Digital and Data Compliance

INTRODUCTION

The Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2025/26 has been updated and to enable the Parish Council to tick Assertion 10 on the Annual Governance Statement the Parish Council will need to comply with the following :

1.47 Email management - Every authority must have a generic email account hosted on an authority owned domain, for example clerk@abcparishcouncil.gov.uk or clerk@abcparishcouncil.org.uk rather than abcparishclerk@gmail.com or abcparishclerk@outlook.com for example.

1.48 All smaller authorities (excluding parish meetings) must meet legal requirements for all existing websites regardless of what domain is being used.

1.49 All websites must meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.2 AA and the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018 (where applicable).

1.50 All websites must include published documentation as specified in the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Transparency code for smaller authorities (where applicable).

1.51 All smaller authorities, including parish meetings, must follow both the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016 and the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018.

1.52 All smaller authorities, including parish meetings, must process personal data with care and in line with the principles of data protection.

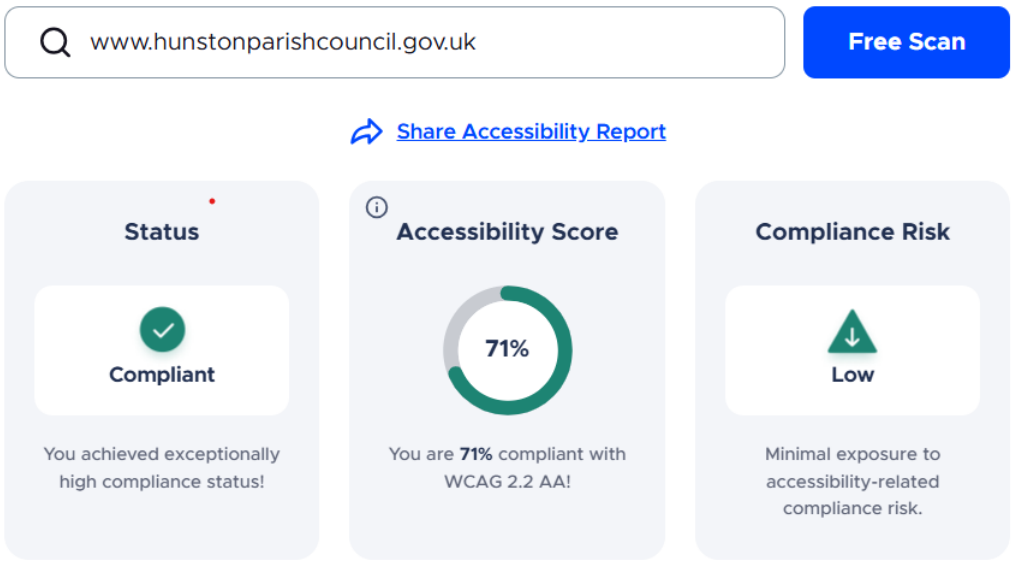
1.53 The DPA 2018 supplements the GDPR and classifies an authority as both a Data Controller and a Data Processor.

1.54 All smaller authorities (excluding parish meetings) must also have an IT policy. This explains how everyone - clerks, members and other staff - should conduct authority business in a secure and legal way when using IT equipment and software. This relates to the use of authority-owned and personal equipment.

Current Position

The Parish Council owns the domain name hunstonparishcouncil.gov.uk and operates with a .gov.uk email address. The website address and email address matches.

The website has an accessibility statement and the statement states that the site is WCAG2.1AA standard. The Clerk has carried out an accessibility check on 15 July 2025, via userway.org which shows that the site is 71% compliant with WCAG 2.2AA. The Clerk has contacted the website provider to seek clarification as whether there is anything else we can do to improve accessibility.



The Parish Council has a Data Protection Policy and is registered with the Information Commissioner and the Registration Certificate is available to view on the website. The Data Protection Officer is the Parish Clerk.

Action Required

1. Review the issues with use of personal devices.
2. Complete an IT Policy which contains information on use of personal devices.
3. Update the website to ensure WCAG2.2AA compliance.
4. To consider members training to ensure they understand the importance of data security.
5. Reminder to Councillors on the importance of always using their hunstonparishcouncil.gov.uk emails for all Parish Council correspondence.

AGS Assertion 10 — Digital and data compliance

5.117. Data protection and security - Using authority-owned email accounts ensures that sensitive information is handled in a controlled environment with appropriate security measures. This aligns with GDPR principles such as data minimisation, integrity and confidentiality.

5.118. Accountability and transparency - authority-owned email accounts provide a clear record of communications, which is essential for transparency and accountability. This helps in maintaining an audit trail and ensures all authority-related communications are accessible for review if needed.

5.119. Consistency, trust and professionalism - it is best practice to use .gov.uk domains for smaller authorities' emails and websites (excluding parish meetings). This helps maintain a consistent and professional image for the authority and ensures all communications are easily identifiable as coming from the authority. This is increasingly important as cyber scams are on the rise. For support on setting up a gov.uk domain for your smaller authority you can follow the guidance on moving your parish council to a .gov.uk domain.

5.120. Having authority-owned email accounts also makes Data Subject Access and Freedom of Information Requests easier to manage.

5.121. Compliance with policies - All authorities should have an IT policy that mandates the use of authority-owned email accounts for official business. These policies are designed to ensure that all communications are conducted in a manner that is consistent with the authority's standards and legal obligations

5.122. IT Policies - An IT policy prevents misunderstandings when using IT equipment for authority business and makes sure that there can be no excuses for anyone in your authority not protecting their data or working safely. If your authority does not have a policy, you might like to use this IT policy template. It is important to personalise the template for the specific use of your authority and add links to guidance where needed.

5.123. Website accessibility - Where a smaller authority is subject to the requirements of website accessibility it does not have to buy a new website to comply with accessibility law if it places a disproportionate burden on the authority. At a minimum all authorities' websites must include an accessibility statement on their website and keep it under regular review. This statement should include reasons for not meeting accessibility requirements, ways to source alternative copies of non-accessible documents and a point of contact.

5.124. Data Protection - To ensure compliance with data protection regulations, smaller authorities should:

• Appoint a Data Protection officer to oversee data protection and ensure compliance with GDPR (Under Section 7 of the DPA 2018, Parish Councils and Parish Meetings are exempt from this requirement).

• Conduct regular data audits to identify what personal data is held, how it is used and make sure it is processed lawfully.

• Implement a Data Protection policy on data handling, storage and sharing.

• Provide regular training to ensure all staff and members are trained on data protection principles and practices.

• Secure data using appropriate technical and organisational measures to protect personal data from breaches.

5.125. The Freedom of Information Act places a duty on every public authority to adopt and maintain a publication scheme which details the publication of information by the authority and is approved by the Information Commissioner; adoption of the Information Commissioners Office model publication scheme meets this requirement.

5.126. In addition to this the Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities requires parish councils, internal drainage boards, charter trustees and port health authorities with an annual turnover not exceeding £25,000 to publish certain information set out in the code. This enables local electors and local taxpayers to access relevant information about the authority's accounts and governance.

5.127. Smaller Authorities with total turnover or expenditure greater than £25,000 should as best practice comply with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015; the government believes that in principle all data held and managed by local authorities should be made available to the public unless there are specific sensitivities to doing so.

5.128. Monitoring an authority's compliance with the relevant transparency code is not part of the external auditor's limited assurance review of the AGAR. It would however be expected that internal auditors would review this control area.