

RECORDS MANAGEMENT POLICY 2006

Version Number 1 August 2006

RECORDS MANAGEMENT POLICY POLICY STATEMENT

Definition of Records Management

Records management is defined as the field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition of records including processes for capturing and maintaining evidence and information of business activities and transactions in the form of records.

The Purpose of this Policy Statement

The purpose of this statement is therefore to ensure the creation and management of authentic, reliable and useable records, capable of supporting the functions of Council for as long as they are required.

The Council:

- Recognises that its records are part of the cultural and archival heritage and resources of the community it serves;
- Accepts that it has an obligation to ensure that its records are managed effectively and at least cost, commensurate with legal, operational and information requirements; and
- Is committed to fulfilling its responsibilities under the Public Records Act (NI) 1923; the Disposal of Documents Order (No.167) 1925; the Data Protection Act 1998; the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

The Council has therefore agreed to introduce a policy, which will:

- Establish a Council-wide framework for the management of records in all mediums;
- Promote and ensure compliance with legislative requirements and best practice standards;
- Ensure that all records can be used as an information resource which enhances their value as assets of the organisation; and
- Identify the roles and responsibilities for ensuring good records management.

To achieve this, the Council undertakes:

- To implement best practice in its systems and procedures for records management, data protection and freedom of information issues to ensure that records are managed throughout their life cycle in the medium most appropriate to the task they perform;
- To develop and maintain information retrieval systems which facilitate access to individual records and the information they contain, enable them to be retrieved quickly and accurately and identify their relationship with other records held by the Council;

- To ensure records are protected and kept secure in a manner commensurate with their value to the operation and business continuity of the Council and the archival heritage of the Borough;
- To ensure records are retained for the appropriate period of time and that those records worthy of permanent preservation are identified as early as possible;
- To ensure the Council's notification entry in the Data Protection Register is accurate, and that personal data is processed in accordance with the Data Protection Principles and the other requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998; and
- To ensure the Council's Publication Scheme is maintained and complied with, and that requests for information are handled in compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

This policy will be reviewed at least once every three years and, if appropriate, be amended to reflect legislative and technological change and best practice.

ATTACHED AT APPENDIX A IS THE LIST OF ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES RELATING TO THIS POLICY

APPENDIX A

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

As compliance with this policy and the legislation to which it relates is very important to the business needs of the Council and its commitment to accountability and openness, the following key persons have a role in encouraging the implementation of best practice.

The Council

The role of the Council, exercised in the first instance through the Resources Committee, is to set the policy on records management issues and to ensure that those responsible for the implementation of the policy are held accountable for its delivery.

Individual Members

The role of individual Members of the Council is to ensure that they support the concept of good records management and adhere to the principles of data protection and freedom of information as public representatives.

Chief Executive

The Chief Executive is responsible for ensuring that the Council complies with legislative requirements relating to records management, the Data Protection Act 1998, the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. His principal role is to ensure that the Council's policy is adhered to.

Assistant Director Corporate Services

The Assistant Director (Corporate Services) is the main Officer responsible for the corporate records management function. S/he is responsible for ensuring that the Records Management Officer is supported in her work in terms of commitment and resources. S/he is the 'corporate champion' of good records management.

Directors

Senior managers play a key role by recognising records management as an important corporate responsibility and giving it the necessary level of priority and authority. They actively support the deployment and maintenance of records management throughout the Council and, in addition, they are expected to lead and promote the appropriate culture change to ensure its success.

Assistant Directors

Assistant Directors are responsible for liaising with the Records Management Officer to ensure that staff in their charge are complying with the Council's records management policy and procedures.

Records Management Officer

The role of the Records Management Officer is to promote best practice in records management, allied to compliance with the Data Protection Act, Freedom of Information Act and the Environmental Information Regulations. Day-to-day responsibilities include the design, implementation, maintenance and monitoring of all records management activity in consultation with relevant staff throughout the Council and the operation of a central records management service.

The Records Management Officer is the Council's liaison officer with the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland and also with the Information Commissioner.

All Employees

All staff who create, receive and use records will have records management responsibilities at some level depending on the nature of the role they fulfil. Employees are responsible for ensuring that the records for which they are responsible are accurate and are created, maintained and disposed of in compliance with the records management guidelines/procedures as laid down by the Records Management Officer.

Others

This policy also applies to any individual or organisation acting on behalf of the Council.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Explanatory notes on the policy are available as a separate document. Further information can be obtained from the Records Management Officer based at the Civic Centre.

RECORDS MANAGEMENT POLICY

EXPLANATORY NOTES

THE NEED FOR A POLICY STATEMENT

Antrim Borough Council requires a corporate policy statement on records management because:

- 1. It is an organisation dependent on its records for the effective and efficient discharge of its responsibilities. Failure to manage its records properly constitutes a significant risk to the Council.**

The Council's records are its corporate memory, providing evidence of actions and decisions and representing a vital asset to support its daily functions and operations, including compliance with legal and regulatory requirements. They support policy formulation and managerial decision-making, protect the interests of the Council and the rights of employees, clients and citizens, and help to deliver services in accountable, consistent and equitable ways. They help the Council to make good use of precedents and of organisational experience. They support consistency, continuity, efficiency and productivity in service delivery, management and administration.

A clear statement of policy, set by the Council and endorsed by senior management, is considered essential to communicate the Council's position on records management, data protection and freedom of information. The Council's policy was approved on ----- and is available as a separate document.

- 2. There are legal obligations on the Council to protect records and handle the information appropriately.**

General obligations

The Public Relations Act (NI) 1923 declares the records of District Councils in Northern Ireland, along with those of Government Departments, the Courts and Non-Departmental Public Bodies, to be public records under the charge and overall superintendence of a Government Department (currently the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure). As such the Council's records cannot be disposed of without reference to the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) that acts on behalf of the Department. It follows therefore that those Council records which are selected for permanent preservation in PRONI form part of the cultural and archival heritage and resources of the Borough.

There is also a legislative requirement on each Council to implement records management as set out in the Public Records Act (NI) 1923 and in the disposal of Documents Order (No. 167) 1925. PRONI has published standards and guidance on records management, including the Northern Ireland Records Management Standard (NIRMS), which the Council will endeavour to follow, together with standards, guidance and toolkits published by other archival institutions and British Standards (BSI) accepted in records management.

The Council also has an obligation under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to ensure that it has due regard to the promotion of equality of opportunity between persons within the 'nine specified dimensions'. This has significance for how the Council manages the access to its

records, by both the public and employees, and this will be addressed within the operational procedures developed to support this policy.

Specific Obligations

The Council is required by law to comply with the Data Protection Act 1998 which came into force on 1st March 2000. The Act protects personal privacy and upholds individuals' rights by regulating the processing of personal information about identifiable living individuals. It sets out rules for good information handling, known as the eight enforceable Data Protection Principles, which all Council staff, Members or others who process any personal information on behalf of the Council must adhere to at all times. The Information Commissioner enforces and oversees compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and issues Codes of Practice, which the Council should follow by way of good practice.

The Council also has a statutory obligation to comply with the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The aim of this Act is to make it easier for the public to obtain information held by public authorities. The Council has two main responsibilities under the Act. Firstly, the Council must adopt and maintain a Publication Scheme, which essentially is a guide to information it holds which is publicly available. Secondly, the Council is required to respond to individual requests since 1st January 2005 when the general right to access to information held by public authorities, subject to certain conditions and exemptions, came into force. The Information Commissioner issues guidance on the Act and the Lord Chancellor's Department has issued two Codes of Practice regarding records management and responding to requests for information respectively. The Code of Practice on records management stresses that having a clear statement of corporate policy is a significant element in compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

On 1 January 2005 new Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) came into force (replacing the former regulations in place since December 1992) giving members of the public the right to access environmental information held by public authorities. The new regulations have broadened the definition of environmental to cover information on the state of the environment, such as:

- Air, water, soil, land, flora and fauna (including human beings), diversity, genetically modified organisms
- Information on emissions and discharges, noise, energy, radiation, waste and other such substances
- Measures and activities such as policies, plans and agreements
- Reports, cost benefit and economic analyses
- The state of human health and safety, contamination of the food chain
- Cultural sites and built structures (as they may be affected by environmental factors)

All of this legislation, and particularly the recent introduction of the Data Protection Act 1998 and Freedom of Information Act 2000, has increased the need for public authorities, such as Antrim Borough Council, to have in place a robust records management system to enable it to comply with this legislation.

DEFINITION OF RECORDS MANAGEMENT

Records Management is an integrated administrative system by which the Council seeks to plan and control the life cycle of all records created or received by the Council in the course of its business. The same Records Management principles apply irrespective of the medium in which the record is held. A record is any paper, book, photograph, microfilm, map, drawing, artefact, chart, magnetic tape, disk, optical disk or electronic storage medium.

IMPLEMENTATION

This policy will be implemented through the Council's agreed Action Plan which includes:

1. Conducting an information audit of all records held at present. This will enable
 - 1.1 the preparation and adoption of a corporate file plan;
 - 1.2 the preparation and adoption of a Disposal Schedule(s) which specifies agreed retention periods for all series of records;
commencing an ongoing programme of reviewing records to ensure that they are disposed of either by retention by the Council, transfer to PRONI or destruction; and
 - 1.3 the identification of appropriate low cost storage facilities and the transfer of non-current records to those facilities.
2. Defining and adopting an appropriate electronic document and records management system for the Council.
3. The preparation and distribution of corporate guidelines and operational procedures on records management, data protection and freedom of information.
4. The development and delivery of a training programme for all staff on records management, data protection and freedom of information.