

A report on the benefits of dedicated Council email addresses

The following extract is from the Information Commissioner's Office:

"As a data controller, a council has obligations relating to the confidentiality, integrity and availability of all personal data it holds. This means that the council is accountable for any council business conducted involving personal data on any device or through any email account. The use of personal devices and email accounts could raise the risk that personal data is processed for different purposes from which it was originally collected.....If copies of data (such as email attachments) are stored on many different devices, there's an increased risk that it'll become out-of-date or inaccurate over time. There's also an increased risk that it'll be retained for longer than necessary because it's difficult to keep track of copies"

And from The Practitioner's Guide (March 2023), point 1.26 states that

"every authority should have an email account that belongs to the council and to which the council has access – this ideally would be a .gov.uk or .org.uk address or could be an address linked to the council website.

If the Council has not created a generic email address by 31 March 2024, then this could result in either a qualification or other matter on the 2023/2024 AGAR."

What does this mean for Holbrook Parish Council?

It is important for Holbrook Parish Council to uphold the highest standards of confidentiality and compliance with legislation, notably the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

In order to meet the Parish Council's obligations, it is recommended that dedicated email addresses are used for official council communications. GDPR, along with other legislation governing data protection and freedom of information, emphasises the need to separate personal correspondence from official council matters. Adopting a dedicated gov.uk email address will help to mitigate some of the risks associated with emails:

- 1. GDPR Compliance:** The use of personal email accounts for council business raises concerns about data security, access control, and potential breaches of sensitive information. It's critical to ensure compliance with GDPR requirements for data protection.
- 2. Accountability and Transparency:** With the implementation of a dedicated council email address, the transparency of official correspondence is heightened, aiding accountability and facilitating responses to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests.
- 3. Mitigating Risks:** Using personal emails increases the risk of accidental disclosure or misuse of sensitive council-related information. A dedicated email address specifically for council affairs can significantly reduce these risks.
- 4. Protecting Councillors:** If a councillor uses an email account that cannot be easily searched, the ICO could request that they hand over their laptops/computers for an investigation and it could be some time before they had them returned.
- 5. Continuity:** A dedicated email address remains consistent even if a councillor leaves the council as their email address will be closed.

- 6 Security:** The advantage of a gov.uk address is that only local authorities and government organisations can have a gov.uk email address which gives a further layer of protection against misuse. A standalone email system (gmail, hotmail, aol, outlook, etc.) cannot comply with the legal requirements on the council.

Our current website provider "Suffolk.Cloud" quoted for a domain name and 10 mail addresses of either 1 GB or 2GB at a cost of £450 for 2 years (quote dated Feb 23) I have been informed that this is an expensive option. We would also need to pay for at least two additional email addresses.

I have contacted CloudNext.Uk on the recommendation of other clerks and their prices are considerably less, with more email addresses with more capacity. CloudNext.UK charge £110 plus VAT every two years for the domain name ending in gov.uk and £49.99 plus VAT per year for email addresses. Therefore compared with Suffolk Cloud the cost would be £210 plus VAT for 2 years, but includes all the emails needed.

I am looking into the possibility of changing the domain name on our existing website, as it is illegal to re-direct from a gov.uk domain name to a non-gov.uk domain name.

Council is asked to consider the proposal to implement gov.uk email addresses for all councillors and its employees.

Jo Hazlewood
Clerk/Proper Officer – 6th November 2023