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Hemswell Cliff Parish Council

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Documents and Records Management Policy

No changes

Aim

Hemswell Cliff Parish Council recognises that the efficient management of its records is necessary to comply with its legal and regulatory obligations and to contribute to the effective overall management of the Parish Council.

Information is an asset and the records of the Council are important sources of administrative, evidential and historical information. They are vital in its current and future operations, for the purposes of accountability, and for an awareness and understanding of its history and procedures. They form part of the memory of the organisation. Records Management can be defined as the systematic control, organisation, access to and protection of information from its creation, through its use, to its permanent retention or destruction.

There are 3 basic stages in a records lifecycle:

1. Creation or receipt
2. Maintenance and use
3. Disposal/Retention

Scope

This policy applies to all records (electronic and paper) created, received or maintained by the Parish Council in the course of carrying out its functions. Records are defined as all those documents which facilitate the business carried out by the Parish Council and which are thereafter retained (for a set period) to provide evidence of its transactions or activities. These records may be created, received or maintained in hard copy or electronically. A small percentage of the Parish Council's records will be selected for permanent preservation as part of the Council's archives and for historical research.

Responsibilities

The Parish Council has a corporate responsibility to maintain its records and record management systems in accordance with the regulatory environment. The person with overall responsibility for this policy is the Clerk to the Parish Council.

The person responsible for records management will give guidance for good records management practice and will promote compliance with this policy so that information will be retrieved easily, appropriately and timely. Individual staff and employees must ensure that records for which they are responsible are accurate, and are maintained and disposed of in accordance with the Parish Council's records management guidelines.

The Parish Council Records Management System

The Parish Council will create, use, manage and destroy or preserve its records, in all media and in all forms, in accordance with statutory requirements. It will ensure that correct information is:

- captured, stored, retrieved and destroyed or preserved according to need
- fully exploited to meet current and future needs, and to support change
- accessible to those who need to make use of it

The Parish Council will ensure that the appropriate technical, organisational and human resource elements exist to make this possible.

How Should Records be Held?

Records should be held in paper based or electronic files in shared directories, databases or document management systems. The files should be organised in a structured way and have some

indication as to their contents and relevance. Where there are confidentiality issues, files should be held in a separate paper or electronic file in a secure storage area.

Irrespective of the method chosen to keep the records, a standard set of records management principles and tools can be used to manage them. The more important of these include filing schemes and retention schedules.

What Points Should be born in Mind When Managing E-mails?

E-mails are as much an official communication as is a letter, memo or a fax, and may be disclosed in response to a Freedom of Information or Data Protection request and in legal cases. Electronic messages can be legally binding; contracts can be set up via e-mail and the Parish Council may be held liable for defamatory statements in e-mails. For these reasons, nothing should be stated in an e-mail that would not be stated in other forms of written communication.

If an e-mail contains important information or an important decision, it should be added to the relevant paper or electronic file/folder. Most e-mails are about trivial matters. It is a drain on resources to store them on the records management system and to search them when responding to a subject access request. Under the Data Protection Act the Parish Council should keep information about people for no longer than is necessary; this includes e-mails to/from or about people. Out-of-date trivial e-mails and those that have been copied to the relevant subject file should be deleted as soon as possible so that a backlog does not accumulate as this becomes difficult to manage.

On Which Electronic Drive Should Information be Saved?

A Parish Council computer hard drive (usually the c: drive) should not be used to store information other than for current work, as this drive is not backed up. Computer files should not be password protected unless they are confidential and only then if the Chairman and Deputy Chairman are provided with the password, so that the information can be accessed during an absence or emergency.

The Parish Council will operate a back-up system with two external storage drives. The Parish Council computer hard drives must be backed-up to the external hard drive in the possession of the Parish Clerk immediately prior to Parish Council Meetings. All updated files must be overwritten by the back-up so that only the latest file version is retained. This does not mean that historic information will be lost, only that the latest information has been added to it. The external hard drive should be stored safely as far away from the computer as possible.

The Parish Council website should be used for saving and making available non-sensitive information for reference purposes.

How Should Electronic Files and Folders be Managed?

Documents and folders should have file titles which are easily understood by others. Personal file names or uncommon abbreviations should not be used, as they will be meaningless to others. Out-of-date material should not accumulate in a file, and if a document is not accessed in the course of eighteen months, it should probably be deleted from the drive, provided that it is backed-up on the external hard drives.

Retention period

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Parish Council is required to maintain a retention schedule listing the record series which it creates in the course of its business. The retention

schedule lays down the length of time which the record needs to be retained and the action which should be taken when it is of no further administrative use.

Citations are given for key Acts of Parliament, Statutory Instruments and regulations which are relevant to determining statutory retention periods for specific groups of records. These should be regarded as minimum retention periods. It may be advisable to retain some records for longer than these statutory retention periods. The stated retention periods in the schedule are recommended minimum periods, based on assessments of common needs and potential legal liabilities.

Archived Records

Paper copies of the Archived records should be indexed and safely stored at an agreed location.

Destruction of Records and Data

Destruction has to be carried out in such a way as to ensure that data from which individuals can be identified cannot fall into the wrong hands. The Data Protection Act specifically states that in deciding how far to go with this, the level of technology available should be considered, together with the cost of using it, and the effect it would have on the data subject if the information was misused as a result of it falling into the wrong hands. Any data containing personal information must be destroyed under secure conditions. Putting information in a bin and hoping that it will be appropriately destroyed at a later date is not enough. Destruction of any record, including confidential records, should only be carried out where authorised as there may be legal, administrative or archival retention requirements.

Hemswell Cliff Parish Council Records Retention Schedule

Document	Minimum Retention Period	Reason
Agendas and Minutes		
Signed Minutes of Council Meetings	Indefinite	Archive
Agendas	As long as they are useful	Management
Reports	As long as they are useful	Management
Signed Policy Documents	Indefinite	Archive
Correspondence		
Correspondence & papers on important local issues & activities	Indefinite	Archive
Routine correspondence, papers & emails	As long as they are useful	Management
Finance and Payroll		
Receipt and Payment accounts	Indefinite	Archive
Accounts/Financial Annual Return	Indefinite	Archive
Receipt Books of all kinds	6 years	VAT
Bank Statements (including deposit/savings accounts)	Until the Annual Audit is completed for that year	Audit
Bank Paying-in Books	Until the Annual Audit is completed for that year	Audit
Cheque Books Stubs	Until the Annual Audit is completed for that year	Audit
Budgetary Control Papers	2 years + current	Audit
Quotations and Tenders	12 years/Indefinite	Statute of Limitations
Paid Invoices	6 years	VAT
Paid cheques	6 years	VAT

VAT records	6 years	VAT
Payroll records	12 years	Superannuation
Loan Documents	2 years + current	Audit
Insurance Policies		
Cert of Employers Liability	50 years	Legal
Cert of Public Liability	21 years	Legal
Policy renewal records & correspondence	While Valid	Management
General Management		
Investments	Indefinite	Audit / Management
Title Deeds, leases, agreements, contracts	Indefinite	Legal / Audit / Management
For Ball Park and Fields		
Applications to hire	6 years	VAT
Health & Safety		
Equipment Inspection Records	25 years	Management
Risk Assessments	5 years	Management
Miscellaneous		
Complaints	5 years after case closed	Management
Public consultation: surveys & returns	Retain as long as useful	Management
Register of Interests	Indefinite	Archive
Reports, newsletters etc from other bodies	Retain as long as useful	Management
Personnel/Human Resources		
Application forms (interviewed - unsuccessful)	6 months	Management
Disciplinary records	Retain for period of employment	
Personal files (not payroll information)	6 years after ceasing employment	
Planning		
Applications - All consultative documents including plans	Retain as long as useful	Held by local authority
Applications upon which Council has commented - All consultative documents including plans	1 year	Management
Local Plans	One copy of the current plan	Management

This document is available free online at: <http://www.hemswellcliffparishcouncil.org.uk/>

In accordance with the Parish Council's Publication Scheme this document can be purchased for 5p per page, plus postage and packaging. To get a quote for a copy of this document please contact the Clerk to the Parish Council.

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