

Cyber Security – Domain name

Last month I submitted a report with a recommendation to consider moving our email system away from AOL to either Gov.uk or Org.uk. Part of the report included prices from our current org.uk host to add the email section onto our account, as we would incur early contract termination fees if we were to move the org.uk domain hosting to another supplier. Our hosting contract ends May 2023.

The price for creating the org.uk email system within the current hosting contract was quoted at £37.50 per month, which gives us 11 – 25 email addresses. If a councillor leaves and a new councillor joins the old email account would be deleted and a new email account created meaning the number of email accounts are still the same and therefore no extra monthly charge.

When speaking to our current org.uk host and all possible gov.uk hosts I asked them what domain they would recommend, org.uk or gov.uk, all of them said the same, that it is down to personal preference. The org.uk would cost slightly less annually but the gov.uk would have a higher level of security against hackers taking over the domain, plus gives the end user a higher level of trust from the site or email as anyone can buy a org.uk domain but you have to apply meeting strict criteria to have a gov.uk domain.

When investigating the gov.uk side of this project there were 2 articles on the NALC website, that steered me to the following information:

Article 1 dated 19 April 2021, named “The importance of secure email systems and GOV.UK domains for local councils” written by Breakthrough Communication who are a company DAPTC use for communications, engagement and compliance training. *See Annex for article.*

Article 2 dated 11th February 2022, named “Domain security survey” written by Simon Foster the Domains Lead, for Securing Government Services, from the Central Digital & Data Office section of the Cabinet Office. *See Annex for article.*

I spoke with Simon Foster and his team, they are a section within the Cabinet Office, setting up a new program dealing with Cyber Security within gov.uk domains for Parish and Town Councils. They have offered to work alongside us should we choose to go down the gov.uk route to ensure we have the correct level of security on the gov.uk domain. This would include our domain being checked daily for threats, or attempted domain hijacking. In return they ask we work with them on their new program, feeding back data, (minimal Clerks’ time required).

When looking at gov.uk as we do not own this domain at present, we have no current hosting contract to consider. When applying for a Gov.uk domain the Government insist you use one of their approved suppliers, to apply for the domain and to host the domain.

To date I have approached 3 companies, with 2 companies having quoted:

Contractor A: £100 +VAT to register and look after the domain name, a one-off email set up fee of £280 +VAT, plus £48 per month paid directly to Microsoft (£4 per month per email). They administer the account, if you forget your password you contact them and they send the reset link, if a councillor leaves and a new councillor joins they delete the old account and set up the new account.

Contract B: £110 + VAT to register and look after the domain name, no set up fee, no monthly cost for email but £49.99 for hosting up to 25 email addresses and website per year. As Clerk I would do basic administration of the account, if you forget your password, you contact me and I send the

reset link, if a councillor leaves and a new councillor joins, I delete the old account and set up the new account, anything more technical they administer.

Contract C: TBC

It is worth noting each domain (org.uk, gov.uk, co.uk or .com) incurs an annual cost to register. Registering the domain gives you the right to use the domain, the registration prices are not capped, and each hosting company charge varying amounts. At present we own corfecastlepc.org.uk & corfecastlepc.co.uk. By owning the rights for both these domains it means no one else can register them and use them, however they could still register corfecastleparishcouncil.org.uk or CCPC.co.uk. At any time if we are late renewing the registration for Corfecastlepc.org.uk or co.uk domain the domain is available for anyone to buy. Most domain hosts will hold the domain for a short period of time and email you several times before the domain is available for anyone else to buy. The gov.uk domain if we are late paying the annual fee will never be sold to anyone else.

If we go down the route of gov.uk we must consider which domain, we wish to buy:

1. corfecastle-pc.gov.uk or
2. corfecastleparishcouncil.gov.uk,

our website and emails depending on the above choice would be:

1. www.corfecastle-pc.gov.uk & CllrASmith@corfecastle-pc.gov.uk or
2. www.corfecastleparishcouncil.gov.uk & CllrASmith@corfecastleparishcouncil.gov.uk.

At present we pay £30 every 2 years for the corfecastlepc.org.uk domain, plus £15 per year for corfecastlepc.co.uk.

Recommendation:

1. To purchase a gov.uk domain through contractor B and work alongside the Central Digital & Data Office section of the Cabinet Office to ensure the highest level of security on both the website and email system. Domain options
 - a. Corfecastleparishcouncil.gov.uk
 - b. Corfecastle-pc.gov.uk
2. To set up all members and officer with new gov.uk email accounts.
3. To change the website content from org.uk to gov.uk.
4. To discuss and agree options for retaining domain names.
 - a. Continue paying current contractor hosting org.uk placing an auto redirect to gov.uk until contract expires (May 2023), then allow registration to lapse. £10 deposit paid in May 2020, £245 remaining.
 - b. Continue paying current contractor hosting org.uk placing an auto redirect to gov.uk renewing contract every 3 years for approx. £250 total.
 - c. Cancel the org.uk hosting contract with immediate effect, will be subject to early contract termination fees.
 - d. Continue paying £15 per year for co.uk domain or allow current registration to end in August 2022.

The Chairman and Vice Chairman recommend option 1b & 4a

Author: Clerk

Dated 2nd March 2022