



**Un Llais Cymru**  
**One Voice Wales**

## Community & Town Councils Digital Guidance

### Using Cloud Storage for Managing Documents

November 2024

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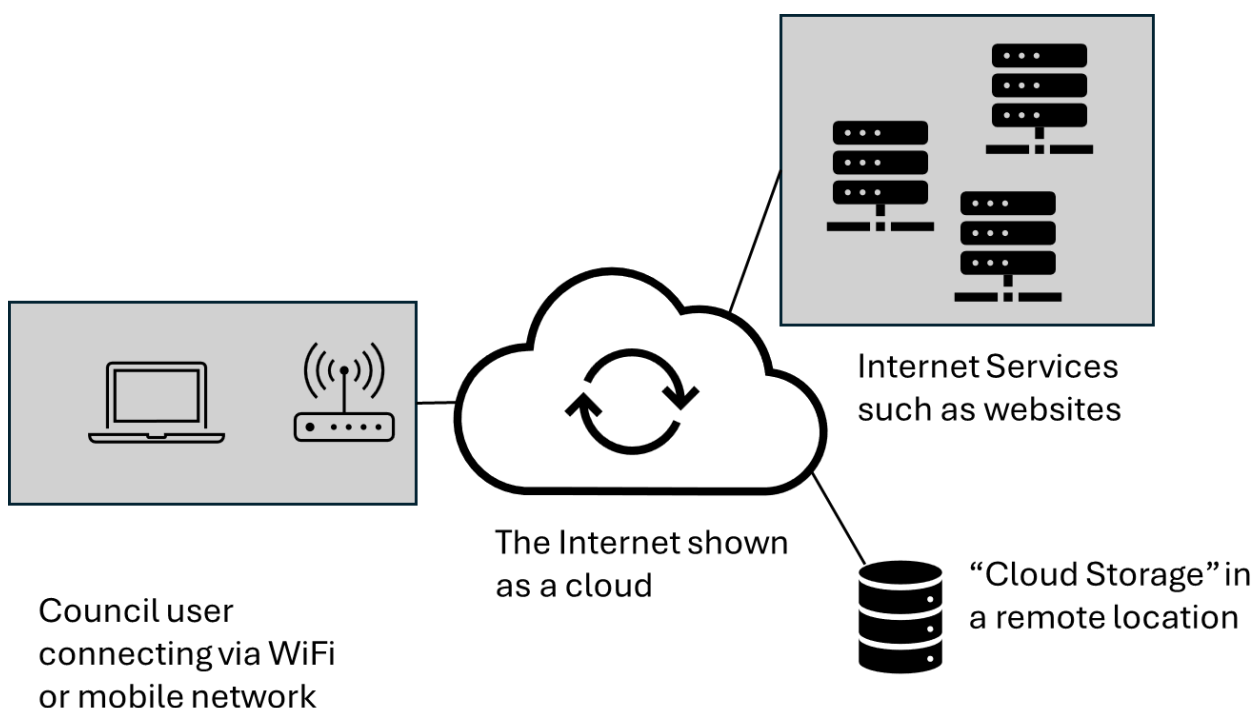
## Introduction

Community and Town Councils in Wales engage with residents, disseminate information, and promote transparency through various digital means. One critical aspect of this is effective management of documents which are stored digitally – stored on a computer either locally or via the internet. This document explores how councils can leverage what is known as “cloud storage” for document management.

## What is Cloud Storage?

Cloud storage is a digital service model where data is stored on remote servers (i.e. computers in other locations) rather than on a local computer. These remote servers are maintained, managed, and backed up by third-party providers and are accessible to users over the internet. This means that Community and Town Councils can save their important documents, such as meeting minutes, public notices, and member details, on these remote servers ensuring that the documents are secure and can be accessed from anywhere with an internet connection. The internet is often nicknamed “the cloud” in this context as you don’t see where the data goes exactly, it feels like it’s floating in the sky, ready to be accessed whenever you need it. The cloud can make storing and using data easy without worrying about the physical details. It also mitigates the risk of data loss due to local hardware failures.

Diagram 1: Simple Representation of the Internet as a Cloud



## Why use Cloud Storage?

- **Data Backup:** Provides automatic data backup, reducing the risk of data loss due to hardware failure or other incidents.
- **Flexibility:** You can easily add or remove storage space as needed without buying and setting up new equipment.
- **Cost-Effectiveness:** Reduces the need for local storage equipment and associated maintenance costs.
- **Accessibility:** Documents can be accessed from anywhere at any time, facilitating remote work and collaboration.
- **Collaboration:** Multiple users can work on documents simultaneously, enhancing productivity and communication.

## Cloud Storage Providers

### Pricing Models

Cloud storage pricing varies between providers based on several models:

- **Subscription-Based:** Fixed fees are charged monthly or annually for a specified amount of storage.
- **“Freemium” Model:** This is usually a variation on the subscription model. Basic services and a small amount of storage are provided for free, with charges applied for additional features or increased storage capacity.
- **Pay-as-You-Go:** Charges are based on the actual amount of storage used.

### Market Leading Cloud Storage Providers

There are numerous providers available, providing different technical Solutions for backing up files, different pricing models and other features. The list below just covers some of the most familiar providers and attempts to show how their offers differ and may appeal to different councils.

#### Google Drive

Google Drive offers a versatile cloud storage solution integrated with Google Workspace, which includes tools like Gmail, Google Docs, Sheets, and Slides. Key ways it can be used include editing documents by multiple people at the same time, easily sharing with multiple people, and real-time updates.

#### Microsoft OneDrive

Microsoft OneDrive is part of the Microsoft 365 suite, which includes Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Teams. OneDrive provides robust integration with these tools, making it an excellent choice for organisations already using these Microsoft products. It can be used in all the ways noted for Google Drive but also integrates with applications like Word and Excel where these are installed on local computers.

## Dropbox

Dropbox is renowned for its simplicity and ease of use. It offers features like file synchronization, sharing, and collaboration. Dropbox is useful for teams needing to share large files and work together on projects. It integrates with Google Workspace and Microsoft 365 but isn't a full suite of products to the same extent.

## Box

Box states it is designed with enterprise security and collaboration in mind. It offers advanced security features, integrations with other enterprise tools, and compliance with various regulations. The free and business plans offer more storage than the competing offers from Dropbox

## Best Practices for Small Organisations

For very small organisations, such as community councils, the following best practices are recommended:

- **Start Small:** Begin with a free or inexpensive plan to see if it suits your needs before upgrading to more expensive services.
- **Regular Backups:** Ensure that all key documents are backed up regularly to avoid data loss. This can usually be automated via software supplied by the cloud provider
- **Access Control:** Limit access to sensitive documents to authorized personnel only to maintain confidentiality. The cloud provider should give instructions on how this can be done
- **Training:** Provide training to staff on how to use cloud storage effectively and securely.
- **Add a "disaster" backup:** Think about what would happen if you lost access to your cloud provider because of a business failure or a security breach. To prepare for this, councils should regularly save all their data onto a physical device, like a USB stick or an external hard drive.

## Security and Privacy Considerations

When using cloud storage, it is essential to address security and privacy. Key considerations include:

- **Data Encryption:** Make sure your data is encrypted (scrambled and secure) when it is being sent and stored, so only authorized people can read it. Your cloud provider should give instructions for this.
- **Compliance:** Follow laws like the Data Protection Act 2018 to ensure personal information is handled correctly.
- **Access Management:** Set up strong controls to decide who can see and change documents.
- **Regular Audits:** Check your security regularly to find and fix any weaknesses.

## Implementation Plan for Cloud Storage

An effective implementation plan includes the following steps:

- **Assess Needs:** Determine the volume and type of documents to be stored, as well as access requirements.
- **Select Provider:** Choose a cloud storage provider based on the council's needs and budget -reviewing the plans and pricing which are offered by the different providers.
- **Migration:** Plan and execute the migration of existing documents to the cloud.
- **Ongoing Management:** Regular updates and ongoing management of the cloud storage solution are required to ensure it remains effective.
- **Training:** Provide training to staff responsible for managing the cloud storage system.

## Document Retention Policy

An effective document retention policy ensures that documents are stored for an appropriate length of time and disposed of securely when no longer needed. Key elements include:

- **Retention Periods:** Define how long different types of documents should be retained (e.g., meeting minutes for 10 years).
- **Storage Methods:** Specify how documents should be stored (e.g., encrypted cloud storage) to ensure security and accessibility.
- **Disposal Procedures:** Outline procedures for securely disposing of documents that are no longer required.
- **Compliance:** Ensure the policy complies with relevant legislation and regulations.

## Version History

	Date	Issuer	Reason	Review Date
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