



Corporate Records Management Policy

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Introduction

1. Records Management

What is it?

Records management is defined by the National Archive as:

'The function of creating, organising and maintaining records to ensure they provide evidence of activity, decision-making and policy. It includes the establishment of links between related records, swift and accurate filing and accessibility when required and scheduled destruction or transfer to an archives repository as appropriate in a timely fashion.'

Records management is not complicated. Most people are already performing records management tasks in the workplace. Records management is a practical and common-sense activity which supports the delivery of the Council's services.

Why do we need to manage records?

Effective records management will enable the Council to:-

- Access records when required;
- Ensure that decision-making and operations are properly supported and informed by relevant records;
- Have improved control over records;
- Make better use of space and storage facilities;
- Make better use of staff time and work more efficiently;
- Reduce costs;
- Maximise the benefits of investment in new technology;
- Help the Council to meet its obligations under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 1998, the Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on Records Management (the Code of Practice);
- Work towards achieving ISO 15489 or following the key principles;

Statutory and regulatory environment

As a public body, delivering or enabling public services and carrying out statutory functions, there are a number of regulatory or statutory frameworks with which we must comply. For example:

- Public Records Act 1958 and 1967
- Local Government (Records) Act 1962
- Local Government Act 1972
- Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Freedom of Information Act 2000

Compliance with these regimes relies on effective recordkeeping.

2. Records Management Policy

What is the Records Management Policy?

The aim of this policy is to define a framework for managing the Council's records to ensure that the Council.

- Creates and captures accurate, authentic and reliable records;
- Maintains records to meet the authority's business needs;
- Disposes of records that are no longer required in an appropriate manner;
- Protects vital records;
- Conforms to any legal and statutory requirements relating to record-keeping;
- Complies with government directives.

The Policy is a statement aimed at everyone at the Council who handles information in any form. In other words all Members, officers and contractors. The Policy describes what the Council does and intends to do with respect to the management of its records, by or on its behalf.

Who is responsible for the Records Management Policy?

The Policy has been approved by the Executive. The Officer who has overall responsibility for the implementation of the Policy and records management programme is the Head of People & Law. Each Service Unit has appointed a Freedom of Information Link Officer, or their Deputy, as the nominated officer with operational responsibility for records management within their service. A list of Freedom of Information Link Officers/Deputy Link Officers is available on the Hub under 'Freedom of Information'

Scope of the Records Management Policy

The Policy applies to all records created, received or maintained by the Council and its staff in the course of individual or organisational activity.

For these purposes, a record is defined as: recorded information, regardless of media or format.

Relationship with other policies

The Records Management Policy does not exist in isolation, but is part of the Council's Corporate Governance Framework. This Policy will be kept under review in light of the implementation of the Information Services Strategy as it relates to records management and also the development and use of new technologies.

The Council's Financial Procedure Rules have specific requirements concerning the form and retention of financial records and financial stationery. The Director of Resources has responsibility for the maintenance of financial records.

Vital records and business continuity

The management vital records and business continuity are an important aspect of records management. They are part of the Council's wider Business Continuity and Risk Management Policies.

All records (regardless of medium or format) which are vital to the Council and its operations – whether in the event of an emergency or to its continuation of business - must be identified and protected using appropriate measures commensurate with the nature of the record and the purpose for which it is required.

Appropriate measures have been put in place in the Council's Business Continuity Plan to prevent or minimise the risk of compromising the records and recordkeeping systems of the Council.

Partnership working

The Council carries out many projects and services in conjunction with partners. Therefore, we have a responsibility to ensure that partnership records are properly managed.

This Policy is intended to eliminate unnecessary duplication of records across stakeholders, but not at the expense of operational efficiency. Information sharing amongst partners and stakeholders is a key issue for effective delivery of services. Appropriate protocols and procedures for record creation and management will continue to be developed which demonstrate compliance with the law and best practice.

Core records which need to be kept permanently should be identified and one partner made responsible for management and long-term preservation.

Those operational records created during the partnership which facilitate the service/function of the partnership in respect of individual partners should be managed by each partner and have retention periods applied that reflect each partner's specific requirements.

The Council should, in all instances, recommend to its partners that an appropriate file plan is put in place and that consistent metadata standards, version control and file titling procedures are implemented to ensure that the records can be managed effectively and to agreed standards across the partnership.

General Principles

Where the Council is the lead partner:

- The core records will be retained and managed by the Council.
- Retention schedules for the records will be prepared and applied to records created.
- The Council's Records Management Policy will apply.

Where another organisation is the lead partner

- The core records will be retained by the lead organisation.
- The Council should identify and manage the records relating to its role in the partnership.

Where no single organisation is the lead partner

- The Council should ensure that provisions are made for one partner, whether this is the Council or another partner, to be responsible for management of the core records.
- If the Council is nominated to manage the partnership's records, then the Council's Records Management policy and procedures will apply.

3. The Principles of good records management.

There are four principles

1. A transparent process for the creation of records;
2. Records should be retrievable;
3. Proper filing or archiving systems; and
4. Appropriate procedures for the destruction of records.

It is recognised that methods of managing records may vary throughout the Council, according to statutory and practical requirements. It is the Council's aim to maintain this flexibility – subject to certain minimum standards, whilst complying with the principles laid down by this Policy.

A transparent process for the creation of records

Each service unit should have in place an adequate system for documenting its activities and take ownership of the records created. Some service units may also have particular legislative and regulatory requirements which could impact on their systems and these must be taken into account.

- Records arranged and indexed in such a way that they can be retrieved quickly and efficiently;
- Records are linked with the Council's Freedom of Information Publication Scheme if this appropriate;
- Procedures and guidelines for referencing, titling, indexing, version control and security marking;
- Procedures for keeping the system updated;
- The ability to cross reference electronic and paper records.

The Information Protection Policy applies to all records created in the course of Council business. This Policy is available on the Hub.

Data Quality

The Council has an established Policy for Data Quality. This can be found on the Hub or through the Policy and Performance Team.

Records should be retrievable

The record keeping system must be maintained so that the records are properly stored and protected and can easily be located and retrieved. This will include:

- Ensuring that adequate storage accommodation is provided for the records;
- Tracking and monitoring the movement and location of records so that they can be easily retrieved (This provides an audit trail);
- Controlling access to the information;
- Identifying vital records and applying the appropriate protection, including relationship to the Business Continuity Plan;
- Ensuring non-current records are transferred for storage in a controlled manner

Subject to the following standards, it is not necessary for all service units to have identical systems. However, systems should be easy to understand and operate. Staff should be trained in the use of the relevant systems, at an appropriate level. The location and movement of records should be carried out in a uniform manner, with an auditable trail of record transactions. Where necessary, electronic records should be cross-referenced with paper records.

Proper filing and archiving systems

The Council has in place an Agreed Standard for record keeping covering both manual and electronic records. The Standard, has clear rules for referencing, titling, indexing and (where necessary) security marking of records. The Agreed Standard can be found on the Hub.

Storage accommodation should be adequate to prevent damage to records and unauthorised access to confidential or personal data. The Council also recognises the need to comply with health and safety legislation in the way that paper records are stored and accessed.

The Council is considering procuring a Electronic Document Management System that would make the retrieval and storage of records easier. Until then, Heads of Service are responsible for ensuring the appropriate and safe management and storage of live and archived records in their respective areas of responsibility.

Procedures for the retention and destruction of records

A template Retention and Disposal Schedule is attached to this Policy as Appendix 2, using criteria laid out in the National Archives Guidelines and in compliance with statutory requirements. Approved Retention and Disposal Schedules are attached as Schedule 3. The Council has in place an Agreed Standard for the retention and destruction of records. The Disposal Procedure can be found on the Hub.

The key issue is to identify those file series which can be destroyed at pre-determined dates and/or which need to be retained in a way that is appropriate for business reasons. Heads of Service are responsible for ensuring that disposals in their respective areas of responsibility are carried out in line with this Policy and their approved Retention and Disposal Schedule. Documents earmarked for destruction must be completely destroyed eg through shredding by the Council's approved contractor.

A Retention and Disposal Schedule for each service unit must be approved by the Head of People & Law.

A record of the disposal must be completed and retained by the relevant FOI Link Officer using the approved form of Destruction Certificate shown at Appendix 1.

Electronic Legacy Systems

Guidlelines are currently being developed.

4. Effectiveness

Everyone at the Council has a responsibility to ensure that proper and appropriate records are created and maintained in accordance with this policy. The effectiveness of this policy will be monitored by review and audit, at least every 3 years. All staff are reminded of their obligations to comply with the Data Protection Act and the Council's data security requirements through the Code of Conduct for Employees.

5. Training and Awareness

Since all employees are involved in creating, maintaining and using records, it is vital that everyone understands their record management responsibilities as set out in this policy. Managers will ensure that staff responsible for managing records are appropriately trained or experienced and that all staff understand the need for records management. A training programme has been established and funded to ensure that all staff are aware of their obligations. Further information is available from Learning and Development Reps and the Hub.

6. Related legislation

Freedom of Information Act 2000

Further information on FOI can be found on the Hub.

Data Protection Act 1998

The Data Protection Act 1998 came into force on 1 March 2000. Its purpose is to protect information about individuals and to enforce a set of standards for the processing of such information. This places responsibilities and liabilities on those who process personal data (The Data User).

This Act affects nearly every officer of the Council as most use information technology or structured manual records. If these records contain personal data, then care must be exercised when applications for disclosure are received. If the information is disclosed, even accidentally, you can be held **personally liable** under the Data Protection Act.

Further information on Data Protection can be found on the Hub.

Environmental Information Regulations

Environmental Information Regulations establish an access regime which allows people to request environmental information from public authorities and those bodies carrying out a public function. The Regulations came in to force on the 1 January 2005). There is a very broad range of

information which could fall within the classification of environmental such as:-

- Information on the state the environment and factors effecting the environment, for example, instances of flooding, habitat loss, species extinction, greenhouse gases, radioactive waste, noise, building developments etc.
- Information on measures such as policies, legislation (including reports on the implementation of environmental legislation), environmental agreements etc and also economic analysis/cost benefit of such measures.
- Information on the state of human health and safety, the food chain, cultural/built structures and the conditions of human life, where they are effected by environmental factors such as acid rain, air pollution etc.

Further information on the Environmental Information Regulations can be found on the Hub.

Useful contacts

If you need further any information or guidance, please browse the websites listed below:-

www.dataprotection.gov.uk

www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk

www.dca.gov.uk

www.lga.gov.uk

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/www.opsi.gov.uk>

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

Alternatively you can contact your FOI Link Officers

Authorisation

The Executive is responsible for the authorisation of this policy.
The Head of People & Law is responsible for keeping it up to date.

Appendix 1 - Model Destruction Certificate



Destruction Certificate

Name of Service

File No.....

Name or description.....

Destruction authorised by.....
(Signature)

Date.....201

Destroyed by.....
(Signature)

Date.....201

**WHEN THE RECORD HAS BEEN DESTROYED THIS CERTIFICATE
MUST RETURNED TO THE SERVICE UNIT FOI LINK
OFFICER WITH 5 DAYS.**