

Agenda Item 12 – .gov domain and new website

As briefly set out in the previous budget item report, the Parish Council website is 7 years old. It is now old in technology terms and its functionality is limited. The hierarchy needs re-visiting and it needs some work to tidy it up. There have been a couple of issues recently, one of which can only be fully addressed by purchasing an additional widget, the Clerk is currently using a work around. Given all this it is suggested that the Council should look to procure a new website.

Alongside this, for some time now the Cabinet Office has been encouraging Parish Councils to move to a .gov domain. This is recommended in JPAG best practice guidance. A .org domain as we have now is still acceptable as it is unique to the Parish and is administered by the proper officer.

.gov domains are only available to UK public sector organisations, including Parish Councils and provide the sender or recipient of an email with assurance that they are engaging with an official part of the government. It is less likely that emails will end up in junk or spam in-boxes. .gov domains also benefit from enhanced cyber security.

Prices for .gov domains have reduced significantly this year and the Cabinet Office is providing funding of £100 plus VAT for Parish Councils signing up to a .gov domain in this financial year only. This makes it a good time to transition.

The Clerk has attended online training and meetings through the Domain Helper Service at the Cabinet Office, who are available to assist throughout the process. Available support is due to reduce from April 2025.

The first stage has been to decide on the Parish Council's requirements and obtain quotes from three suppliers, and then to discuss with Council and obtain approval to proceed.

The Clerk drew up a specification and asked for costs to be split down to various areas.

The Clerk selected three possible providers from the Cabinet Office shortlist by looking at their current market and website offer and chose three with a track record of operating within the Parish Council and other Public Sector environments and whose sample websites appear to match the Council's requirements.

Two quotes have so far been received and one of these is able to meet all the requirements as set out in the specification and provided a comprehensive proposal.

Costs are as follows:

- Year one - £1,534 plus VAT, including some one-off set-up costs and taking into account the £100 discount (Cabinet Office funding).
- Year two onwards - £1,074 plus VAT.

The above include the annual Microsoft subscriptions, which we currently pay separately. The on-going annual fee also includes website support and .gov domain renewal.

A further quote is awaited, following a video call, which should be received Mid-October.

It should be noted that the website quotes are for templated websites already being used by other Parish Councils, that meet the legal requirements for Parish Councils and appear to be intuitive and easy to update. The Council currently uses Wordpress, a templated website adapted to the Council's needs. The Clerk has watched some video tutorials of one of the potential websites, and this appears to provide all the requirements with straightforward adding, updating and editing of pages and documents and displaying information and documents in appropriate and accessible formats. There is also an automatic planning applications update function linked to the Local Authority Planning Portal.

The Clerk can arrange a demonstration to ensure that the website has the required functionality and to ask relevant questions.

This Provider offers comprehensive training and support, which includes phone support as well as email and online chat and help guides. Some providers do not provide telephone support.

Currently the Parish Council budget is £1,000 per annum for website and IT support and £925 for Microsoft subscriptions and domain renewal. £600 was paid last year for website support, Microsoft charges are £829 per annum and domain renewal around £25 every 2 years. An annualised cost of £1441. Switching could reduce the annual ongoing costs, depending on the option chosen.

As year one would be a transition period there would be some costs for the old and the new systems and so it is suggested that, if Council agrees to the transition, year 1 costs are funded from the Capital Budget set aside for Office Equipment and CCTV (the upgrade for the Village Hall CCTV having been funded from Reserves).

A quote for a new website was also obtained from our current provider for comparison, this would be at a cost of between £3,000 and £5,000 (ex VAT), depending on the option chosen offering a more bespoke website choice, plus there would be ongoing support costs and the annual costs for the .gov domain and Microsoft package which would have to be paid for separately. As this would be bespoke it would require more time investment from the Clerk for set up and would not have a track record of being used by other Parish Councils where it will have been tested to ensure it meets the requirements of this sector.

The Parish Council is being asked to decide whether to approve transition to a .gov domain in principle. The Clerk will look to bring a further paper to November Council once all quotes have been received.

Debbie Bird
Clerk to Willand parish Council
October 2024