



ANDERTON WITH MARBURY PARISH COUNCIL

REPORT

Report to: Parish Council
Date: 16th July 2024
Report for: Discussion
Report of: Clerk

Report Title

.Gov Domain

Summary

This report is the first step in supporting the council to consider whether it should move to a .gov domain.

Background

The majority of businesses and organisations communications are now done online. It is quicker, more efficient, less costly and more sustainable. It means that organisations can now reach people instantly through websites and emails. There is an expectation that council information is available, and accessible, at the click of a mouse.

From a Parish Council perspective, communities expect the communications they receive from the council, whether on your website or by email, to be safe, legitimate, accurate and trustworthy.

Unlike other domain names like .co.uk or .org, the .gov.uk domain is only available to UK public sector organisations and is strictly controlled. Any visitor to a .gov website or recipient of your email will know they are engaging with an official part of the government. This means that communications are immediately recognised as legitimate, and recipients will always understand the capacity in which they are being contacted.

The Cabinet Office state that “owning a .gov.uk domain is a sign of good practice. It clearly shows a council’s commitment to professionalism. Your community can see that your council is a key, recognisable part of the government, and this automatically builds trust and legitimacy.”

Administration & Data Security and Freedom of Information

Council business should be conducted separately from personal accounts as it is subject to the Freedom of Information Act and may need to be disclosed.

Having a .gov domain for emails means that each Parish Councillor can have their own email address and should they leave or retire, the account email can be closed but the data retained for statutory disclosure if requested.

There is also peace of mind that the domain cannot be bought by anyone else in the event of a lapsed renewal. With a .gov domain, it can only be issued one and will never be sold on.

Cyber-Security

There are 2 important ways that .gov.uk domains are more secure than .org.uk or other domains.

1. All companies that are approved to set up .gov.uk domains must meet strict security criteria. This includes measures like Cyber Essentials which ensure they are well protected. If they are secure, your information is secure too.
2. There are also security criteria for the services they set up for Parish Councils. For example, validation systems will protect the council's email domain from being used for spoofing and phishing scams. These systems also ensure that emails cannot be altered while being sent or received.

The second way your .gov.uk domain is protected is through central government: There are teams whose job it is to scan .gov.uk domains for threats and vulnerabilities. This includes the team in the Cabinet Office, who look for security weaknesses, and the National Cyber Security Centre, which monitors websites and email services for suspicious activity.

These protections are crucial for parish councils and their communities. While they can't always prevent human error, these measures will make the parish council less vulnerable to data breaches, phishing attacks, and loss of trust and reputation.

Accessibility

Government websites should be accessible and easy to read and there is a 'government design principles guide' which should be followed in order to design a website that complies with government principles.

Recommendations

Currently it is not mandatory for Parish Councils to have a 'gov domain it is just defined as 'best practice' however the Cabinet Office are encouraging councils to make the move now as the process may take some time to go through. Some suppliers have been given funding to reduce the cost to Parish Councils who want to make the move.

If the Parish Council decides to go ahead, it will need to agree what it needs so that quotes can be obtained.

This includes:

- Website Domain
- Hosting
- Design and Build of Website
- Email Addresses (Microsoft and/or webmail)
- Website Management
- Current Website Diversion
- Cloud Services
- Email Migration

A decisions matrix table provided by the Cabinet Office is annexed to this report to aid discussion on what the Parish Council needs if it decides to go ahead.

Next Steps:

Once the Parish Council has decided whether it wants to explore a .gov domain further, further information will be obtained in relation to services and costs and tabled for further discussion.