

## **Report to: Helmdon Parish Council**

**Tabled on: 27 March 2024**

**Report author: Danny Moody**

**Report title: Transition of website, domain name, and email services**

1. At its meeting held on 28 February 2024 the council resolved to discontinue its website, domain, and email services with 2Commune/Cuttlefish and to transfer to Parish Online (Minute ref: 28/02/24 – 219). At that time, it was thought that the parish council had until 31 March 2024 to complete the transfer, as that was the date that the council had been invoiced up to.
2. The clerk gave notice to Cuttlefish on 29 February 2024 and the response was “*There will be no termination cost as you were officially out of contract as of the 30th January and we kept your website live until today (29th Feb 2024) to allow you time to remove any information you wish to retain. Tomorrow we will begin the process of deleting all system files in line with GDPR.*”
3. The clerk immediately contacted Cuttlefish and after a protracted exchange, Cuttlefish agreed to put off deleting the council’s files until Friday 8 March 2024. The clerk contacted Parish Online on Thursday 29 February 2024 to place an order and to explain the situation. Parish Online setup a new website, worked with Cuttlefish to transfer the domain name, email system, and some website content, and by the Monday (4 March 2024) the new site and the email system were fully functional.
4. It is likely that some website content has been lost. All the parish council’s information (agendas, minutes, reports, councillor details etc) has all been saved but it is not known if information from all groups and organisations has been saved, partly because we are not sure what was on the old website, so cannot easily see whether anything is missing. If there is lost information, then it is unlikely to be mission critical. Important things can be replicated as and when necessary.
5. The transfer did not happen as the council envisaged. Had the transfer taken place on or just before 31 March 2024, there would have been much more time to plan and co-ordinate. It was also unfortunate that the transfer took place whilst one of the volunteer webmasters was away and the other was busy with other things.
6. We are where we are. The fact that the new website was created in a matter of days, that the domain name transfer went smoothly, and that all the council’s email was saved and transferred to the new system is a massive win. If we’ve lost some website content along the way, that’s not a bad outcome.
7. The council’s email system was kept operational throughout. There was a very short period between Monday 4 March and Tuesday 5 March 2024 when the email system was transitioning from the old server to the new server (called DNS Propagation) when sometimes it would work and sometimes it wouldn’t, but it was fully functional by midday on 5 March 2024. A note was sent to all councillors on Sunday 3 March 2024 with instructions for setting up the new email and pointing people towards Cllr John Plunkett should any assistance be required on the Tuesday or Wednesday with setting up email. Unfortunately, not all councillors read the email on the Sunday and may have not had access to it during the transfer, so some councillors did not regain email access for

several days and I believe there is one councillor that still does not have access.

8. All councillors have access to their email via <https://webmail.helmdonparishcouncil.gov.uk> where they can enter their council email address (e.g. [dannymoody@helmdonparishcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:dannymoody@helmdonparishcouncil.gov.uk)) and the password provided by Parish Online (the old 2Commune passwords don't work, obviously). The passwords were available from the clerk, from the chair, or from Cllr John Plunkett. Once councillors had access to their email through webmail they could change their password. If any councillor hasn't yet changed their password, they should do so **IMMEDIATELY**. The home page on the webmail system provides instructions for how to set up mail clients on computers, laptops, phones, tablets etc. Using webmail on a desktop is workable but is somewhat limited on a phone or tablet. Using a mail client such as Outlook, Mail, or Thunderbird is preferable.
9. If any councillor is still having issues with email setup, then they can access support from Cllr John Plunkett or me.
10. The new website is a work in progress. The council needs to gradually work out what, if any, information is missing and replace it. There is some tidying up to do, and new and fresh content needs to be added. The website team (the clerk and the two volunteer webmasters) should work together to add to the site over the coming months.
11. The new site is far easier and more intuitive to manage and there have been very favourable comments about the new design and feel.
12. Whilst the new site got off to a rather jerky start, the decision to move to Parish Online, who the clerk reports have been extremely supportive and communicative, and away from Cuttlefish, appears at this stage to have been the right decision.