



Department of the
Environment

www.doeni.gov.uk

The Draft Local Government (Domain Names) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015

Consultation Document

February 2015



Department of the
Environment
www.doeni.gov.uk

DRAFT LOCAL GOVERNMENT (DOMAIN NAMES) REGULATIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2015

This Consultation Document seeks views on the draft Local Government
Domain Names Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015.

Comments should be sent by 30th March 2015 to:

**Local Government Policy Division 2
Department of the Environment
Level 4, Causeway Exchange
1-7 Bedford Street
Town Parks
Belfast, BT2 7EG.**

E-mail: LGPDConsultations@doeni.gov.uk

Textphone 028 9054 0642

The following people will be able to answer queries in relation to the draft
regulations:

Name	E-mail	Telephone
Damien Dean	damien.dean@doeni.gov.uk	028 9082 3366
Mark Mulholland	mark.mulholland@doeni.gov.uk	028 9082 3364

Crown Copyright 2014

This material may be freely reproduced except for sale or advertising purposes.

CONTENTS

	Page
Purpose of the Consultation Document	1
Background	1
The Draft Regulations	3
Consultation Questions and Comments	4
Human Rights	6
Equality	6
Regulatory Impact Assessment	6
Rural Proofing	6
Freedom of Information Act 2000 – confidentiality of consultations	6
Alternative format	7
Annex A –The Draft Local Government (Domain Names) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015	8
Annex B – The Freedom of Information Act 2000 – confidentiality of consultations	10
Annex C – List of Consultees	12
Annex D – Domain Naming Convention Guidance	14

DRAFT LOCAL GOVERNMENT (DOMAIN NAMES) REGULATIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2015

PURPOSE OF THE CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

1. The Department of the Environment is seeking comments on its proposal to make the Local Government (Domain Names) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (the 2015 Regulations). The proposed Regulations specify the range of domain names that councils may use. The Draft Regulations are attached at **Annex A**.

BACKGROUND

2. Domain names are used to establish an organisation's unique identity, in terms of websites. Organisations usually choose a domain name which corresponds with their business name, helping internet users to easily find their website. For example, the Times newspaper's website is www.thetimes.co.uk and the Belfast Telegraph's is www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk.
3. A domain name consists of one or more parts, technically called labels that are conventionally joined up and separated by dots, such as example.com.
 - The right-most label conveys the top-level domain (TLD); for example, in the web address for the Department of the Environment, www.doeni.gov.uk, gov.uk is the top-level domain.
 - Numerous top-level domains have been registered for use, and the most commonly used are com, org, net, edu, int, and gov.

The gov top-level domain is normally linked to a country code TLD such as uk (United Kingdom) or es (Spain).

4. At Consideration Stage of the Local Government Bill, the Assembly agreed that provision should be added to allow the Department to specify a standard format for the domain names of the 11 new councils.
5. Section 125 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 (the 2014 Act) states that, *“The Department must, by regulations, specify a standard format for the domain names of council websites”*. This amendment requires the Department to make regulations specifying the format of councils’ website addresses; it does not require the Department to prescribe a single domain name format which must be used by all 11 councils.
6. As councils are bodies corporate in their own right and are independent organisations, the Department’s preferred option is to prescribe multiple formats which councils may choose from when deciding upon a domain name.
7. All of the 11 new councils have already registered domain names. Seven councils have registered domain names ending in ‘.gov.uk’ whilst the remaining four have registered names ending in ‘.com’ or ‘.org’.
8. The UK Cabinet Office Naming and Approvals Committee, which controls all domain names ending in .gov.uk, states that all public sector bodies **should** use the ‘.gov.uk’ naming convention, **but this**

is not mandatory. However, where an organisation uses the '.gov.uk' convention, it must abide by the Committee's guidance. This guidance can be viewed at the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/naming-and-registering-government-websites/local-and-regional-government-naming-and-registering-websites>.

9. The Department has developed guidance, in liaison with the Department of Finance and Personnel, for councils that have decided not to use the '.gov.uk' naming convention, and this is attached at **Annex D**. This guidance can be summarised as follows. Councils registering a domain name that does not include '.gov.uk' should ensure that they:-
 - use short and easily understood names and no acronyms;
 - use real words;
 - describe the primary purpose e.g. www.councilname.org;
 - use consistent and commonly known names; and
 - strip out unnecessary words.

THE DRAFT REGULATIONS

10. Section 125 of the 2014 Act requires the Department to make regulations which specify a standard format, meaning that the Department can prescribe a range of domain name format that councils may use.
11. The Department considers that it would not be appropriate to limit local government to using a single format for domain names. Given the fact that all elected members have been given a mandate by the

electorate, and councils may have different views on what their domain name format might be, the Department intends to specify a range of domain name formats which councils may use.

12. The 2015 Regulations, therefore, provide councils with a choice of formats and the decision about which one to use rests with the elected members of each council.

13. The Department proposes to specify in regulation 2 (3) that councils must have regard to guidance produced by the Department of the Environment, in liaison with the Department of Finance and Personnel. This guidance will also indicate that councils should:-
 - use easily understood names and not acronyms;
 - use real words;
 - describe the primary purpose e.g. www.councilname.gov.uk;
and
 - use consistent and commonly known names.

<p>Q1. Do you agree that a council's domain name must include the actual name of the council?</p>
--

14. The Department proposes to specify in regulation 2 (1) that councils may choose to use one of 4 top-level domain names. The proposed top-level domain names are:-
 - .gov.uk;
 - .org;
 - .com; and
 - .net.

Q2. Do you agree that the councils should be able to use domain naming format containing a top-level domain from the list above?

Q3. Do you consider that other top-level domain names should be included? If yes, what top-level domain names would you suggest?

15. The Department would welcome any other views that you have on the issues outlined above.

Human Rights

16. The Department believes that the proposals are compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.

Equality

17. Under the terms of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Department carried out screening for equality impact and is satisfied that the proposed legislation will not lead to discriminatory or negative differential impact on any of the section 75 groups. A copy of the screening form can be viewed on the Department's website: http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/information/equality_unit/policies_screened_out_-_january_to_march_2015.htm

Regulatory Impact Assessment

18. The Department has not conducted a regulatory impact assessment as the proposed legislation does not give rise to any associated costs or savings on business, charities, social economy enterprises or the voluntary sector.

Rural Proofing

19. The Department has assessed the proposed measures and considers that there would be no differential impact in rural areas or on rural communities.

Freedom of Information Act 2000 – confidentiality of consultations

20. The Department may publish a summary of responses following completion of the consultation process. Your response, and all

other responses to the consultation, may be disclosed on request. The Department can only refuse to disclose information in exceptional circumstances. Before you submit your response, please read **Annex B** on the confidentiality of consultations. It gives guidance on the legal position about any information given by you in response to this consultation.

Alternative format

21. This document is available in alternative formats. Please contact us to discuss your requirements.

22. This Consultation Document is being circulated to persons and bodies listed in **Annex C** and is also available to view at:
http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/local_government/local_government_consultations.htm

23. Responses and comments on the draft Local Government (Domain Names) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 should be sent by 30th March 2015 to the address below or by e-mail to LGPDConsultations@doeni.gov.uk.

Local Government Policy Division 2
Causeway Exchange
4th Floor
1-7 Bedford Street
Belfast
BT2 7EG

Textphone: 028 9054 064

DRAFT STATUTORY RULES OF NORTHERN IRELAND

2015 No.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Draft Local Government (Domain Names) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015

Made - - - - - xx xxx xxxx
Coming into operation - xx xxx xxxx

The Department of the Environment, makes these Regulations in exercise of the powers conferred on it by sections 125 and 127(6) of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014^(a).

In accordance with section 127 of that Act, the Department has consulted councils, such associations or bodies representative of councils, such associations or bodies representative of officers of councils and such other persons and bodies as appear to the Department to be appropriate.

Citation, commencement and interpretation

1.—(1) These Regulations may be cited as The Local Government (Domain Names) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 and shall come into operation on 1st April 2015.

(2) In these Regulations, “2014 Act” means the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Domain names

2.—(1) For the purposes of section 125 of the 2014 Act, the specified format for the domain names of council websites is the council name followed by—

- (a) .org;
- (b) .gov.uk;
- (c) .com; or
- (d) .net.

(2) Where paragraph (1)(b) applies, councils must have regard to the Naming and Approvals Committee’s guidance^(b).

(3) In all other cases, councils must have regard to guidance produced by the Department of the Environment, in liaison with the Department of Finance and Personnel^(c).

^(a) 2014 c. 8 (N.I.).

^(b) See <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/naming-and-approvals-committee-nac>

^(c) See <https://www.doeni.gov.uk>

Sealed with the Official Seal of the Department of the Environment on XX XX XX.

Elizabeth Loughran

A senior officer of the Department of the Environment

EXPLANATORY NOTE

(This note is not part of the Regulations)

These Regulations specify the format for the domain names of council websites.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 – confidentiality of consultations

1. The Department may publish a summary of responses following completion of the consultation process. Your response, and all other responses to the consultation, may be disclosed on request. The Department can only refuse to disclose information in exceptional circumstances. Before you submit your response, please read the paragraphs below on the confidentiality of consultations and they will give you guidance on the legal position about any information given by you in response to this consultation.
2. The Freedom of Information Act gives the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority, namely, the Department in this case. This right of access to information includes information provided in response to a consultation. The Department cannot automatically consider as confidential, information supplied to it in response to a consultation. However, it does have the responsibility to decide whether any information provided by you in response to this consultation, including information about your identity should be made public or be treated as confidential.
3. This means that information provided by you in response to the consultation is unlikely to be treated as confidential, except in very particular circumstances. The Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the Freedom of Information Act provides that:

- the Department should only accept information from third parties in confidence if it is necessary to obtain that information in connection with the exercise of any of the Department's functions and it would not otherwise be provided;
 - the Department should not agree to hold information received from third parties "in confidence" which is not confidential in nature; and
 - acceptance by the Department of confidentiality provisions must be for good reasons, capable of being justified to the Information Commissioner.
4. For further information about confidentiality of responses please contact the Information Commissioner's Office (or see website at: <http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk>).

List of Consultees

All Northern Ireland District Councils

Association of Local Government Finance Officers

Association for Public Service Excellence

Belfast Solicitors Association

Local Government Auditor

Civil Law Reform Division

Community Relations Council

District Judges - Magistrates Court

Equality Commission for NI

HM Revenue & Customs

Human Rights Commission

Law Centre (NI)

Law Society of Northern Ireland

Local Government Staff Commission

MEPs

MLAs

MPs

National Association of Councillors

NI Assembly / Committee for the Environment

NI Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux

NI Chamber of Commerce and Industry

NI Chamber of Trade

NI Council for Voluntary Action

NI Political Parties

Northern Ireland Court Service

Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission

Northern Ireland Law Commission

Northern Ireland Local Government Association

QUB – School of Law

Society of Local Authority Chief Executives

The Executive Council of the Inn of Court Northern Ireland

The Law Society of Northern Ireland

UU – School of Law

The section 75 bodies and persons listed in the Department's Equality Scheme

DOMAIN NAMING CONVENTION GUIDANCE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

1. Background

This guide sets out the principles for registering and managing local government Domain Names.

The global system of Internet Domain Names exists to make Internet services more accessible for ordinary users.

Domain Names serve as more easily memorable names for Internet resources such as computers, networks, and services. A domain name represents an Internet Protocol (IP) resource. Individual Internet host computers use Domain Names as host identifiers, or host names. Host names are the leaf labels in the domain name system usually without further subordinate domain name space. Host names appear as a component in Uniform Resource Locators (URLs) for Internet resources such as web sites (e.g., en.wikipedia.org).

Domain Names are also used as simple identification labels to indicate ownership or control of a resource. Such examples are the realm identifiers used in the Session Initiation Protocol (SIP), the Domain Keys used to verify DNS domains in e-mail systems, and in many other Uniform Resource Identifiers (URIs).

An important function of Domain Names is to provide easily recognizable and memorable names to numerically addressed Internet resources. This abstraction allows any resource to be moved to a different physical location in the address topology of the network, globally or locally in an

intranet. Such a move usually requires changing the IP address of a resource and the corresponding translation of this IP address to and from its domain name.

Domain Names are used to establish a unique identity. Organizations can choose a domain name that corresponds to their name, helping Internet users to reach them easily. For instance IBM's web site is at ibm.com, and GNU's is at gnu.org.

Generic Domain Names increase popularity. A generic domain name may sometimes define an entire category of business that a company is involved in, rather than being the name of the company. Some examples of generic names include books.com, music.com, travel.com and art.com. Companies have created successful brands based on a generic name, and such generic Domain Names tend to be very valuable.

Domain Names are often referred to simply as domains and domain name registrants are frequently referred to as domain owners, although domain name registration with a registrar does not confer any legal ownership of the domain name, only an exclusive right of use for a particular duration of time. The use of Domain Names in commerce may subject them to trademark law.

2.Naming strategy for local government

Councils with, or planning to have, an Internet presence should adopt and exercise a centralised approach to planning the acquisition, management and use of appropriate domain names. A domain name is intellectual property and has both financial and strategic value.

Local government should consider using **.gov.uk** naming convention as their primary domain. The UK Cabinet Office Naming & Approvals committee guidelines **must** therefore be adhered to if a **.gov.uk** format is used.

Local government **may** use **.org**, **.com**, **.gov.uk** or **.net** as their primary domain sites, and should follow the guidance below in this case.

Domain Names should not point to anything other than an organisation's home page.

3. Use real words

To improve readability, URLs should use real words rather than abbreviations or acronyms. Hyphens and underscored spaces should not be used. Existing examples include www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk and www.justice.gov.uk. (Note that the guidance for local government permits the use of hyphens to describe the type of organisation e.g. '-bc' for borough councils.)

4. Describe the primary purpose

URLs should describe the primary purpose of the website or its primary focus so that users know what to expect from the website. Examples include www.communities.gov.uk and www.culture.gov.uk.

5. Be consistent with existing naming conventions

Where there are several acceptable alternatives, preference should be given to a URL consistent with existing ones so that it is easier to remember. For example www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk is consistent with www.homeoffice.gov.uk and www.ofsted.gov.uk is consistent with

www.ofgem.gov.uk.

6. Use commonly known or brand names

Where an organisation is commonly known by a particular acronym or brand name, use that as the primary URL because it will be easier to remember. Brand names should be used particularly where the real word URL is long or unwieldy. Examples include www.gchq.gov.uk and www.ofsted.gov.uk.

7. Strip out unnecessary words

Where an organisation name contains frequently used words such as prepositions or conjunctions, these may be stripped out for simplicity. Examples include www.nationalschool.gov.uk and www.commonleader.gov.uk.

8. Use short URLs

URLs should be short so that they are easy to type and therefore reduce human error. Shortened forms such as acronyms and abbreviations are preferred where the alternative real word form is unwieldy. Examples include www.ecgd.gov.uk and www.dfid.gov.uk.

9. Use easily understood URLs

URLs should be easy to say so that they are easily understood when communicated verbally and to reduce human error. In particular, avoid the use of hyphens or underscores in URLs. (Note that the guidance for local government permits the use of hyphens to describe the type of organisation e.g. '-bc' for borough council.)

10. Defensive registration

As part of a defensive strategy, councils should consider registering other, closely related Domain Names, for example, generic top-level domains (gTLDs) – .com, .org, .info and in the .uk second level domains (SLDs) – .co.uk, .org.uk.

The objective of defensive registration is risk management – to avoid or reduce occurrences of:

- **typosquatting** (common misspellings of your domain name);
- **cybersquatting** (registration of Domain Names reflecting or similar to the names of existing organisations with the intention of selling the names back to you or for using them for bad faith purposes); or
- **cybersmearing** (where anonymous authors set up web sites that spread alternative, false or disparaging information).

11. Naming conventions

Names must not imply a national (UK-wide) activity when in reality it is focused on or limited to a regional/geographic responsibility or activity.

Names must reflect the legal name or registered ‘trading name’ of your organisation.

Names should minimise risk of confusion with similar organisations, geographic areas or similar registered names and avoid the risk of inadvertent masquerading.

Generic names should be avoided for local, regional or intradepartmental initiatives, and used only for genuinely pan-

governmental activities sponsored by the Prime Minister's Office or the Cabinet Office.

Domain Names must:

- contain only standard ASCII alpha numeric characters A to Z; numerals 0 to 9 and/or hyphens;
- not begin or end with a hyphen (-);
- not coincide with Internet protocols, such as, www, ftp, dns, whois;
- not include postal codes, or pseudo abbreviations, such as, ltd, plc, gov;
- not contain more than 64 characters.

One and two letter Domain Names will not normally be used. Exceptionally they may be permitted for generic online services which are intended to apply to all of government or the .gov.uk community *and* for which a very short domain name is essential for end-user convenience. Exceptions will require the personal approval of the Director for Digital Engagement on behalf of the Permanent Secretary, Government Communications and the Government CIO.

Internationalised Domain Names are currently not supported. Where names contain letters that cannot be reproduced in standard ASCII, the conventionally accepted spelling should be used.

When registering any name you should be aware of the need to avoid infringing existing trademarks, trade names and third party business names. These can sometimes mistakenly be used as generic terms. Apart from giving unnecessary publicity there is a risk of it being illegal. Where a trade name, trademark or business name is to be used then written proof of your authority to use the name or mark must be submitted. It may be useful to check the [UK Intellectual Property Office](#)

and the searchable [Company Names Index](#) from Companies House.

12.Using abbreviations or acronyms

A small number of three and four letter acronyms may be considered as 'household names', for example, BBC, HSE, ITV, OFCOM, No10, However, to the broad majority of users, acronyms are meaningless. Web managers should favour a user-centred approach and register accordingly. For example, host names like education.gov.uk, environment.gov.uk and defence.gov.uk may be considered intuitive and unambiguous to a general user.

Three and four letter abbreviations or acronyms should only be used if:

- the domain name owner is a central Department of State (for example FCO); or
- the domain name owner is a central government body that is generally known by that abbreviation within the public sector, and to the wider public (for example MOD, NHS); or
- it can be shown that there is no reasonable and meaningful alternative.

Local government bodies should avoid using initials, wherever possible, as these are generally reserved for central government.

13.Local authorities

Local authorities should generally use the format **councilname.gov.uk**, **councilname.org**, **councilname.com** etc, unless there is the possibility of confusion with another authority or service (for example, national, devolved, regional, county or city) then geographic clarification will be necessary.

Where the full title is not used the following **suffixes** may be used (with the hyphen):

- '-bc' Borough Council
- '-dc' District Council

14.How to apply for a domain name

Your application for a domain name must be submitted through an approved Internet Service Provider (ISP).

Accuracy is important. You need to give your ISP sufficient information as a number of applications are being initially rejected with advice because the applicant has not read the rules, used the wrong template, or supplied misleading or inadequate information.

What does the name represent? Please provide name of the project, initiative or organisation for which the domain name is being used. This is not necessarily the same as the domain owner, which must also be provided.

Entries for **Organisational Contact** must be the name/address of the person or contact point designated to receive communications from the Registrar/ Committee related to the administration of the domain name. This person must be an employee of the proposed domain name owner.

Entries for **ISP Contact** must be name/address of the person or contact point designated to handle hosting issues associated with the domain name. This person must be an employee of the proposed ISP.

15.Your application should describe your organisation

You **should** clearly describe the status of your organisation (as domain

owner) and the purpose of the domain name for which you are applying. Include:

- the status of your organisation (for example, borough council, district council);
- the role and objective of your organisation;
- the status of your staff (for example, local government officials or employees);
- the source of your funding (for example, household / business rates);
- to whom your organisation is accountable (for example, ratepayers).

16.Purpose of the domain name

You should outline the primary purpose and planned content of your proposed domain name, for example:

- an information website
- a transactional website
- a campaign website
- an educational website, eg, aimed at children/schools
- a redirect page

Who is the **audience** for your website? You should identify your primary audience (eg, general public, rate payers etc). **Using abbreviations within your application.** Spell it out when you first use them within your application – do not use abbreviations.

The End

