

**Harlow District Council**

**Freedom of Information Act 2000  
Records Management Policy**

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## 1. Introduction

Harlow District Council recognises that its records are an important public asset and that they are a key resource to its effective operation and to its accountability. Like any asset, they require careful management and this policy sets out the Council's responsibilities and activities in regard to the management of its records. It provides the framework for specific departmental/service guidance and detailed operating procedures.

## 2. Scope

This policy aims to ensure that records are managed effectively throughout the organisation in accordance with professional principles and specified legislation and guidelines (see appendix 1). It applies to all the records of Harlow District Council. A record is any recorded information regardless of medium (including paper, microform, electronic, audio-visual and record copies of publications), which is created, collected, processed, used, stored and / or disposed of by Harlow District Council's employees, as well as those acting as its agents in the course of a District Council activity. [1]

It applies to all employees of Harlow District Council.

## 3. Policy Statement

The aim of the policy is to define a framework for managing the Council's records to ensure that the Council:

- Creates and captures authentic and reliable records to demonstrate evidence, accountability and information about its decisions and activities.
- Facilitates auditing and protects the Council's legal and other rights.
- Maintains records securely and preserves access to them.
- Disposes appropriately of records that are no longer required.
- Protects vital records, which it needs in order to function effectively.
- Maintains records to meet the Council's business needs.
- Addresses the needs of the Council's stakeholders, including the public and employees.
- Conforms to any legal and statutory requirements relating to records-keeping.
- Complies with Government directives.

## 4. Identification of roles and responsibilities

- The Chief Executive of Harlow District Council is responsible for approving a framework for managing and overseeing its duties in relation to records management as set out in this policy.
- The Head of Governance and the Corporate Information Manager will provide a link between Data Protection, Freedom of Information, Records Management practices, coordinating and maintaining the Retention Schedule and publication scheme.

- Strategic Directors/Heads of Services are responsible for the management of their records, in accordance with this policy and ensuring that all staff are aware of record keeping issues.
- All Harlow District Council employees will be responsible for creating and maintaining records in relation to their work that are authentic and reliable.

## **5. Training and Awareness**

Since all Harlow District Council employees are involved in creating, maintaining and using records, it is vital that everyone understands their record management responsibilities as set out in this policy. Heads of Services will ensure that staff responsible for managing records are appropriately trained or experienced and that all staff understand the need for records management.

A training programme has been established to ensure that all staff are aware of their obligations around Data Protection, Freedom of Information and Records Management.

## **6. Records Creation and Record Keeping**

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

- Records arranged and indexed in such a way that they can be retrieved quickly and efficiently.
- Records that are linked with the Council's metadata framework and Freedom of Information Scheme.
- Procedures and guidelines for referencing, titling, indexing and version control and security marking.
- Procedures for keeping the system updated.
- The ability to cross reference electronic and paper records.
- Documentation of this system and guidelines on how to use it.

## **7. Record Maintenance**

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 that adequate storage accommodation is provided for the records.
- Monitoring the movement and location of records so that they can be easily retrieved and provide an audit trail.
- Controlling access to the information.
- Identifying vital records and applying the appropriate protection, including a business recovery plan.
- Ensuring non-current records are transferred in a controlled manner to archive rather than stored in offices.

## **8. Records Retention and Disposal**

With increasing public access to our records, it is important that disposal of records happens as part of a managed process and that it is 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:

- The appropriate records are reviewed and disposed of / transferred to archive each year in accordance with Harlow District Council's Retention/Disposal Guidelines and Harlow District Council's procedures for destroying confidential material and magnetic media.
- Documentation of the disposal/transfer of records is completed and retained.
- Records selected for permanent preservation are transferred to archive as soon as possible.
- An intended review/disposal date must be created when creating electronic records.
- Records subject to a Freedom of Information request are not destroyed.

## **9. Access**

Harlow District Council needs to ensure that decisions regarding access to the records are documented so that they are consistent and can be explained and referred to. Heads of Services must ensure that:

- All staff are aware of the arrangements for allowing access to certain types of information.
- Procedures are in place to document decisions concerning access.

## **10. Performance Measurement**

The Head of Governance and Corporate Information Manager will report annually to the Chief Executive. Performance Indicators will include:

- Local performance indicators.
- Response time in providing information from the records or retrieving the records themselves.
- Selective audit of departmental / service records.
- User satisfaction percentages.

## **11. Review of Policy**

This policy will be reviewed in April 2011.

## Appendix 1

### Standards and Legislation

Archive and Record Keeping legislation [2]

- Local Government Act 1972
- Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Environmental Information Regulations 2004

### Records Management Standards and guidelines

- British Standards

BS 4783	Storage, transportation and maintenance of media for use in data processing and information storage
BS 7799	Code of practice for information security management
BS ISO 15489	Information and Documentation - Records Management
BSI DISC PD 0008	Code of practice for legal admissibility and evidential weight of information stored on electronic document management
BSI DISC PD0010	Principles of good practice for information management
BSI DISC PD0012	Guide to the practical implications of the Data Protection Act 1998

- Public Records Office Standards for the management of public records
- Retention Guidelines for Local Authorities produced by the Local Government Group of the Records Management Society of Great Britain

[1] Not all documentary materials we use are records. For example, reference material, stocks of publications and documents retained for distribution, extra copies made for convenience or reference and personal papers are not records in the terms of this policy.

[2] There will be other record-keeping legislation specific to certain areas of work, which should also be taken into account.