



Bracknell Forest Borough Council

Records Management Policy

BRACKNELL FOREST COUNCIL RECORDS MANAGEMENT POLICY

Aim of the Policy

To provide an integrated records and information management system, to ensure rapid and consistent access to records throughout the Council to enable it to comply with Section 46 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

What is Records Management?

The planning, control, organisation and training activities relating to the creation, distribution, utilisation, storage, retrieval, maintenance, protection, preservation and final disposal of all types of records required for the conduct of Bracknell Forest Borough Council's business.

What is a record?

Any paper, book, file, photograph, microfilm, map, drawing, chart, magnetic tape, disk electronic record or printout that has been generated or received by Bracknell Forest Borough Council or has been used by the Council as evidence or because of the information it contained.

Why does Bracknell Forest Borough Council need a Records Management Policy?

- To ensure rapid and consistent access to records through a system which is independent of the memories of staff.
- To ensure staff have access to accurate and up to date information wherever and whenever they require it.
- To improve efficiency in public service.
- To save staff time and reduce environmental waste.
- To reduce storage space and costs.
- To ensure that records of potential historical value are passed to Berkshire Records Office.
- To meet the Lord Chancellors Code of Practice on the Management of Records under Section 46 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Objectives of a Record Management Policy

1. That every record should have an identified owner who is responsible for the management and classification of that record.
2. That records should be classified to ensure accurate and rapid retrieval.
3. That records should be shared, where appropriate, to minimise duplication and a master copy to be retained by the owner.
4. That each Directorate should comply with the Corporate Retention and Destruction Schedule.
5. That records should be stored and managed in the most efficient and cost effective manner either on site or off site at Reading Records Management Centre.
6. That confidential or sensitive records are stored and accessed appropriately and in accordance with the principles of the Data Protection Act.
7. That departmental officers should be identified to give appropriate coverage to each service/department to assist with compliance.

8. That records should be disposed of in accordance with the Corporate Retention and Destruction schedule or sent to archives as soon as is appropriate
9. That monitoring and management requirements are met

The Policy

1. That every record should have an identified owner who is responsible for the management and classification of that record

1.1 Ownership

Every record has an owner who is responsible for categorising, classifying and indexing the record when it is created using the appropriate classification scheme. However, during the life span of the record, the owner may change.

For records (e.g. correspondence) received from outside the Council ownership for records management purposes passes to the member of staff receiving the record to action.

1.2 Responsibilities

The owner of the record is responsible for making sure the correct retention schedule for the record is applied. Retention times may be subject to legislation. Guidance on retention times can be found in the Council's Retention and Destruction Schedule. Departmental Records Officers will also advise on appropriate retention times.

The owner should ensure that any records that may potentially be useful for historical research are referred to the Berkshire Records Centre.

Owners and custodians have differing responsibilities and powers. An owner has the right to amend, destroy and archive a record. The custodian holds the records for the owner and carries out his/her instructions concerning the record.

The owner/custodian of a record is responsible for maintaining the master copy. Other staff can then destroy their copies without worrying that the information is lost. The owner will be responsible for the location of the record and its storage in the appropriate format.

If there is any significant/important change to the master copy, the owner should inform those individuals who are likely to be affected.

2 That records should be classified to ensure accurate and rapid retrieval and systems introduced to assist retrieval

All documents will need to be classified in order to ensure rapid and consistent access by a system which is independent of the memories of employees.

Classification will also provide a logical basis for deciding retention periods.

Classification is usually done according to the function of which the records are a part, e.g. finance, personnel, health & safety etc.

These function categories can then be sub divided into specific series of records relating to activities, e.g., personnel records - recruitment, advertisements, interview records.

Each Directorate will need to compile its own list of categories tailored to its specific record types.

3 That records (except for personal information) should be shared to minimise duplication and a master copy retained by the owner.

The ideal should be one master copy for each record which must be identifiable. It will be necessary to maintain an audit trail of amendments in order to control the number of versions and to alert people to alterations.

It is important that the master copy of the record is kept up to date and amendments notified to those likely to be affected.

Records needs to be protected so that only the owner of the record can edit.

Records should be made available to staff requiring access to them but they may not need to keep a separate copy. Minimise the number of copies held by arranging for relevant links to be included on BFNet and publishing to Groupwise libraries

If the master copy is known to be retained, other copies can be destroyed when their operational life is ended.

4 That each Directorate should comply with the Corporate Retention and Destruction Schedule.

4.1 Purpose of Retention Schedule

The retention schedule specifies the length of time records should be kept, and where and how they should be kept.

The schedule exists in order to:

- Provide knowledge of what exists for everyone in the Council, thus giving the ability to respond quickly and accurately to requests for information
- Ensure that records are kept as long as they are needed to meet legal, financial and organisational requirements.
- Encourage timely movement of material from expensive office space to efficient storage areas or appropriate destruction.
- Identify records of historical value or interest to ensure that they are not accidentally destroyed and will be transferred to Berkshire Records Office.

5 That records should be stored in the most efficient and cost effective manner that will meet the requirements to access them, either in electronic or hard copy form, with the appropriate level of security either on site or off site at Reading Records Management Centre.

5.1 Storage

The Corporate Document Retention & Destruction Schedule identifies classes of records for retention and specifies where they are stored and for how long. A set disposal or transfer date should be marked on the record, or a date when its retention will be reviewed.

The type of storage will depend on:

- The format of the record - and whether conversion to an alternative format would be cost effective.
- Whether the record is of long term interest and may potentially be transferred to Berkshire Records Office
- Legal requirements - whether the record would be legally admissible if retained in electronic or photographic format
- The potential for technological obsolescence and whether the technology for accessing the record will be available within its potential lifespan.

Custodian of electronic stores of documents should ensure that machine readable documents remain accessible and readable to the owners and others who need to use the document.

5.2 Electronic records

When software is upgraded it is important to ensure that documents can still be read with the new software.

It is important that when software or hardware becomes obsolete the future availability of the record should be planned. Backfile conversion to the current technology should be considered, but it may be too costly and onerous. Reverting to simpler technology, such as microfiche or paper may be necessary.

The same retention periods and security consideration should apply to computerised or other non paper records as would apply to paper ones.

Effectively managing electronic records will require: maintaining structured folders which logically grouped information together, security arrangements to ensure that the integrity of the records can be maintained, i.e. operating password systems so that unauthorised users cannot access material, protection from loss or destruction etc. It should also be possible to cross reference electronic records to the corresponding paper records.

6 That confidential or sensitive records are stored and accessed appropriately.

All records should be tagged as part of the classification:

Public Domain would be used typically for all records which could justifiably be viewed by any member of staff or member of the public. Examples would include public notices or leaflets, finalised committee minutes, policies.

Internal would be used for all records which required a restricted circulation, typically within a department but including all staff members who would need to process or handle the record and its contents. Examples would include records relating to internal issues, e.g. procedure manuals or interaction with members of the public.

Confidential would be used for all records which required minimal circulation and only to those who had a need to know.

All persons who have contact with the record have a duty to protect the record in a manner appropriate to its security tagging. This includes IT staff or system administrators who may have technical access to the records but who would not normally be included on a distribution list.

7 That departmental officers should be identified to give appropriate coverage to each service/department to assist in compliance with the retention policy and ensure new and existing staff are trained.

7.1 Responsibilities

To act as a records management contact for their directorate, promoting good records management practice and providing information about their departmental records.

To administer and monitor the appropriate disposal of the Directorate's records or their transfer to archives.

To be responsible for all current and semi current storage of electronic records within their directorate and compliance with the Corporate Records Retention & Destruction Schedule.

8 That records should be disposed of in accordance with an agreed procedure and in accordance with the Corporate Records Retention & Destruction Schedule, or sent to archives as soon as is appropriate

8.1 Transfer to Archives

The departmental records officers should devise a method for regular transfer of historical material to Berkshire Records Centre.

Questions to consider:

- Does the record provide information on a major change in the directorate's history?
- Does it relate to a major project undertaken?
- Does it reflect a political trend?
- Does it show the procedure and method of decision making and working?
- Does it relate to a controversial project or period (a political "hot potato")?
- Does it contain information only available within Bracknell Forest Borough Council?

8.2 Disposal

Each Directorate should set up a procedure for disposal of records, including confidential destruction. This should be administered and monitored by the departmental records management officer.

Each department should maintain a management audit trail for destruction of records

9 That monitoring and management requirements are met

There needs to be a management trail so that management can assure itself that proper practices are being followed and that all transactions can be accounted for and justified. Directors are responsible for ensuring that records are managed in accordance with Departmental Guidelines on Records Management .