



May 2013

GUIDANCE ON RETAINING AND PRESERVING COUNCIL DOCUMENTS

Records are an essential part of your council's business, and you are required by law to keep certain records, as well as to comply with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Records need to be cared for so they can be accessed as needed and do not deteriorate with time.

A small proportion of your records merit permanent preservation as archives because of the unique evidence they contain about your community. These guidelines have been produced to offer advice on what to keep, for how long and finally what to do when they are no longer needed for business purposes.

Councils need to be proactive in reviewing their records, Worcestershire Record Office suggests that this should be done every ten years or so and has compiled the following tips on keeping your records safe:

- **Have a policy and procedures for your records which identifies the records you create, what form they are kept in, who needs access and how long they should be kept**
- **Consider the physical conditions in which you create and store records**

Paper records are vulnerable to damage particularly from damp or poor storage conditions and careless handling. To counter these problems:

- Store your records in a clean, dry environment with reasonable ventilation.
- Keep them out of direct sunlight.
- Avoid the use of metal clips (which can rust), rubber bands and adhesive tape (which perish or dry out) or plastic bags (which are acidic and will stop ventilation and hasten the decay of paper).
- When a record is known to be for permanent preservation (e.g. minutes) try to use the best quality paper and ink that you can (acid free paper and avoid biro ink). Unfortunately, much recycled paper is very acidic, however there are good reasons to use it for items not to be permanently preserved.



- Use sturdy storage boxes.
- Keep the store locked.
- List the records so they can be found without damaging rummaging.
- Don't allow items to be 'borrowed' and separated from the main body of the records.

Nowadays electronic storage is becoming the norm for many record series and this brings its own problems. Records in this form are very vulnerable to sudden loss, corruption or damage.

- Keep them secure and protect passwords.
- Don't rely purely on storage on disk for prime records.
- Back up vital records on a server and check them regularly to ensure they can still be opened.
- Ensure you migrate data when you change systems so older records are still accessible.
- Keep metadata (e.g. when created, by whom, format etc.) with the records to ensure they can be put in context.
- Keep important records as .pdf files rather than in 'Word'.

Retention Guidance:

The following schedule attempts to list the main types of parish and town council records and to give recommendations for their retention and disposal.

Where complete and detailed series of minute books and general accounts have survived there should be less need to preserve other records, but individual clerks will be best placed to judge which documents relate to significant or contentious local issues about which more detailed information needs to be preserved.

Remember, Worcestershire Record Office is always happy to discuss and advise on issues relating to the storage or disposal of your records. Any archives deposited in the Record Office remain the property of your council. You will receive an initial receipt for any deposit and in due course a more detailed list will be prepared. If any item needs to be temporarily withdrawn back into your custody appropriate arrangements can be made.

WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

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ARCHIVING AND RETENTION OF DOCUMENTS



The following list is an annex to NALC Legal Topic Note 40, dated September 2010.

RETENTION OF DOCUMENTS REQUIRED FOR THE AUDIT OF PARISH COUNCILS

DOCUMENT	MINIMUM RETENTION PERIOD	REASON
▪ Minute books	Indefinite	Archive
▪ Scales of fees and charges	6 years	Management
▪ Receipt and payment account(s)	Indefinite	Archive
▪ Receipt books of all kinds	6 years	VAT
▪ Bank statements, including deposit/savings accounts	Last completed audit year	Audit
▪ Bank paying-in books	Last completed audit year	Audit
▪ Cheque book stubs	Last completed audit year	Audit
▪ Financial records	3 years	Audit
▪ Quotations and tenders	6 years	Limitation Act 1980 (as amended)
▪ Paid invoices	6 years	VAT
▪ Paid cheques	6 years	Limitation Act 1980 (as amended)
▪ VAT records	6 years	VAT

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▪ Petty cash, postage and telephone books	6 years	Tax, VAT, Limitation Act 1980 (as amended)
▪ Timesheets	Last completed audit year	Audit
▪ Wages books	12 years	Superannuation
▪ Insurance policies	While valid	Management
▪ Certificates for Insurance against liability for employees	40 years from date on which insurance commenced or was renewed	The Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Regulations 1998 (SI. 2753), Management.
▪ Investments	Indefinite	Audit, Management
▪ Title deeds, leases, agreements, contracts	Indefinite	Audit, Management
▪ Members allowances register	6 years	Tax, Limitation Act 1980 (as amended)

For Halls, Centre, Recreation Grounds		
▪ application to hire ▪ lettings diaries ▪ copies of bills to hires ▪ record of tickets issued	6 years	VAT
For Allotments		
▪ register and plans	Indefinite	Audit, Management
For Burial Grounds		
▪ register of fees collected ▪ register of burials ▪ register of purchased graves ▪ register/plan of grave spaces ▪ register of memorials ▪ applications for interment	Indefinite	Archives, Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977 (SI. 204)

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<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ applications for right to erect memorials▪ disposal certificates▪ copy certificates of grant of exclusive right of burial		
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Worcestershire County Council will signpost parish or town councils to information and advice on record-keeping and specialist storage facilities at Worcestershire Archives. The Record office has a commitment under the 1972 Act to care for the prime records of parish councils. This is free of charge. Record Office/Worcestershire Archives Tel: 01905 766351 or email: Recordoffice@worcestershire.gov.uk

<http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/cms/community-and-living/records/getting-involved/depositors/review-and-appraisal-of-records.aspx>