Decision Paper: Parish Council Website & Email Modernisation

Sampford Courtenay Parish Council — Summary for Decision

1. Why We Are Changing
Current councillor emails use personal Gmail accounts (e.g., cllr.name.scpc@gmail.com).
This does not meet current expectations for GDPR, FOI, records retention, and government digital accessibility standards (WCAG 2.2 AA).

The council must move to name@sampfordcourtenay-pc.gov.uk and ensure the website is compliant and supportable long-term.

2. Options Considered

Option A — Move to Parish Online (website + email bundle)

Pros

Simple "all-in-one" vendor-managed solution.
The whole package including Email hosting included is based on Zoho, which we have used for 20 years.

Comes with mapping tools, office suite and emails.

Parish Online will help with migration

Software is all fairly easy to use

Cons / Risks

Vendor lock-in: website + email + mapping tied to one supplier.
Website format is limited to one template.

Email dependent on Zoho, not a mainstream UK public-sector standard.

Unclear long-term control of DNS, data export, and exit costs.

Accessibility ("WCAG compliant") is claimed but not independently auditable.

Harder to change just one part (email or website) in future, although migration away from Parish-online to native Zoho is an option

Suitable if: the council wants maximum simplicity, minimum administration, and accepts tighter lock-in.

Option B — Keep Drupal, modernise it, and run email via Microsoft 365 or Google Workspace

Pros

Lowest lock-in: website, email and domain fully separable.

Drupal 10 → 11 upgrade is straightforward and future-proof. We are currently on Drupal 10.1.6, but the upgrade to 11.0.0 is but one click away

Full control of accessibility, retention, FOI search, security policies.

Email on Microsoft 365 or Google Workspace is industry-standard, well-supported, and easy to audit.

Can continue to use existing site structure/content, just refreshed visually.

Cons

One-time upgrade/re-theme cost.

Email licensing cost per councillor. (but lower than Zoho bundle price as few councilllors
A higher level of IT input from the Council to manage the system.

Suitable if: the council wants long-term independence, compliance, and flexibility.

3. Cost Overview (indicative)

Option A — Parish Online

Website + email + domain package: ~£300–£800/year (population-based).

Mapping add-ons from ~£50/year.

No separate email licences, but limited flexibility.

Option B — Drupal + M365/Google

Email:

Microsoft 365 Business Basic ~£4.60/user/month (best FOI/eDiscovery support).

Google Workspace Starter ~£7/user/month.

Domain: .gov.uk via Jisc, ~£110/year.

Drupal hosting: varies (typically modest).

One-time upgrade/theme refresh cost (depends on vendor).

For 10 councillors, annual email cost is approx:

Microsoft 365: £552/year

Google Workspace: ~£840/year

4. Recommended Option

Option B: Keep Drupal (upgrade to Drupal 11) + Microsoft 365 or Google Workspace for email.

Reasons:

Fully meets GDPR, FOI, accessibility, and public-sector digital standards.

Council retains full control of domain, email, and data.

Avoids dependency on a single supplier.

Drupal 10.1.6 → 11 is simple and provides long-term support.

A light visual refresh will address WCAG 2.2 and improve usability without rebuilding the site.

5. Implementation Checklist
Website (Drupal)

Upgrade Drupal 10.1.6 → 10.3 → 11.

Update PHP to 8.3 (if needed).

Remove deprecated modules; ensure theme is WCAG-ready.

Carry out WCAG 2.2 AA audit and update the Accessibility Statement.

Improve visual design (colour contrast, mobile menus, metadata).

Email

Decide Microsoft 365 vs Google Workspace.

Move DNS for sampfordcourtenay-pc.gov.uk under council control (Jisc if not already).

Create councillor accounts: name@sampfordcourtenay-pc.gov.uk.

Set up SPF, DKIM, DMARC.

Configure retention, FOI search, and shared mailboxes (clerk@, chair@, info@).

Migrate or forward mail from old Gmail accounts.