Records Management Policy

Introduction

The Council creates and receives records in order to deliver services, take decisions, demonstrate accountability and meet its legal obligations. Records may be held on paper or electronically and include documents, emails, messages, photographs, audio or video recordings and information held within business systems.

Effective records management ensures that information is accurate, accessible and secure for as long as it is required, while avoiding the unnecessary retention of information. Records must therefore be managed consistently throughout their lifecycle, from creation or receipt through active use, storage, review and eventual disposal or transfer to archive.

Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to provide a corporate framework for the creation, management, storage, retrieval and disposal of Council records. It should be read alongside the Council's Records Retention Policy and applicable retention schedules, which determine how long particular classes of record should normally be retained.

Scope

This Policy applies to all Council records, regardless of format or location, created or received by Members, Officers, contractors or others acting on the Council's behalf in connection with Council business. It applies to records held in corporate systems, shared drives, email, collaboration systems, portable media and paper files.

Records management principles

Council records should be:

- created where necessary to provide an adequate and reliable record of Council business, decisions and transactions;
- accurate, complete and capable of being understood in context;
- stored in an appropriate Council system so that they can be located and retrieved when required;
- protected against unauthorised access, alteration, loss or destruction, with access limited where appropriate;
- managed so that unnecessary duplicate and working copies are not retained indefinitely; and
- retained for no longer than necessary, unless continued retention is required by law, for operational need, because of a dispute or investigation, or for historical value.

Creating and filing records

Officers should ensure that significant decisions, advice, approvals, transactions and other material Council business are appropriately recorded. Records should be filed promptly in the relevant corporate or service system and should be named or classified sufficiently clearly to enable them to be identified and retrieved.

Where several versions of a document exist, the final or authoritative version should be identifiable. Working drafts and duplicate copies should be removed when they cease to have a continuing business, evidential or legal purpose.

Email and electronic communications

Email and other electronic communications are records where their content provides evidence of Council business. Important communications should not be retained solely in an individual mailbox or personal workspace where the record properly belongs within a corporate or service filing system. Routine, transitory and duplicate communications should be deleted when no longer required, in accordance with the Records Retention Policy.

Access, security and information rights

Records must be handled in accordance with their sensitivity and the Council's information governance and security requirements. Personal data must be processed in accordance with data protection legislation. Records must also be capable of retrieval where required for the purposes of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Environmental Information Regulations 2004, data protection rights, audit, investigation or legal proceedings.

Retention, disposal and legal holds

Records must be retained and disposed of in accordance with the Council's Records Retention Policy and applicable retention schedules. Disposal must be secure and, where required by that Policy, appropriately recorded.

Normal disposal must be suspended where a record is relevant to an information request, complaint, audit, investigation, dispute or actual or reasonably anticipated legal proceedings. Relevant records must be preserved until the matter, including any review or appeal, has been concluded and appropriate advice has been obtained where necessary.

Archives

Records of enduring historical or archival value should be considered for transfer to the appropriate archive service rather than destruction. Any transfer must be appropriately documented.

Responsibilities

All Officers are responsible for managing the records they create and receive in accordance with this Policy. Corporate Directors are responsible for ensuring that appropriate records management arrangements operate within their Services and that staff understand their responsibilities. Where responsibility is delegated, the Officer concerned should have sufficient knowledge of the Service and this Policy to carry out the function properly.

Managers should ensure that records remain accessible and appropriately managed when staff change roles or leave the Council and that business records are not left solely within personal filing locations or mailboxes.

Review

This Policy should be reviewed after any significant legislative, regulatory, technological or organisational change.

Contact

Martin Goodman

Head of Legal & Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) (Data Protection Officer)

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