

PARISH COUNCIL RECORDS  
Document Management

(Retention and disposal of records)

Over view

With Parish Councils being sent more information both electronically and some still on paper, there is an ongoing difficult situation as to what, when and how documents should be kept and just as importantly destroyed.

Destroying documents of any kind, whether minutes, general correspondence, planning applications, accounts, maps and the whole myriad of information that comes across a clerks desk should always be destroyed in a manner that it safe.

However, what is meant by safe? This would depend on what it is you are about throw out or shred.

Obviously paper items can be placed in recycle bins, whether this is in your office for collection at a later date or taken to a local recycling centre. It should also be safe for the environment.

Additionally care should be taken to ensure that any paper documents being ‘thrown away’ do not have other people’s personal data on them. These documents should be shredded before disposal. The Data Protection Act 1998 states that if you hold information on anyone, it’s disposal should be timely and appropriate.

Electronic information is fairly easy to get rid of as you can just press the ‘delete’ button, it should be noted that although deleted from your computer or laptop, documents may still be on you backup systems and therefore these must be removed as well. In addition, be aware there are programmes that are able to ‘recover’ deleted documents.

Some of us are lucky to have the minute books dating back to 1894, and believe they are of unique importance, but then, so are the minutes of today – although they do not look so good on a screen if you compare them to the sometimes rather beautiful copper plate writing of yesteryear.

Under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2001 various documents are required to be available to both members of the public and other groups and organisations. There is even a Publication Scheme to aid us in keeping track of our records and letting the world at large know what we have.

According to the FOI if you state that a document or some information is not available, and then it is found to have been on a councillor’s computer because s/he thought it might be worth keeping and you have destroyed the one on the office computer, this could cause problems.

Therefore, by having a retention schedule, all officer’s, councillors and other staff – if you have them – know exactly what is required to be kept and when to throw things away.

First Steps.

But, before you go away and start getting rid of all that stuff in the garage, attic or old filing cabinet just take some time to think about what it is you are getting rid of and why.

First ascertain the following:

- Is the information available else-where, this may depend on where it originated from in the first place? (District and County Councils have large archive areas and may be able to access the information of others as well)
- Will you need to refer to it on a regular basis
- Would it make your job easier if you kept a copy or harder if you destroyed it.
- Can the information be précised in some way and kept in a smaller file.
- Can the information be kept in a different format.

Depending on the answers to these questions this then gives you the second step.

### Step Two.

Check with other bodies and organisations that send you documents and information. It may be that they also keep copies of all their documents which mean that you may be able to access their archives if you want to go back to an item of interest.

Is there anything that you have to keep by law? This will take the guess work out of some of the queries that you might raise while looking through your files.

If there are papers, documents or electronic files that has a statute of limitations which state how long you must keep something, this will make the third step much easier.

### Step Three.

Once you have decided exactly what you are going to keep, how can you keep it?

The simplest answer is to place the items in envelopes or files appropriately labelled and sealed and then placed in your own archives or those of the county archivist, these people are always happy to help with advice and guidance.

Items placed in county archives still belong to the people who placed them there – you are not handing over ownership.

Alternatively you could scan everything you want to keep and place on a disc or USB stick.

Remember to keep a list of everything you archive, whether in your own offices or others, this will aid retrieval should the need arise.

The following is a schedule listing the type of records to be retained on a permanent basis, reserved – perhaps in the county archives- and those which can be destroyed, normally after a minimum retention period.

1. For items to be permanently retained

<b>Item</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Minutes of council/ committee meetings	<i>Signed copies, once a signed copy is available all notes taken at the meeting and any draft copies of minutes should be disposed of. Recorded copies should also be destroyed, as they do not form part of the 'legal' record.</i>
Reports and other documents circulated with agendas	<i>If a copy is attached and is included with signed minutes, these can be destroyed.</i>
Title deeds	<i>The original kept in a fire proof safe</i>
Bylaws and orders	<i>One copy of each is sufficient.</i>
Property registers and tenders, including registers of allotments.	
Maps, plans and surveys of property owned by the council or parish meeting.	<i>Original, or official copies should be kept in a fire proof safe.</i>
Receipt and payment books	<i>For historical records</i>
Maps created under the provision of the Right of Way Act 1932.	
Community magazines and newsletters	<i>One copy of each edition. These are a very useful social history account.</i>
Press cuttings book Photographs	<i>Again these are useful for social history and show the changes taking place over time in the area</i>
Any records dating from before 1894. Parish Councils now tend to hold these and they are from the days of the poor laws, surveyors records, enclosures & tithes etc.	<i>(Due to their valuable history should be in controlled environment)</i>
Cine film and video recording.	<i>Archived in a fire proof container</i>
Planning applications and related papers for major or controversial developments; also planning appeal decisions	<i>Previous applications are sometimes used to weight the refusal/granting of applications. Appeal decisions can be used as a reason for further permissions or future refusal. Kept until completion of development.</i>
Correspondence and papers on important local issues or activities	<i>Perhaps these could be précised to aid archiving.</i>
Burial ground records listed in Local Cemetery Order 1977 No. 204 section 12	<i>To be kept indefinitely.</i>

2. To review for possible retention.

These documents should be passed to the County Archivist only after the minimum prescribed length of time, and when no longer required by the Clerk or Council.

It will then be for them to decide. *(From a personal point of view, the Kent County Archivist is very good at contacting Clerks for information or when they are reviewing documents so it is a good idea to try and form a good working relationship with them).*

Item	Notes
Appeal decisions	<i>See above</i>
Leases, agreements, contracts and wayleaves	<i>Retain while in force.</i>
Quotations and tenders for major works	<i>Retain for 12 years</i>
All finance vouchers before 1950	

3. For destruction when no longer of usefulness to the Council or Clerk.  
However please see the additional notes.

Item	Notes
Agendas	<i>But P if minutes do not survive</i>
Councillors' declarations of office	<i>But P if minutes do not survive</i>
Nominations from parish council elections	<i>But P if minutes do not survive</i>
Quotations and tenders for minor works	<i>But must keep for 12 years S of L</i>
Unsuccessful tenders	<i>Three years (unsuccessful contractors may wish to contest the Council's decision)</i>
Routine correspondence and papers	<i>Depending on the issues raised in the correspondence, some papers may be required longer than others. Once the issue has been concluded may be destroyed, unless SoL applies.</i>
Planning applications for minor works where granted	<i>Retain until development has been completed.</i>
Planning applications for minor works where permission is refused	<i>Retain until the appeal dates have expired.</i>
Scale of fees	<i>5 years, S of L</i>
Insurance policies	<i>This used to be 40 years, but they can be destroyed at the end of their current year. However if you think that a claim may be on the way then keep for 7 years.</i>
Cash & Petty cash books	<i>Minimum time is 6 years.</i>

Receipts books of all kinds Postage stamp & telephone books Paid invoices Paid Cheques VAT records	<i>VAT regulations &amp; tax purposes. Due to S of L</i>
Bank statements, including deposit /savings accounts. Paying in books Cheque stub books Time sheets	<i>For audit purposed. (Some of these may be of use for social history)</i>
Cash & Petty cash books Financial returns to district auditor	<i>May be destroyed, but P if general accounts do not exist (as a local authority there should be yearly accounts and a completed audit)</i>
Wages books	<i>12 years minimum, S of L</i>
Emails, memos between Councillors, Clerk and Councillors, members of the public and the Clerk and Councillors.	<i>After completion of issue, or every 6 months whichever is the longer</i>

P=Permanently Keep

R= Send to county archivist – they can review as required.

D=Destroy at the end of their usefulness or at the end of the Statute of Limitations (S of L) Whichever is the longest.

Policy Prepared by:		<i>Linda Hedley</i>
Approved by Council on:		<i>8<sup>th</sup> March 2016</i>
Policy became operational on:		<i>19<sup>th</sup> July 2016</i>
Next review date:		<i>18<sup>th</sup> July 2017</i>
Review of policy	By	<i>Adopted</i>
03/03/2026	L Hedley	March 2026