



DOCUMENT AND RECORDS MANAGEMENT POLICY

First Adopted By Full Council:	2015 June	Item	Not Recorded
Last Approved Review Date:	2022 Sept	Item	23FC096
Next Review Date:	2026 Sept	Item	

Aim and scope

Information is an asset, and the records of the Council are important sources of administrative, evidential and historical information. They are vital in its current and future operations, for the purposes of accountability, and for an awareness and understanding of its history and procedures. The aim of this policy is to cover the maintenance, storage, and confidentiality (when applicable) of information held by the staff and councillors.

Importance of Records Management

The implementation of good Records Management practices will benefit the Council in many ways by:

- improving the conduct of business in an orderly, efficient, and accountable manner
- ensuring that the Council is compliant with its statutory obligations
- recording the policy and decision-making process
- protecting the interests of the Council, Councillors, staff, and parishioners
- providing evidence of Council activities
- maintaining a reliable memory for the Council
- having effective records management there will be tangible savings in time and resources
- ensuring compliance with Data Protection and Freedom of Information Legislation

Definition of a record

In this policy, records mean any documents or data which form recorded evidence of Council activity, i.e., in any form including paper, e-mail, documents held on computer systems and information held in databases. This information is created or received, used, and maintained by the Council in the conduct of its activities and is kept for accountability, compliance with legislative and statutory requirements and to assist in the planning and running of future activities.

Responsibilities for Records Management

All members of the Council including staff and councillors have a legal responsibility to maintain the confidentiality, integrity and security of data held.

Councillors need to adopt good practise if creating and maintaining records outside of the office; ensuring that records are held in a structured fashion to allow easy retrieval. The responsibility for record holding may be fulfilled by ensuring that the Clerk is provided with a copy of such records in an agreed format. This is most efficiently achieved electronically by email, including a read receipt request to confirm that it is safely received.

Records Management System

General

The Council will create, use, manage and destroy or preserve its records, in all media and in all forms, in accordance with statutory requirements. It will ensure that information is captured, stored, retrieved, and destroyed or preserved according to need. It will ensure that the appropriate technical, organisational, and human resource elements exist to make this possible.

Records should be held in paper based or electronic files in shared directories, databases, or document management systems. The files should be organised in a structured way and have some indication as to their contents and relevance.

For most topics there should be one lead file held by the office. Councillors and Committee Chairmen may also have a file on the same subject, kept only for so long as is needed for their personal reference, but they should ensure that the lead file (office) gives the complete story of the handling of the issue.

Information will be accessible to those who need to make use of it, with the following exceptions:

Personal Data: All personal information obtained through the course of the Council's activities will be stored securely and not available for public access in accordance with Data Protection Legislation. Personal data will be monitored on a regular basis and shredded or deleted once it has served its purpose, is not needed anymore or is out of date.

Information will only be supplied to a councillor to help them carry out their duties, upon request. They will only receive as much information as necessary and will only receive information relating to the area they represent.

Confidential Data: Where there are confidentially issues, files should be held in a separate paper or electronic file in a secure storage area or electronically password protected. Although rare, confidential minutes from meetings will be printed on coloured paper (to avoid mixing them with ordinary minutes) and will not be available for public inspection.

Confidential data in relation to staff is only held by the Clerk and will only be provided to councillors on a 'need to know' basis.

Complaints or queries in relation to staff or councillors must remain confidential.

Managing E-mail Records

E-mails are official communications and may be disclosed in response to a Freedom of Information or Data Protection request and in legal cases. Electronic messages can be legally binding; contracts can be set up via e-mail and the Council may be held liable for defamatory statements in e-mails. For these reasons, nothing should be stated in an e-mail that would not be stated in other forms of written communication.

Councillors must use their councillors email addresses for all council correspondence in accordance with the Council's Internet and Email Policy.

Under the Data Protection Act the Council should keep information about people for no longer than is necessary; this includes e-mails to/from or about people. Out-of-date trivial e-mails and those that have been copied to the relevant subject file should be deleted as soon as possible so that a backlog does not accumulate as this becomes difficult to manage.

Managing Electronic Records

The Council will operate a back-up system with two external storage drives, one held by the Clerk (or other member of staff in her absence) whilst the other backs up overnight. All updated files must be overwritten by the back-up so that only the latest file version is retained.

The Council website should be used for saving and making available non-sensitive information for reference purposes.

Documents and folders should have file titles which are easily understood by others. Personal file names or uncommon abbreviations should not be used, as they will be meaningless to others. The title should clearly indicate the version status, such as, draft 1, draft 4, final version etc. Out-of-date material should not accumulate in a file, and if a document is not accessed in the course of eighteen months, it should probably be deleted from the drive.

Records Retention/Destruction

Guidance is provided in the NALC Legal Topic Notice 40 and the SLCC advice note: Retaining Important Documentation. These documents set out the periods for which Council records should be retained to meet operational needs and to comply with legal and other requirements and were used as the basis for *Appendix A – Timetable for Retention/Destruction of Council Records*.

Some documentation will need to be kept indefinitely and as such will need to be archived with the Bedfordshire & Luton Archives and Records Service (BLARS). Further guidance is provided as to what BLARS will/will not accept from town and parish councils. Copies of archived records should be indexed and stored safely.

Destruction has to be carried out in such a way as to ensure that data from which individuals can be identified cannot fall into the wrong hands. Any data containing personal information must be shredded.

An individual who suffers damage because of a contravention by the data controller is entitled to compensation for that damage. Contravention of the Data Protection Act is a criminal offence and carries a fine.

Destruction of confidential material

Any record produced by the Council which is not in the public domain, and which contains information on identifiable individuals should be treated as confidential. Most confidential material is subject to the Data Protection Act and under the Act the individual handling or processing confidential personal data is personally responsible for the proper disposal of such data.

What *is* confidential

Any record which contains personal information about a living individual e.g.

- Questionnaire or other data collected under a guarantee of confidentiality
- Correspondence or other documents which reveal the contact details or any financial details of a named living person (unless permission has been given to circulate the details)
- Correspondence or other documents which reveal personal details or pass comments on a named living person
- Staff personnel records
- Discipline records
- Job applications
- Interview notes
- Sick pay records

- Maternity pay records
- Tax and NI returns
- Wages and salary records
- Accident books and records
- Health/medical records

APPENDIX A

TIMETABLE FOR RETENTION/DESTRUCTION OF COUNCIL RECORDS

Records	Minimum Retention/Destruction	Means
Minute books	Indefinite (sent to BLARS)	N/A
Accounts/Annual Returns	Indefinite (sent to BLARS)	N/A
Investments	Indefinite	N/A
Title deeds, leases, agreements,	Indefinite	N/A
Financial Information:		
- bank statements	Last completed audit	Shred
- paying –in books	Last completed audit	Shred
- cheque book stubs	Last completed audit	Shred
- timesheets	Last completed audit	Shred
- fees and charges	6 years	Shred
- receipt books	6 years	Shred
- quotations and tenders	6 years	Shred
- paid invoices	6 years	Shred
- paid cheques	6 years	Shred
- VAT	6 years	Shred
- petty cash, postage books	6 years	Shred
Allotment register and plans	Indefinite	N/A
- individual tenant information	1 year after hiring ceased	Shred
Parish Hall		
- booking forms	6 years	Shred/E E*
- lettings diary	6 years	Shred
- invoices	6 years	Shred
Burial Grounds		
- Registers of burials/fees/ Memorials/certificates etc	Indefinite	N/A
- plans of cemeteries	Indefinite	N/A
- monthly inspections	5 years	N/A
- memorial inspections	5 years' worth of inspections	Shred
H&S/Risk Assessments	Indefinite	N/A
Play Area Inspections	Annual – 21 years / Weekly – 2 years	Bin
Insurance policies	21 years	Shred
Personnel Records	6 years	Shred
Planning applications	3 years after granting/ refusal or until project completed if controversial or major development	Bin (public info)
Structure Plans/Local Plans etc	Once updated/replaced	Bin
Information from other bodies (e.g., NALC, CBC etc)	Once no longer relevant or useful	Shred/E E
Correspondence – general	Once no longer relevant or useful	Shred/E E

* E E – electronically erased