Cabinet Office

Parish Council Domains Helper Service

Image: Illustration of a woman holding a large speech bubble and pointing at a light bulb. A question mark is at her right shoulder. A man can be seen in the background working on a laptop.

Parish Council Domains Helper Service

General questions about .gov.uk domains

1. What is a domain?

A domain name is the digital asset that is used to identify organisations on the internet. All internet facing services require a domain to work. These include everything from websites through to email, document sharing and mapping services. For example, in the website address 'www.nhs.uk', and the email 'test@nhs.uk', 'nhs.uk' is the domain name that makes the website and email work.

Need a simple way to explain a domain? This [infographic](#) might help.

2. What is different about a .gov.uk domain?

A .gov.uk domain can only be owned by government bodies in the United Kingdom. This means central and local government as well as the public sector. No other organisations are eligible to own and operate a .gov.uk domain.

Registration of .gov.uk domains is strictly controlled. The Central Digital and Data Office (CDDO) assigns approved .gov.uk domain names on behalf of the Cabinet Office.

3. An important point about the purpose of other widely-used domain names

In general:
- **.org.uk:** Designed to identify, and be used by, non-profit organisations, charities and community groups e.g.bhf.org.uk
- **.co.uk:** Commonly used by commercial entities based in the UK e.g.bbc.co.uk
- **.com:** Commonly used by entities that operate globally e.g. cocacola.com
- **.ac.uk:** Designed to identify, and by used by, educational establishments e.g. cardiff.ac.uk

A domain name helps everyone understand who you are and what you do.

Spot the imposter! Watch out for websites ending -gov.uk e.g. council-gov.uk. These are not official .gov.uk domains. There's a big difference between a dot and a dash!

4. Why should parish councils own a .gov.uk domain?

It should be easy for anyone to identify government organisations on the internet. Your community shouldn't have to guess whether the site they're on, or the email in their inbox, is genuine. Use of a .gov.uk domain means that you are instantly recognisable as an official, authentic government organisation and your communications can be trusted.

5. What are the benefits of owning a .gov.uk domain?

There are a number of benefits to owning a .gov.uk domain:

Trust and credibility: A .gov.uk domain conveys trust and authority, as it's exclusively used by government and public sector organisations at every level in the UK. This exclusivity helps in building community, partner and peer confidence, which is crucial for a council's reputation.

Security and reliability: .gov.uk domains are renowned for their robust security measures, monitoring for potential security vulnerabilities, and safeguarding sensitive and personal information. This aspect is particularly critical for councils to separate personal and professional data.

Professional image: A .gov.uk domain signifies a Parish Council's commitment to professionalism, enhancing the council's image and reflecting its seriousness in maintaining high standards.

Ease of recognition: A .gov.uk domain is easily recognisable and memorable to its community, suppliers, partners and peers. This recognition can improve the accessibility and usability of the council's online services and information, making it more user-friendly for residents.

Trusted emails: Outgoing .gov.uk emails are more likely to be cleared by security filters and delivered successfully. Recipients recognise them as coming from an official source and this means they are more likely to be read and responded to. The content of your emails will be recognised as official government business.

Better controls: Councils can better control access to official papers and correspondence. When clerks and councillors leave, information is not lost and email accounts can be easily re-allocated.

Easier to respond to data requests: Council staff will not have to surrender private emails if, for example, a freedom of information request is received.

Proactively monitored: A .gov.uk domain is monitored by the Domains Team at the CDDO. They make sure your domain is configured correctly, and any security vulnerabilities are quickly spotted.

Legal protection: As .gov.uk domains are based within UK jurisdiction they have better legal protection.

You'll find a summary of these benefits in this infographic.

6. Why should council staff use a .gov.uk email address?

These are the reasons for using a .gov.uk email address:

Professional: A .gov.uk email address conveys a sense of professionalism and legitimacy. The credibility of the sender, and their connection to the council, is clear, making communications immediately recognisable as trustworthy.

Verification: A .gov.uk email address is issued based on stringent verification processes - only authorised individuals within the council will have one. Other email addresses - such as Gmail, for example, are open to anyone. This increases the risk of individuals creating fake accounts for malicious purposes. For example, anyone can open an account and send an email from 'councillor_diblyPC.gmail.com' whereas 'councillor_diblyPC.gov.uk can only be owned by a legitimate member of staff.

Security: .gov.uk email systems are designed to adhere to strict security standards to protect government information.

Administration: Data Subject Access and Freedom of Information requests can be handled quickly and efficiently from a central point. Records of all communications are maintained and can be easily accessed for audit purposes.

Separation: By using a .gov.uk email, a councillor's professional life is kept entirely separate from their personal life. Your community will understand clearly in what capacity you are contacting them. Your individual privacy will not be infringed upon should a Data Subject Access or Freedom of Information request be received.

N.B. It's important to note that users of any email system should always follow best practices for account security, such as setting up, and regularly updating, robust passwords, and enabling two-factor authentication.

About the Parish Council Domains Helper Service

1. What is the Parish Council Domains Helper Service?

The Parish Council Domains Helper Service has been set up by the Cabinet Office to help parish councils to own and operate a .gov.uk domain more easily. Essentially, there are three aspects to the service:

- A suite of practical advice, guidance and reference materials - taking councils through the process of registering, adopting and maintaining a .gov.uk domain

- An enhanced level of support from .gov.uk domain registrars who understand the needs of parish councils

- Help with costs - a one-off contribution towards a new .gov.uk domain

Guided workshops will be included in this initial phase of the service - for example, providing advice on how to choose a domain registrar that is right for a council.

2. Who is the Service for?

The Domains Helper Service is open to any parish council that:

- Wants to move to a .gov.uk domain OR

- Already has a .gov.uk domain and wants to use other associated services such as email or a website.

If any council is unsure about their eligibility they should email parish.council@domains.gov.uk for advice.

3. Is enhanced support available from all .gov.uk domain registrars?

No. There is a shortlist of .gov.uk domain registrars that have committed to providing an enhanced level of support. This shortlist is provided to parish councils moving over to a .gov.uk domain as part of the Service.

4. What does enhanced support mean?

The shortlist of .gov.uk domain registrars have committed to:

- Providing active support - taking the initiative to help both clerks and councillors; using non-technical language

- Acting as 'technical point of contact' for the council's .gov.uk domain

- Helping to set up services such as websites, emails and document management, liaising with other suppliers when needed

- Supporting device set-up - for example, help with setting up new email, migration and forwarding

- Ensuring continuity of service.

5. How do councils access the Parish Council Domains Helper Service?

Councils interested in moving over to a .gov.uk domain can register their interest by emailing parish.helper@domains.gov.uk