



Parish and Town Council records

Retention and Preservation Guidelines

Records are a vital part of your council's business. Your council is required by law to keep certain records and also needs to comply with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. It is important that you look after your records to ensure they can be accessed when needed and do not rapidly deteriorate over time.

A small proportion of your records will be worth keeping permanently as archives because of the unique evidence they contain about your council and the community it serves.

These guidelines offer advice on which records should be kept and for how long. They also recommend what to do when the records are no longer needed for regular use by the council.

Top tips for keeping your records safe

Have a policy and procedures for your council's records

- Identify what records your council creates, what form they are kept in, who needs access and how long they need to be kept for

Paper records are most often damaged by damp or poor storage conditions and careless handling, so:

- store records in a cool, clean, and dry environment with reasonable ventilation
- keep them out of direct sunlight
- avoid using metal clips and other metal parts in files, plastic bags, rubber bands or adhesive tape - all these will decay over time and cause damage to paper
- use good quality, acid free paper for records that you know are to be kept as archives (avoid papers made from wood pulp which are very acidic and become brittle with age)
- use sturdy storage boxes
- keep your store locked
- list your records so they can be found easily without "rummaging"
- don't loan or give records to a third party

Electronic records can be damaged or lost entirely in a very short space of time, so:

- keep them secure (e.g. password protected)
- don't store vital records on tape or disk
- back-up vital records on a server and check they can be recovered
- migrate data when you change software and hardware systems so that you can still access older records
- keep metadata¹ along with the data itself so that you understand what it means
- keep important records as pdf rather than a proprietary format such as MS Word

¹ Metadata is data about the data, eg the file format, date of creation and name of the person who created the file.

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Retention Guidance

The following schedule lists the main types of parish and town council records with recommendations for their retention and disposal. However, your council should decide if these retention periods are suitable for your specific situation.

Final action on the records

Unless a specific period is shown in the schedule, all records should be kept until they are of no further administrative use to your council. Any records noted for 'permanent' keeping should be transferred to Gloucestershire Archives at the end of their administrative use.

Where the final action is 'preserve' we recommend that the record is deposited with Gloucestershire Archives as soon as is practical. We will preserve it as part of your parish or town council archive.

Where the final action is 'review' please contact us for advice. For example, where complete and detailed minutes and accounts have survived there should be less need to preserve other records, but each clerk will be best placed to judge which local issues need fuller documentation.

Gloucestershire Archives will be pleased to discuss any questions arising from these guidelines and to advise on storage or disposal of records.

Contact details:

For advice on current records and electronic records management:

Information Management Service

01452 425098

recordscentre@gloucestershire.gov.uk

For advice on depositing archives:

Gloucestershire Archives Collections Team

01452 425294

archives@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Gloucestershire Archives
Clarence Row
Alvin Street
GLOUCESTER
GL1 3DW

Visit Gloucestershire Archives to find out more about our service including our online catalogue

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Type of record	Minimum Retention Period	Final action	Notes
Administration			
Signed annual council and committee minutes	permanent	preserve	
Agendas	End of administrative use	destroy	but if minutes do not survive, preserve
Reports/documents circulated with agendas	keep as per related agendas	review	but if copies are included with signed minutes, destroy
Councillors' declarations of office	2 years from end of term of office	destroy	but if minutes do not survive, preserve
Councillors' register of interests	18 months from end of appointment	review	
Routine correspondence and papers	End of administrative use	review	for possible preservation of a representative sample
Correspondence and papers on important local issues or activities	End of administrative use	preserve	at the Clerk's discretion
Planning applications for minor works	End of administrative use	destroy	
Planning applications and related papers for controversial developments	End of administrative use	preserve	at the Clerk's discretion
Planning Appeal decisions	6 years from conclusion of Appeal	destroy	
Elections			
Ballot papers for Parish/Town council elections	6 months from close of poll	destroy	to comply with Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) (amendment) Rules 2004 Sec48(1)

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Type of record	Minimum Retention Period	Final action	Notes
Nomination forms for candidates for election to the Parish/Town council	6 months from close of poll	destroy	but if minutes do not survive, preserve
Register of electors	End of administrative use	destroy	as Gloucestershire Archives preserves already
Legal and Property			
Byelaws and orders	permanent	preserve	only one copy of each
Title deeds more than 100 years old	permanent	preserve	but Gloucestershire Archives will not receive deeds still needed to prove title.
Title deeds less than 100 years old	permanent	review	
Contracts, wayleaves, agreements or other legal documents other than title deeds	permanent	review	
Insurance policies	40 years from end of policy	destroy	
Property registers, terriers	permanent	preserve	
Maps, plans and surveys of property owned by the council or meeting	permanent	preserve	
Maps created under the provisions of the Rights of Way Act 1932	permanent	preserve	
Tenders and quotations (successful) – for contracts under hand	6 years after term of contract has expired	destroy	to comply with Statute of Limitations
Tenders and quotations (successful) – for contracts under seal	12 years after term of contract has expired	destroy	to comply with Statute of Limitations
Tenders and quotations (un-successful)	1 year after start of contract	destroy	

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Financial			
Account books and receipt and payment books	6 years from end of current financial year	preserve	
Precept books and contribution orders	6 years from end of current financial year	destroy	
Financial returns to district auditors	6 years from end of current financial year	destroy	but if general accounts do not survive, preserve
Rent books	6 years from end of current financial year	destroy	but if general accounts do not survive, review
Cash and petty cash books	6 years from end of financial year	destroy	but if general accounts do not survive, review
Vouchers	6 years from end of financial year	review	for possible preservation of a representative sample
Miscellaneous			
Community magazines or newsletters	permanent	preserve	one copy of every issue
Press-cuttings books	permanent	preserve	but this does not imply that clerks have a duty to compile these
Photographs	permanent	preserve	but remember that photographs need to be identified and dated to be useful in the future
Records of other / predecessor bodies			
Records of other bodies such as a burial board, charity, fire brigade, Home Guard unit, local	permanent	preserve	

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Type of record	Minimum Retention Period	Final action	Notes
society or ad hoc committee			
Any records dating from before 1894 now held by the town or parish council or parish meeting such as poor law or surveyor's records, an inclosure award etc	permanent	preserve	please notify Gloucestershire Archives of the existence of these records
Reports, guides, handbooks etc received from other organisations	End of administrative use	review	

Frequently Asked Questions:

Where is Gloucestershire Archives, and what do you do?

[Gloucestershire Archives](#) in central Gloucester provides an archives service for Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire. We preserve archives dating from the 12th century onwards and make them available for the community to use and enjoy, now and in the future. The [Information Management Service](#) can offer advice on records management to councils and other organisations

When do records become archives?

When you do not use them regularly for administrative reasons but keep them for what they tell you about the history of the council and its community. Archives should be preserved permanently.

How can we use our archives if they are at Gloucestershire Archives?

Your council still owns its archives when you deposit them at Gloucestershire Archives. We will send you a receipt for the material deposited with us. You can use the records by visiting our searchroom, or you can arrange with us to temporarily withdraw records for anniversaries and other special events.