

LONG STRATTON TOWN COUNCIL POLICY ON DOCUMENT RETENTION

1. Introduction

Information is an asset. The records of the Council are important sources of administrative, evidential, financial 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. However, they also need to be managed. They are only an asset if they provide important sources of administrative, evidential and historical information.

Records management is the systematic control, organisation, access to and protection of information from its creation, through its use, to its permanent retention or destruction.

There are 3 stages in the life cycle of information:

- a. It is created or received
- b. It is used
- c. It is disposed of or retained / archived.

The Importance of Record Management

If there is no agreed or recognised information handling system then ultimately chaos rules, time is lost and problems arise. A problem left, results in frustration and continued confusion. This policy is therefore aimed towards promotion of systematic handling of information. The overall aim of this policy is not only to detail the procedure in relation to the management of records but ensure compliance with legislation and ensure awareness in the council of procedures and compliance.

The benefits of good record management:

- ✓ Improves the conduct of business
- ✓ Helps to ensure compliance with statutory obligations
- ✓ Supports the decision-making process
- ✓ Protects the interests of the council
- ✓ Makes tangible savings in time

2. Legislative Background

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 ("the Act") provides the citizen, who could be anyone anywhere including companies, with the right to request information from the Town Council (TC). The only requirement is that TC must **HOLD** the information/record, which is the subject of the request. *'Hold' does not mean that the TC either initiated the information or that the information relates to TC's functions or operations. The information could be information that another organisation has initiated or produced, and forwarded to the TC for 'information purposes'.* The TC has adopted a Publication Scheme based on the model Scheme advertised by the Information Commissioner. The Scheme is updated annually. This identifies the information which is routinely or annually published by TC and which is also a requirement of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. If a category is

included in the Publication Scheme it must be published and any request for the disclosure of that information can simply be directed to the TC's publication source i.e. TC's website. Where an enquiry is made for information as a hard copy, this will be responded to by the Town Clerk with the appropriate charges being made.

There is also data which is personal, and the Data Protection Act of 1998 now updated by new data protection regulations (2018) details the principles which must be followed by organisations which process personal information. Personal information is information held about an individual which on its own or with other data can identify a living individual. Processing information means obtaining it, recording it, storing it, updating it and sharing it. Such information should not be held unnecessarily and should be destroyed securely. This information, if held, should be recorded in an Information Audit.

Information must often be retained for a considerable period of time and some indefinitely. There are statutory requirements relating to the retention of certain information or records, e.g. council minutes, personnel information for HMRC, financial information etc. (see Appendix 1) but the retention of other information is at the discretion of PC.(see Appendix 2). The destruction of some information has to be undertaken securely and destruction has to show conformity with this policy. The destruction of some paper copies should be complete i.e. incineration or shredding. Electronic copies must be completely deleted from any memory source or other media. It should be noted that the TC is not required to meet its disclosure commitments for information which is archived, out of date or otherwise inaccessible.

3. Definition of a record

A record means any documents or data which forms recorded evidence of TC's activities. i.e. hard copy letters, email messages or letters and other documents held on the computer or set as a hard copy. This extends beyond the Clerk to individual members of the Council. These records or information are created or received, used and maintained by TC in the conduct of its activities. A record is something which can be retained and remain useable for as long as it is needed, it can be something which is required to be retained or something which can be destroyed when no longer required. A record if held either as an electronic copy or as a paper copy should be held within a file. Files should be titled with an indication of their content and where confidential marked thus. Emails which contain important information should be added to the relevant folder. Personal file names and uncommon abbreviations should not be used. A title should clearly indicate a version's status e.g. final version. Out of date material should be destroyed or deleted.

There are several categories of information which have only short-term use and can be destroyed within 3 months:

- a. Items for information only – such as advertising leaflets and merchandise
- b. Items which support discussion and decision making but which can be easily found on websites – such items might have been referred to, for example, in a report the Clerk has made to Council

- c. Items requiring a decision, and once dealt with can be destroyed because they are available from an alternative source – for example, a planning application
- d. Items which support minute taking, report and letter writing – draft copies and notes
- e. Spare copies of items – agendas, minutes, reports, and so on.

Categories of information which have a longer term or permanent use (but also refer Appendix 1)

- a) Items which might have been included or are currently included on the publication scheme – such as a policy or grass cutting contract. Such a document can be destroyed once it has been amended, unless required for historical reasons. For example, it is worthwhile for a TC to keep grass cutting contracts to compare information. Classes of information described within the FOI Publication Scheme clearly state the time frame required for disclosure of that information
- b) Items which need to be retained for legislative purposes – such as the signed minutes. It is good practice to publish, as a minimum, current and previous council year. It might be practical for a council to retain its minutes for five years, in which case it would publish those minutes but when over five years old, the minute book might then be sent to the Norfolk Record Office (NRO) for safe keeping. If this is the case, then no disclosure is required.

4. Responsibility

The officer who has operational responsibility for retention and destruction is the Town Clerk. The Chairman supports the Clerk with this responsibility. However, all members of the Town Council have a responsibility to ensure that they handle correspondence and information whether received or sent as a hard copy or electronically in the correct manner and that they adhere to the council's policy relating to retention and disposal correctly and in a timely way. The Clerk also has responsibility for maintaining the FOI Publication Scheme and for responding to requests for information requested. The Clerk has a responsibility to respond to subject access requests, investigate data breaches and for the careful audit of information held under Data Protection regulations.

Members should be made aware of the Policy and any paper 'movement' so that if they themselves hold copies of this information they can destroy that information. The Town Clerk will advise a meeting of the Council which records are being destroyed and which records are being removed to the Norfolk Record Office prior to that taking place. This information is then detailed in the minutes.

5. Managing Emails

Emails are as much an official communication as a letter, memo or a fax and may be disclosed in response to a FOI request. The Clerk and Councillors must delete any personal data from letters and emails requested under FOI. Electronic messages can be legally binding and a council may be held liable for defamatory statements in emails. If an email contains important information it should be added to the relevant

paper or electronic file. Out of date emails should be deleted. Care should be taken with sending email trails.

6. Saving Electronic Information

If password protected the Chairman or Deputy Chairman should be provided with the password. A back up system should be operated with two external storage drives, the cloud and a hard drive of which should be held off site. Documents and folders should have file titles which are easily understood by everyone.

7. Retention of Hard Copy Documents

Records have been identified as described in 3. above and detailed in Appendix 1. These are records which should be kept or archived at the appropriate time. The Council office or the Clerk's home will still be the main location for stored records which should need to be retained past the operational requirement. The records stored in the Clerk's home will comprise a **single** copy of the retained record. The NRO is identified as the place where records will be archived. The Clerk should not keep records which have been identified as items to be retained at the NRO.

8. Destruction

Upon the information reaching the expiry date for retention, the Town Clerk shall ensure that **all** copies of that information are permanently destroyed. Papers which can be destroyed are detailed in Appendix 2. It is the responsibility of the Clerk to ensure proper disposal of the documents. Confidential means any record which contains personal information about a living individual.

9. Review of this Policy

This will be done within 2 years of the adoption of the Policy, or earlier if the legislation requires.

Retention of Documents by the Town Council

Document Status	Minimum retention period	Explanation
SR – Statutory Requirement AR – Audit Requirement BP – Best Practice Red – Must have Black – Good to have		
Minute Books (SR)	Indefinite	Archive (NRO) Electronic copy (Clerk) Website (2 years)
Receipt & Payment (or Income & Expenditure) Accounts Annual Returns, year-end bank reconciliation (SR/AR)	7 years	Hard Copy Archive (NRO) Electronic copy (Clerk) Website (2 years)
Receipt books of all kinds (SR)	7 years	VAT
Bank statements, including deposit/savings account, bonds, other investments certificates (AR)	7 years	Audit and management
Bank paying-in books (AR/SR)	7 years	Audit and management
Cheque book stubs (AR/SR)	7 years	Audit and management
Quotations and tenders (AR/SR)	12 years	Statute of Limitations
VAT Invoices / Records (AR/SR)	7 years	VAT
Petty cash, postage and telephone books (AR/SR)	7 years	Audit, management, tax, VAT
EU funded projects accounts (AR/SR)	13 Years	EU laws
Timesheets (AR), Payrol / (SR) Sickness / Holiday record (BP) Tax Codes (AR)	Last completed audit year 7 years	Audit, personnel Audit, HMRC Model document available

Written Statement of Particulars (SR)	During Employment Further 6 months	Model document available
Job Description (SR)	During Employment Further 6 months	Model document available
Completed Job Application forms (BP)	6 months advisory	Post interview queries
Document Status SR – Statutory Requirement AR – Audit Requirement BP – Best Practice Red – Must have Black– Good to have	Minimum retention period	Explanation
Wages books (SR/AR)	7 years	Superannuation
Insurance policies (AR) Employers Liability Certificates (SR/AR)	7 years 40 years	Audit and management
Title deeds, leases, agreements, contracts (SR/AR) Incl. Charter Deeds for a Market	Indefinite	Audit and management Historical
Members allowance register-where applicable (SR/AR)	7 years	HMRC Tax
For halls, centres and recreation grounds and other income such as grazing licences, moorings, car park receipts (AR) - Application to hire - Lettings diaries - Copies of bills to hirers - Record of tickets issued - Inspections incl. Professional Inspections - Contractors Public Liability Certificates	7 years 20 years 20 years	Audit and management VAT Insurance purposes (must be retained in the event of any public liability claims being made)

<p>For burial grounds (SR)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Register of fees collected - Register of burials - Register of purchased graves - Register/plan of grave spaces - Register of memorials - Applications for internment - Applications for right to erect memorials - Disposal certificates - Copy certificates of grant of exclusive right of burial - Rules and Regulations 	Indefinite	<p>Cemeteries Orders Cremations Regulations (to be retained by the Clerk)</p>
All policies and Procedure documents	Retain until reviews/renewed.	

Appendix 2 Destruction of Records

Record Name	Destruction date	Notes
Planning Applications	Following receipt of DC decision	Available on line from DC
Publicity and Advertising Leaflets	Following Parish Council meeting	
Notes taken by Clerk and members from meetings	After meeting following when minutes have been agreed	Routinely discarded material
Notes taken at a job interview	After 6 months	In case a candidate claims discrimination
Personnel and Confidential records	After 6 months following resignation	In case of application for references, employment issues
Electoral role	After revised role has been received	Confidential item CLr copies similarly
Items as detailed in the Policy (Item 3)	3 months after	

Record Name	Destruction date	Notes
Policy documents	Following review and adoption of a revised document	
Correspondence whether electronic or hard copy	Where matter is known to be resolved / concluded	Letters and e mails may be DP protected

Note:

Provision of lists of categories of records destroyed and the authority under which they were destroyed is a legal requirement under the Freedom of Information Act. These requirements do not however apply to material routinely discarded in the course of an administrative activity i.e. duplicates, rough drafts and so on.

Confidential items must be destroyed under secure conditions. **This includes all Data Protected items. Data Protected items are detailed in the Information Audit of the Council, including their date of destruction.**

Appendix 1 details retention and destruction of named documents

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