

2023

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DOCUMENT RETENTION POLICY

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Retention of Documents and Records

1. Information about local council documentation is contained in Chapter 11 of *Local Council Administration* by Charles Arnold Baker (10th edn), a copy of which is held in the parish council's office. This Note, derived from NALC guidance, is intended to update and supplement that information, with particular reference to the length of time the council should retain documents.

Financial returns and accounts

2. Section 11.14 on page 104 of *Local Council Administration* (10th edn) requires clarification. Deddington Parish Council is required to make annual financial returns pursuant to regulations issued under reg 12 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 rather than pursuant to s.168 Local Government Act 1972.

Retention of documents

3. Attached is an **Annexe** indicating the appropriate minimum retention periods for audit and other reasons. There is a clear need to retain documentation for audit purposes, staff management, tax liabilities, and the eventuality of legal disputes and legal proceedings (explained in paragraphs 7-11 below and in the attached **Annexe**). Subject to this, papers and records may usually be safely destroyed if they are no longer of use or relevant. If in doubt, document(s) should be retained until proper advice has been received.
4. Other documents not mentioned in the **Annexe** and not covered in Chapter 11 of *Local Council Administration* may be treated as follows:

Planning papers

- a. Where planning permission is granted, the planning application, any plans and the decision letter should normally be retained until the development has been completed so that, if required, the council can check that the development proceeds in accordance with the terms and conditions of the permission. Where planning permission is granted on appeal, a copy of the appeal decision should also be retained likewise. It may sometimes be sensible to retain an appeal decision indefinitely because of wider implications (e.g., the decision may set a precedent for other developments in the locality).
- b. Where planning permission is refused, the papers should be retained until the period within which an appeal can be made has expired. If an appeal is made, and dismissed, the decision letter may,

as in (a) above, be worth retaining against further applications relating to the same site.

- c. Copies of Structure Plans, Local Plans and similar documents should be retained as long as they are in force.

Insurance policies

All insurance policies should be kept for as long as it is possible for a claim to be made under them. Irrespective of how long policies and correspondence are retained, the recommendation is that councils ensure that they keep a permanent record of insurance company names and policy numbers for all insured risks. Article 4 of the Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Regulations 1998 (SI. 2753) requires local councils, as employers, to retain certificates of insurance against liability for injury or disease to their employees arising out of their employment (this insurance is mandatory pursuant to the Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969) for a period of 40 years from the date on which the insurance is commenced or renewed.

Information from other bodies

Such information should be retained for as long as it is useful and relevant.

Magazines and Journals

A council may want to keep its own publications (e.g. newsletters, parish plans). The Legal Deposit Libraries Act 2003 (the 2003 Act) requires a local council that has published works in print (this includes a pamphlet, magazine or newspaper, a map, plan, chart or table), to deliver, at its own expense, a copy of them to the British Library Board (which manages and controls the British Library). The British Library holds books, periodicals, manuscripts and other publications for reference, study and information. Printed works as defined by the 2003 Act published by a local council therefore constitute materials which the British Library holds.

Correspondence

If related to audit matters, correspondence should be kept for the appropriate period specified in the **Annexe**. In planning matters, correspondence should be retained for the same period as suggested for other planning papers. For other correspondence (unless relating to staff), no firm guidelines can be laid down (but see paragraphs 7–11 below).

Documentation relating to staff

This should be kept securely and in accordance with the eight data protection principles contained in the Data Protection Act 1998. The principles provide that personal data in relation to staff should not be kept for longer than is necessary for the purpose it was held. However even after an employment relationship has ended, a council may need retain and access staff records for former staff for the purpose of giving references, payment of tax, national insurance contributions and pensions, and in respect of any related legal claims made against the council. The time limits within which a claim (and any appeal) may be lodged against an employer at an employment tribunal are set out in the legislation that contains the employment right in question or failing that by reference to the Limitation Act 1980 (as amended) considered in paragraph 7 below. The time for lodging a claim at an employment tribunal is usually measured from the date that the employment relationship ended or the date of the act complained of. Subject to where the Limitation Act 1980 applies, the most common time limit for lodging a claim at an employment tribunal is 3 months (for example a claim for unfair dismissal must, by virtue of s.111 of the Employment Rights Act 1996, be lodged at an employment tribunal within 3 months of the date of the termination of the employment contract) although 6 months applies in redundancy and equal pay claims.

Local/historical information

The Local Government (Records) Act 1962 provides that parish councils may acquire records of local interest and accept gifts or records of general and local interest in order to promote the use of such records (defined as materials in written or other form setting out facts or events or otherwise recording information).

Arrangements for the deposit, storage and management of documents

5. In accordance with s. 227 of the Local Government Act 1972 (the 1972 Act, the relevant principal authority must provide, if requested by the parish council, proper depositories for all the specified papers (defined as public books, writings, council papers and all documents directed by law to be kept) belonging to the parish for which there is no other provision. Documents of local and or historical importance, if not retained and stored by a local council, with or without reliance on the provisions of s.227 of 1972 Act, should be offered first to the county record office if there is one. The county archivist there will always be willing to advise on which records should be permanently preserved.
6. Local councils are advised to implement system(s) of paper and electronic records management (including those records retained for audit purposes reviewed annually by a council's internal auditor). Such systems should ensure the storage and security of, access to and disposal of both paper and electronic records. It is essential that any such system(s) (and policies) relating to record management

include an annual review of the records themselves and also the effectiveness of such systems(s) (and policies).

Retention of documents for legal purposes

7. Most legal proceedings are governed by the Limitation Act 1980 (as amended). The 1980 Act provides that legal claims may not be commenced after a specified period. The specified period varies, depending on the type of claim in question. The table below sets out the limitation periods for the different categories of claim. The reference to 'category' in the table refers to claims brought in respect of that category.

Category	Limitation Period
Negligence (and other 'Torts')	6 years
Defamation	1 year
Contract	6 years
Leases	12 years
Sums recoverable by statute	6 years
Personal Injury	3 years
To Recover Land	12 years
Rent	6 years
Breach of Trust	None

8. As there is no limitation period in respect of trusts, councils are advised that they should never destroy trust deeds and schemes and other similar documentation.
9. For the sake of completeness, it should be noted that some limitation periods can be extended. Examples include:
- where individuals first become aware of damage caused at a later date (e.g. in the case of personal injury);
 - where damage is latent (e.g. to a building); or
 - where a person suffers from a mental incapacity;
 - where there has been a mistake or where one party has defrauded another or concealed facts.
10. In such circumstances the council will need to weigh (i) the costs of storing relevant documents and (ii) the risks of:
- claims being made;

- the value of the claims; and
- the inability to defend any claims made should relevant documentation be destroyed.

11. In cases of doubt it is prudent to retain documents for longer periods than specified, particularly as these can be stored on behalf of the council as set out in 5 above. Finally, insurance policies should be reviewed to ensure compliance with any terms specified in respect of the retention of documents and information.

Data Protection and Freedom of Information Considerations

12. In November 2002, the Lord Chancellor issued a Code of Practice pursuant to section 46 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The Code, which is called the 'Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the Management of Records' applies to public authorities and also bodies which are subject to the Public Records Act 1958. Although local councils are not subject to the 1958 Act, the Code of Practice is a useful source of reference for records management.

13. Further information in respect of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 is set out in LTN 37 (Freedom of Information) and in respect of the Data Protection Act 1998 in LTN 38 (Data Protection).

ANNEXE

RETENTION OF DOCUMENTS REQUIRED FOR THE AUDIT OF PARISH COUNCILS

DOCUMENT	MINIMUM RETENTION PERIOD	REASON
▪ Minute books	Indefinite	Archive
▪ Scales of fees and charges	5 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
▪ 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
▪ 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)

DOCUMENT	MINIMUM RETENTION	REASON
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	PERIOD	
For Allotments		
▪ register and plans	Indefinite	Audit, Management
For Burial Grounds		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ register of fees collected ▪ register of burials ▪ register of purchased graves ▪ register/plan of grave spaces ▪ register of memorials ▪ applications for interment ▪ applications for right to erect memorials ▪ disposal certificates ▪ copy certificates of grant of exclusive right of burial 	Indefinite	Archives, Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977 (Sl. 204)