

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council

Information and Records Management Policy

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1. Introduction

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (WHBC) understands that its physical and digitally held records are an important public asset and a key resource in the effective operation of the Council. The Council receives and generates a large number of records which document and support its activities. These records are a vital source of information on the Council's actions, policies and decisions.

The purpose of records management within WHBC is to:

- Create and capture authentic and reliable records which provide evidence of the Council's activities and decisions and demonstrate its accountability.
- Secure, maintain and preserve those records for as long as they are required and to provide access to them as necessary to support the Council's operations and fulfil its obligations under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Data Protection Act 1998, Environmental Information Regulations 2004, Re-Use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2015 and the General Data Protection Regulations 2018
- Identify those records which will form a significant part of the historical record of the Council's activities and make provision for their permanent or long term preservation subject to any legal limitations on how long they must be kept
- Identify those records that are vital to the continuance of the Council's business and protect these against disasters.
- Destroy records that are no longer required, having regard to statutory record keeping requirements, thus promoting the efficient use of physical and electronic storage space.

2. Scope

For the purposes of this document, a record is defined as:

Recorded information, regardless of media or format, created or received in the course of individual or organisational activity, which provides reliable evidence of policy, actions or decisions. (National Archives)

All records created and received by WHBC are the property of WHBC and must not be used for any activity or purpose other than the Council's official business. This policy covers all records created and received by all departments of the Council, in any format. These will include:

- All computer generated correspondence, minutes of meetings, policies, strategies and other documents.
- Maps, plans, drawings and photographs, whether analogue or digital.
- Hand-written documents and pre-printed forms completed in manuscript.
- E-mail messages, spreadsheets and data from business systems.

3. Policy Statement

WHBC will manage its records to ensure that:

- Records are managed in accordance with current professional standards.
- Records are managed in accordance with current legislation.
- Records management practices are compatible with corporate policies.
- Records are accessible to officers to support them in making informed and proper judgements in the course of their work.
- Records are accessible to the public in accordance with the Council's Publication Scheme and in accordance with the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act.2000, Data Protection Act 1998,Environmental Information Regulations 2004, Re-Use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2015 and the General Data Protection Regulations 2018
- Records are kept securely and protected as far as possible from accidental or deliberate loss or destruction.by any means.
- Records are maintained in a secure environment with good conditions for their physical preservation and storage and which allows access as needed.

- Records are kept in accordance with the schedule for retention and disposal having regard to legal requirements and recognised good practice.
- All staff are aware of their obligations in respect of the filing, retention and disposal of records.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

All staff who create, receive or use records will have some responsibility for their management. Specific responsibilities are outlined below.

The Executive Board will be responsible for:

- Approval of a corporate framework for the management of records within the Council.
- Promotion of a culture and practice of good records management throughout the Council.
- Ensuring that sufficient resources and staffing are available for the maintenance of the records management function.
- Ensuring compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and other legislation appertaining to the management of, and access to, records.
- Promoting the value of historic records and ensuring their preservation as a corporate memory.

Heads of Service will be responsible for:

- Ensuring that the records management policy is implemented and complied with in the services under their control.
- Ensuring that staff have access to corporate training, development and support in records management matters.
- Ensuring that all records within their service area have an identified owner, responsible for their management whilst in use.
- Ensuring the adherence to proper procedures to ensure that no unauthorised destruction of records occurs, particularly any wilful destruction of records pertinent to a request made under the Freedom of Information Act and which would constitute a breach of section 77 of the Act.

- Ensuring that a satisfactory audit trail exists for records destroyed according to the document retention schedules.
- Ensuring that adequate arrangements are in place for the permanent storage of long term importance.
- Ensure that business recovery plans are in place to allow continuity of service in the event of a disaster.

All employees are responsible for:

- Adhering to corporate and service records management policies.
- Filing records according to a file structure appropriate to their subject and format to enable easy retrieval when required.
- Ensuring that all records, regardless of format are stored safely in suitable conditions.
- Ensuring that records are retained in accordance with the retention schedules and disposed of according to corporate and service policies when their retention period has expired.

Employees with specific responsibilities for records management will have these clearly set out in their job description and person specification.

5. Sharing information

Information generated within WHBC should be seen as a resource belonging to the whole Council and, unless there are valid reasons to the contrary, should as far as possible be available for sharing across all services. Information that is not appropriate for general access must be adequately protected or suitably redacted before it is shared.

All information that is available for sharing should be accessible to all sections of Welwyn Hatfield's community and all web based information emanating from WHBC will conform to the relevant and appropriate accessibility guidelines and standards

6. Creating and keeping records

Each service area must have a record keeping system in place (paper or electronic) that documents its activities and provides for quick and easy retrieval of information and records. It must also take into account the legal and regulatory environment specific to its own area of work. The system should include:

- Records arranged and indexed in such a way that they can be retrieved quickly and efficiently.
- Procedures for keeping the system updated
- The ability to cross reference paper and electronic records
- Documentation on the system and its use.
- Procedures and guidelines for referencing, titling, version control and security marking

7. Maintaining Records

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 adequate and accessible storage accommodation (physical and electronic) is provided for records
- Monitoring the movement and location of records so they can be retrieved and provide an audit trail
- Controlling access to information
- Identifying vital records and applying the appropriate protection, including a business recovery plan
- Ensuring (as far as practicable) that non-current records are transferred in a controlled manner to a separate storage area

8. Retention and Disposal of Records

It is important that disposal of records happens as part of a managed process and is clearly and adequately documented. Services must have in place clearly defined arrangements for the appraisal and selection of records for disposal, and for documenting this work. The system should ensure that:

- Records are reviewed, disposed of or transferred in accordance with the Council's policy, which is based on the retention guidelines for Local Authorities (produced by the Records Management Society of Great Britain), specific service requirement and any corporate procedures for destroying confidential material of electronic media.
- Documentation of any disposal or transfer of records is completed and retained
- Records subject to a past Freedom of Information Act request are not destroyed
- Records for permanent preservation are transferred to Hertfordshire Archives (the place of deposit for public records in Hertfordshire) as soon as possible
- An intended disposal /review date is captured when electronic records are created

9. Security

Electronic information held by WHBC will be held in a secure way. The Council's Information Security Policy sets out the way in which this will be managed and monitored by the Council.

10. Access

Because WHBC needs to ensure that decisions regarding access to records are documented so that they are consistent, and can be explained and referred to, Heads of Service must ensure that:

- All employees are aware of the arrangements for allowing access to certain types of information
- Procedures are in place to document decisions concerning access
- Councillors are aware of access, security, data protection and freedom of information issues and abide by this policy at all times.

11. Reviewing the Policy

This policy will be reviewed every two years subject to any changes in legislation. In addition WHBC will carry out regular Information Audits so that the uses of information are carefully monitored.

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Appendix A

Standards and Legislation

Archive and record keeping¹

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
Environmental Information Regulations	2004
Protection of Freedoms Act	2012
Re-Use of Public Sector Information Regulations	2015
General Data Protection Regulations	2018

Records Management Standards and Guidelines

- British standards - BSI 150 15489 – 1 Information & Documentation. Records management
- Public Record Office standards for the management of public records Retention Guidelines for Local Authorities by the Local Government Group of the Records Management Society of Great Britain.

Internal Council Documents

- Internet Protocol
- Information Security Policy and User Guide
- Freedom of Information Policy
- Environmental Information Regulations Policy

¹ There may be other record keeping legislation specific to particular area of work, which should also be taken into account.