folders - I believe it is 30GB of storage per user, so plenty of space).

The setup is fairly simple, it does need a main admin account, but as a guide to costs, Google charges £5 per user per month (billed annually), I believe Microsoft charge the same for their offering."

Approx cost: £660/year (£5 x 11 addresses x 12 months)

2) Use Parish Council Websites (used by Winsley and Wingfield parish councils)

They say: "All email accounts will send and receive but generally if you pay more you will get more. With Microsoft 365, <https://www.microsoft.com/en-gb/microsoft-365/business>, you get more email storage than we'd offer, at 50 GB per account (I think) you also get OneDrive for storage, SharePoint for collaboration and other *added value*. Google Workspace is similar, https://workspace.google.com/pricing?hl=en_uk, more storage and features for their meetings/documents. A lot of it is focused on teams and collaboration but a lot of that isn't always needed if you just want standard email set up!

We could help with the email if required, keeping the website where it is/or we could host that within the charges."

Approx cost: £60/year (£5 for up to 20 addresses x 12 months)

Move to .gov email addresses

Information from ALCA

Funding: 1000 eligible councils will receive a discount of £100 +VAT to offset the initial costs of setting up a new .gov.uk domain in this financial year. Funding is offered on a firstcome-first-served basis; to date more than 280 councils have taken advantage of this scheme. The Parish Council Domains Helper Service is offering a wide range of support to all councils moving over to a .gov.uk domain in the financial year 2024-25. If you're interested in finding out more please contact parishhelper@domains.gov.uk.

The latest email update from Parish Helper is:

“We are writing to you to let you know about some upcoming changes to the Parish Council Domains Helper Service and the availability of funding. Both of these may affect your future move to a [.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) domain.

- We have now allocated over 50% of our funding for this financial year, and we can confirm that it is highly unlikely that further funding will be available in future years
- The Parish Council Domains Helper Service in its current form - with online sessions, advice and guidance - will change. From March 2025, we expect that our service and support will become more online with a focus on self-help.

If you are still considering a move to a [.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) domain and would benefit from the funding and hands-on support available today, we would urge you to engage with the Parish Council Domains Helper Service sooner rather than later. You can do this by [signing up to one of our free, no obligation online sessions](#). Here, you'll find out more about a move to a [.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) domain, what the process involves and the kind of services and costs your council will need to consider. If you have already attended and have specific questions or challenges, we encourage you to [sign up to one of our drop in sessions](#).

As an aside, we are always interested to hear how parish councils are progressing with their move and would appreciate it if you could take a few minutes to tell us how you are getting on through this [short form](#). You can also use this to unsubscribe from our emails.

Should you have any questions then please reply to parish-helper@domains.gov.uk.”

Approx cost: £TBC

APPENDIX 1

Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance, Practitioners' Guide, March 2024

The importance of using .gov.uk domains for websites and emails

- 5.210. All Parish, Town and Community Councils are eligible to use, and are advised to use, a .gov.uk domain for their websites and email communications. Your community, suppliers and partners will now reasonably expect a local council to have a .gov.uk domain name. Note that Parish meetings are exempt from the requirement to have a website.
- 5.211. To assist with compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), it is advised that clerks provide official .gov.uk email accounts to their councillors, which must only be used for official council business.
- 5.212. When choosing a domain name all councils must follow the rules set out by the Cabinet Office to choose a .gov.uk domain name, for example, 'ourparishcouncil.gov.uk' with email addresses linked to that domain.
- 5.213. Using a .gov.uk domain for your council website and email accounts gives Parish Councils the following advantages:
 - 5.214. Increased professionalism and trust from members of your community, partners and suppliers because your email address and website domains are a trusted government brand.
 - 5.215. Separation of your personal life from your professional life, ensuring members of your community, partners and suppliers understand what capacity you are emailing them in - whether a Councillor or Clerk.
 - 5.216. Increased control for the Responsible Officer over email accounts and documentation when managing new joiners, leavers, sudden absences or Freedom of Information and Subject Access Requests.
 - 5.217. Peace of mind that your .gov.uk Parish Council domain will never be sold to someone else if it is not renewed on time, which can happen with .co.uk, .org.uk and other commercial domains.
 - 5.218. Additional security measures, as all .gov.uk domains are checked for any cyber vulnerabilities by the Cabinet Office and reported to the Responsible Owner, or your technical point of contact, so they can be fixed.
 - 5.219. You can read more about the benefits of getting a .gov.uk domain on the GOV.UK website.