

1 of 3 - First Steps...

This is leaflet No.1 of 3 in our series of advice leaflets on how to set up a website for your Parish Council. This leaflet deals with the issues you must address in deciding whether your Parish Council needs a website, what sort of website it might need, what requirements there are both in content and standards, and who you should choose to make the website for you.

We hope that you find these advice leaflets useful, and if we can be of any further assistance, please call us on 0870 766 9817 (BT Standard rate) and we will be delighted to assist.

Stage ONE - Questions:

- 1. What do we want a website for?**
- 2. What information do we want on our website?**
- 3. Do we want to have our own website, or have our information on someone else's?**
- 4. Do we want to add content and update the website ourselves, or get a company to do it for us?**
- 5. Do we have any funding for a website?**

Stage one – Answers:

1. What do we want a website for?

This is a crucial starting point, and one that shapes your entire website policy and development. Some councils simply want a basic website which has contact details and information about where the monthly meetings are held. Others may want a fully interactive website with online discussion forums, online booking forms, meeting calendars and photo galleries. The most common scenario is somewhere between these two outlooks. You must also consider whether you want just a website, or a website with emails included.

2. What information do we want on our website?

Thankfully, we have a clear indicator of what should be on your website from information published by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the Department for Communities and Local Government. They tell us that Parish Council websites should have the following attributes:

- Provides a list of council members and officers with contact details
- Access to the Annual Report
- Minutes of meetings

- Newsletters and news items available
- Shows councils at centre of community life, shows the benefits of the website to the community
- No excessive scrolling
- Vehicle for local people not clerk/councillors
- Good quality images
- Dates and venues of next meetings
- Simple to look at
- Site map
- Easily identifiable address
- List of events
- Up to date

3. *Do we want our own website, or have our information on someone else's?*

This might seem like a strange question to ask, but there are some regional or county-wide organisations who have websites, and might offer to let local Parish Councils 'piggy-back' on their site. The benefit of this is that it will often be free. The downside is that you will seldom have control over where the content goes, what it looks like, how often it is updated, and you will not have your own website address (domain name) or email addresses.

4. *Do we want to add content and update the website ourselves, or get a company to do it for us?*

This is a very important question – do you want someone within your council to do all the updating themselves, or do you want to pay an outside agency to do it for you? If you want to do this yourself, which is invariably much, much cheaper, you will need to get a website which comes with something called a 'Content Management System' ('CMS'). This will be a password-protected application which the clerk or some other council member could access from time to time to perform updating functions, like adding new news items, uploading recent meeting minutes, or updating the meeting calendar. If you wanted to update the website yourself and you did not get a CMS, you will have to ensure that someone in your Council has:

- a) Detailed knowledge of HTML, CSS and website design and coding
- b) Lots and lots and lots of time on their hands!

5. *Do we have any funding for a website?*

It could be that you do not need much funding, especially if you have reached the conclusion that you only need a very limited amount of information on the website. However, if you are going to go for a commercial solution, then you may need to consider the following expenses:

- i) Costs for designing the website (graphics and artwork)
- ii) Costs for creating / licensing the software and code that 'runs' the website (sometimes i and ii are costed together)
- iii) Fees for domain name registration (up to £100 per year if .gov.uk)
- iv) Fees for website hosting, email set-up and support
- v) Fees for updating, adding new content and technical support

So you can see that the list certainly mounts up, and you will need to not only gain funding for the first year, but any subsequent years that you want to run the website. If you do not choose your website company carefully, it can become a very expensive business indeed!

Stage TWO - Questions:

- 6. Should we go for a free package or a commercial package?**
- 7. We have decided to go for a free package – hosting our information on another website. How do we go about doing this?**
- 8. We have decided to go for a commercial package? How much should it cost?**
- 9. What information requirements do Local Government websites have?**
- 10. What technical requirements do Local Government websites have?**

Stage two – Answers:

6. *Should we go for a free package or a commercial package?*

If you are a regular user of the Internet, you will probably have seen lots of adverts inviting you to create 'FREE WEBSITE IN JUST MINUTES!!!' As a Parish Council, you will also have been sent lots of marketing material through the post or email inviting you to set up free Parish Council websites.

Our sincere advise would be that these free websites represent a true false economy. We realise that this is perplexing considering that they are free, but they are seldom 'truly' free, and there are considerable disadvantages, including:

- You will often find that they will include 3rd Party advertising on your site which you cannot control.
- You may not be able to update the sites easily (or at all!).
- Your site will be very basic, and will not be able to include features such as meeting calendars or document archives.
- You will not usually be able to have your own domain name.
- You may not be able to set up email accounts.
- Your website will not be 'Standards Compliant' – the basic standard of accessibility and functionality required by local government and publicly funded websites.

Commercial packages do not come with this sort of baggage, but you must still ensure that you get the website that your Council needs. It is simply not enough to go to your local website provider and ask them to make a website, as there are very important features that publicly funded websites require. For more information on website accessibility and standards compliance, visit our website at www.parishcouncil.net/accessibility.php.

Remember that websites are not easy things to make, and there are massive differences between free websites and websites made by 'hobbyists'. In fact, there are stark differences made by the good commercial providers and the bad. Do think very carefully about who to instruct to make your site, and consider their experience, skill and most importantly, their knowledge of the intricacies of Parish Councils and Parish Council websites.

7. *We have decided to go for a free package – hosting our information on another website. How do we go about doing this?*

There are in fact quite a few free website providers available. You may even find that an Internet or Broadband package that your council subscribes to for its office Internet and telephony access will let you have a small, basic website as part of the deal.

Since many of the providers only target their local area, we cannot list them all here, so we will provide a selection of the best free website providers for you to look into.

!! WORD OF WARNING !! – as a Parish Council, you are duty bound to provide a website that is ‘Standards Compliant’ and meets the minimum requirements for websites funded with public money. This is why Parish Councils are dissuaded from setting up free websites. For more information, see questions 6 (above) and question 10 (below).

* Please note – this is not a complete list, and the notes are only our personal opinion of the providers.

DETAILS OF FREE WEBSITE PROVIDERS		
No.	Name	Notes
1	Freewebs www.freewebs.co.uk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A good selection of templates and colours to choose from. • Sites are not standards compliant, and so do not meet mandatory local government requirements. • Imposes Google Adverts on all pages of your website, unless you pay a fee.
2	GetDotted / Freeola http://getdotted.com/easy-domain-registration-steps.php	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good availability of domain names. • You must also subscribe to their Dial-up / Broadband packages.
3	The Local Channel www.thelocalchannel.co.uk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sites are not standards compliant, and so do not meet mandatory local government requirements. • Imposes adverts from local suppliers on your site. • Poor selection of information and scripts available for the site.
4	Parish-Council.com www.parish-council.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard templates do not offer much of the local area’s ‘look and feel’. • Sites are not standards compliant, and so do not meet mandatory local government requirements. • Imposes Google Adverts on all pages of your website, unless you pay a fee. • Imposes other adverts on all pages of the website,

		<p>including their own marketing details.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the site was assessed, not all the links and buttons were working. • Does allow you to submit your own website to their 'directory'.
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8. *We have decided to go for a commercial package? How much should it cost?*

A commercial website for the largest Parish Council should cost no more than £1000 to set up and around £500 for each year to run. We stress that this is for the **LARGEST** council. We feel that our prices reflect a better indication of what prices should be, with the smaller council sites starting at £250 for the first year (development cost) and £100 hosting subscription for each subsequent year, rising to £450/£200 for medium-sized sites and then £800/£300 for the largest sites. If you have been quoted more than this, do talk to us.

9. *What information requirements do Local Government websites have?*

It is up to you what information goes on your website, and you will not be penalised for not including any specific information. However, it may have an impact if you are including your website as part of any application for Quality Parish and Town Council Status. The Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme states that certain information must be made available to the local community and a website would be the ideal place to post this information. Below is an extract from the Quality Status Scheme checklist:

Communications – Mandatory

You must tick yes to the following 5 questions:

1. Did you provide regular information to your electorate – in the form of a Newsletter or other publication – on all parish council activities over the last year?
2. If you did so was it published four or more times in the year?
3. Did it include a list of council members and officers with contact details?
4. Did one edition include a synopsis of the Annual report (including a brief summary of the accounts)?
5. Were they placed in readily available public sites such as Notice Boards or the Village Hall?

Communications – Discretionary

You should be able to tick yes to at least 9 of the following:

1. Was the Annual Report sent to every household in the parish council area?
2. Did the Annual Report include a summary of reports of council activities during the year?
3. Have you a Parish Plan or contributed to a town or village plan?
4. Do you provide an information/access point for details on local government services and parish council activities?

5. Is the access point electronically linked to the district and county councils?
6. Is information about local government services and parish council activities distributed to every household?
7. Have you established links with voluntary and other community organisations in your area?
8. Has the parish council an e-mail address that is publicly available?
9. Do you have a Website for the parish that provides a list of council members and officers with contact details and access to the Annual Report?
10. Do Councillors hold regular 'surgeries' for local residents (i.e. more than 6 times a year)?
11. Do you consult residents on planning matters?
12. Do you keep the relevant principal authorities informed of parish council activities?
13. Do you publicise parish council activities in local libraries/shops/other public places?
14. Do you publicise the parish council activities in the local press?

It is also worth looking again at the test areas for the NALC / Department for Communities and Local Government award for Parish Council websites (see OUR question 3 on page 1 above).

10. What technical requirements do Local Government websites have?

The answer is "rather more than you would think". The Cabinet Office e-Government Unit has published a list of guidelines setting out the technical requirements for publicly funded and local government websites. They stop short of saying that you should not attempt to make your own website for Parish Councils, but it should only be attempted if you are sure that you will meet their mandatory requirements for accessibility and coding integrity. Similarly, you should not instruct a commercial provider to develop a website if they cannot guarantee that they will meet the requirements.

For more information, visit the website of the e-Government Unit at <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/e-government/resources/handbook/html/htmlindex.asp>. (This is a long and complicated list – if you get daunted, then please give us a call to talk you through it.)

Stage THREE - Questions:

11. Who makes websites for Parish Councils, and who should we choose?

Stage three – Answers:

11. Who makes websites for Parish Councils, and who should we choose?

Once again, this depends on the size and type of website that you have agreed on in stages one and two above. However, for your convenience, we have listed a number of suppliers of websites for Parish Councils below, together with our comments on each.

** Please note that these comments represent our own opinions and observations on our competitors' products. Please visit our competitors' websites to find out more about their products and services. These comments and observations were correct at time of publication.

DETAILS OF COMMERCIAL WEBSITE PROVIDERS		
No.	Name	Notes
1	ParishCouncil.net www.parishcouncil.net	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is our own company, and we genuinely believe our product to be the best available. • Websites are created bespoke for each and every Parish Council, either based on one of our award-winning templates, or to a completely new design. • Sites are standards compliant, meet mandatory local government requirements. • No advertisements or marketing will be imposed on your site. • Industry-leading server uptime. • Industry-leading support and 7-days per week technical assistance. • Huge selection of website additions and 'bolt-on' accessories, such as photo galleries, discussion forums and much more. • Three comprehensive website packages to choose from, costing from £100 to £300 per year (with development costs from only £250 to £500 per year). • ABSOLUTELY NO hidden charges or costs throughout the year. • Domain names provided free of charge (excl. .gov.uk) • Excellent email access. • Award-winning 'Site Admin Section' (SAS) – our website content management system.
2	Mike Henson Productions www.parishcouncilwebsite.co.uk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bespoke websites created for Parish Councils. • High emphasis on good quality photographs for the website. • Websites are fully updated by Mike Henson Productions – Content Management Systems are not included in the website packages. • Not all websites appear to comply with Accessibility Requirements at the minimum Priority Level (1).
3	Tagish Web Content Management www.tagish.co.uk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sites are standards compliant, and meet mandatory local government requirements. • Do not tend to make websites for Parish Councils, but concentrate more on District / County Councils. • Prices range from £1000+ per year for a licence

		(software is not actually 'bought' by the Parish Council).
4	<p>Amaxus Box UK</p> <p>www.boxuk.com/server/show/ConWebDoc.407/viewPage/1/Amaxus-Pricing.html</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-level XML Content Management System with the ability to drive multiple Intranets, Extranets and Internet websites. It currently delivers hundreds of thousands of documents and objects for organisations ranging from Chubb to the NHS • May be somewhat over-complex for Parish Councils. • No prices listed on their website.
5	<p>Parish ID Builder</p> <p>www.idbuilder.co.uk/IDbuilder.nsf/parishes?openpage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Websites are NOT standards compliant, and do not comply with Local Government website requirements. • Costs are very competitive, from just £50 per year without domain name or emails. • You must build the website content yourself,

Stage FOUR - Questions:

12. We have chosen a website provider – what do we do now?

Congratulations! This is a large part of the job out of the way.

We cannot comment on what you must do if you have chosen a provider other than ParishCouncil.net. If you have chosen us to create and host your website, please move on to our [Advice Leaflet No.2 – Setting up your First website with ParishCouncil.net](#).

If you have chosen another supplier, then we recommend that you get in touch with them and ask what information they will need to create your website for you.

Good luck!

ParishCouncil.net

Advice Leaflets in this range:

1. First Steps...
2. Setting up your First website with ParishCouncil.net
3. Transferring your website and domain name to ParishCouncil.net

