

Herefordshire Archive Service

Keeping the Records of Parish Councils: best practice guidelines

This guidance is designed to help parish clerks and other officers responsible for looking after Herefordshire's parish and town councils to manage their records.

Herefordshire Archive Service has a duty to collect, preserve and make available for research, the county's archival heritage. The written evidence left by local government bodies forms a crucial part of our collections and the records of parish councils, produced since their establishment in 1894, are an important element of this.

The archives of parish and town councils should be deposited with us on long term loan. Not all records need to be retained for ever. There are certain types of documentation that need not be kept once their administrative use has passed. Whether an item should be archived or destroyed confidentially is based on statutory requirements as well as an assessment of its long term historical value. This *records management* is an essential process for controlling written information, preserving heritage and minimising clutter.

We are happy to give advice on the type of material that should be deposited in our care and a schedule outlining these is appended at the end of this leaflet. Please note that we cannot accept current material scheduled for eventual destruction and that we reserve the right to destroy confidentially or return all records that need not be preserved indefinitely.

Looking After your Paper Records

Creating your records

A proactive approach to preservation is needed from the start of the records lifecycle. For example, it may be appropriate to use archival paper for records identified for permanent deposit with the Archive Service. Parish clerks should also avoid the use of post-it notes, self-adhesive tape or correction fluid on documents earmarked for permanent retention. Brass paperclips or brass staples will not rust and are an economical alternative to their stainless steel counterparts. All these precautions will extend the life of the record. However, it would be over-zealous (not to mention expensive) to apply these guidelines to routine correspondence or financial information.

Storage

The first step to preserving paper documents is to store them in a cool, clean and dry environment, and away from direct sunlight. Ideally 13-18°C and 50-65% relative humidity. For this matter, avoid basements and attics as these are likely to suffer from dampness or high temperatures. Records held in such unsuitable conditions can deteriorate very quickly.

Records should also be secured against fire, flood, theft or unauthorised access. Whenever possible separate documents from immediate contact with metal, cupboard walls, shelves, trays etc. Make sure that the records are packed in boxes, preferably acid-free boxes, rather than plastic bags. Plastic bags prevent air circulation and can also give off gases harmful to paper. Documents must not be placed at floor level or where leaking water pipes could cause damage. It is prudent to store items in elevated positions if an area is prone to flooding.

If you need further advice about storing records then please contact the Archive Service.

Depositing Records

If you have material that you think should be deposited with the Archive Service, please ring us on 01432 260750 to discuss this with our archivist. When you bring your records for

deposit, you will be asked to complete a deposit form on which the terms of the transfer and issues such as preservation needs and any access restrictions will be recorded. A receipt including our terms of deposit will be given to you.

The terms of deposit can also be viewed online in the 'about the archive service' section of our website.

Cataloguing

The records will be appraised and then listed and indexed in accordance with the Record Office's ongoing programme. The Council reserves the right to return to the depositor any records deemed to be of no historical interest, or, with the consent of the depositor, to transfer them to a more appropriate place of deposit or to destroy them. The ownership of and copyright in all lists and other finding aids rest with the Council. A free copy of the list can be provided to the depositor.

Preservation and conservation

All deposited records are stored in the Council's Record Office in secure conditions which comply broadly with BS5454:2000 (Storage and exhibition of archival documents), and all reasonable precautions will be taken to preserve the records from damage, loss or theft. Records may undergo such conservation and preservation, by our trained conservators, as is considered necessary for their safe storage. Extremely fragile records may be withheld from public access.

Access

Records will be made available to the public for research during the advertised opening hours of the Record Office and in accordance with the search room rules, and the principles and conditions of Data Protection Act 1998, and the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Reproduction and copyright

With regard to the provisions of the current Copyright Act, copies of records may be supplied to members of the public, on payment of an appropriate charge, for use in private study. Depositors may negotiate restrictions on reproduction.

Retention Guidelines for Parish Council Records

The schedule accompanying these guidelines displays the main types of parish and town council records. Each entry lists the record series along with the preferred action, suggestions for retention periods and reasons for the action. These guidelines are meant as a basic introduction to the management of parish council records; please consult the Archive Service when uncertain whether an item needs to be deposited.

The following information provides an explanation for each of the three action terms used within the schedule.

Records identified for permanent preservation

Records in this category have been identified by the Archive Service for permanent retention. These should be deposited with the Archive Service once there is no longer an administrative need for them to be kept locally.

Documents earmarked for permanent preservation are usually identifiable if they have been stored as discrete groups. When no organised filing system is employed this process can be challenging. Other record series are complicated regardless of their filing, e.g. correspondence and planning files. In these cases clerks are often best placed to evaluate which documents relate to significant local issues. Such records should be identified prior to their transfer to the Archive Service.

Typically the only financial records recommended for deposit are the payment and receipt books or the annual audited accounts if the former has not survived. These are often filed with receipts and payments that are not necessary for preservation and should be weeded prior to their transfer to the Archive Service.

Records to be reviewed by Herefordshire Archive Service

Records in this category should be transferred to the Archive Service after the minimum retention period or once they become inactive. An archivist will then review the collection and select documents to preserve. Those records not selected may be safely destroyed by the parish or town clerk, or retained locally.

Records to be destroyed by the parish or town clerk

A large number of parish and town council records can be destroyed once they become inactive or the minimum retention period expires. Financial records account for the majority of this category. Typically these must be kept for a minimum of 6 years after the last entry (Limitation Act 1980, VAT Act 1994 etc.), but may be retained for longer depending on local circumstances. Records not given a minimum retention period can be destroyed once there is no longer an administrative requirement for their custody. If you are unsure whether a document or series of records should be destroyed then please contact the Archive Service for further guidance.

To protect confidential information, all records assigned for disposal should be securely destroyed. Paper records containing confidential information should be shredded or pulped, and not simply thrown out with other classes of records. Electronic or machine-readable records will require a two-step process for assured confidential destruction: deletion of the contents of digital files, and the use of commercially available software applications to remove all residual data from the storage device. These processes may be outsourced to credible commercial companies who specialise in confidential destruction of records.

Records	Retention period	Action	Reason
Administrative			
Signed council and committee minutes	Transfer to HRO after 6 years or once they become inactive	Preserve	Common practice
Draft minutes	Until the date of confirmation of the minutes	Destroy	Operational
Agendas	Until there is no longer an administrative requirement	Destroy	Operational
Reports and other documents circulated with agendas	Until there is no longer an administrative requirement. Destroy these reports if copies are already included with signed minutes	Review	Common practice
Councillors' declarations of office	4 years or until they vacate office	Destroy	Operational
Register of electors	Until there is no longer an administrative requirement	Destroy	Copies already in existence
Grouping orders	Until there is no longer an administrative requirement	Destroy	Operational
Byelaws and orders	Preserve one of each copy and transfer to HRO once they become inactive	Preserve	Common practice
Policy documents	Until there is no longer an administrative requirement	Review	Operational
Title deeds more than 100 years old	Transfer to HRO once they become inactive. HRO will not accept deeds still needed to prove	Preserve	Common practice

	title		
Title deeds less than 100 years old	Transfer to HRO for review once they become inactive. HRO will not accept deeds still needed to prove title	Review	Common practice
Property registers and terriers	Transfer to HRO once they become inactive	Preserve	Common practice
Maps, plans, and surveys of property owned by the council or meeting	Transfer to HRO once they become inactive	Preserve	Common practice
General correspondence	6 Years after correspondence ends	Destroy	Operational
Complaints	6 Years after resolution of complaint	Destroy	Operational
Information Requests	6 Years after resolution of request	Destroy	Operational
Village/parish appraisals, plans, millennium projects and supporting papers	Until there is no longer an administrative requirement	Review	Operational
Planning applications and related papers for major controversial developments	Until there is no longer an administrative requirement	Review with the view to destroy	Operational
Planning applications for minor works where permission is refused	6 years	Destroy	Limitation Act 1980
Leases, agreements, contracts and wayleaves	Until there is no longer an administrative requirement	Review	Operational
Parish council newsletter	Transfer one copy to HRO	Preserve	Common practice
Newsletter mailing list	Retain until consent withdrawn or following regular review consent no longer provided	Destroy	Operational
Quotations and tenders (successful)	6 years after contract ends	Destroy	Limitation Act 1980
Quotations and tenders (unsuccessful)	2 years	Destroy	Operational
Routine internal correspondence and papers	Until there is no longer an administrative requirement	Review with the view to destroy	Operational
Scale of fees and charges	Until superseded by new charges	Destroy	Operational
Employers' liability insurance policies	40 years after expiry date	Destroy	Employers' Liability Act 1969 Employers' Liability Regulations 1998

Risk assessments	Once superseded by a new risk assessment or once inactive	Destroy	Operational
Personnel files	6 Years after termination of service	Destroy	Risk of investigation regarding any future litigation
Personnel files – annual leave	2 years	Destroy	Operational
Recruitment data			
Successful	Add to personnel file	Destroy	Equalities Act
Unsuccessful	6 months after recruitment finalised plus current year		
Financial			
Receipt and payment books	Transfer to HRO once they become inactive	Preserve	Council financial regulations
Rate books	Transfer to HRO	Preserve	Common practice
Annual audited accounts	6 years.	Destroy, but preserve if the receipt and payment books have not survived.	Council financial regulations
Accounts and statements	6 years	Destroy	Council financial regulations
Vouchers before 1950	6 years	Destroy	Council financial regulations
Cash and petty cash books and rent books	6 years	Destroy	Council financial regulations
Receipt books of all kinds	6 years	Destroy	Council financial regulations
Postage and telephone books	6 years	Destroy	Council financial regulations
Bank statements including deposit/saving accounts	6 years	Destroy	Council financial regulations
Bank paying-in books	Last completed Audit year	Destroy	Council financial regulations
Cheque book stubs	Last completed Audit year	Destroy	Council financial regulations
Paid invoices	6 years	Destroy	Council financial regulations
Paid cheques	6 years	Destroy	Council financial regulations
VAT records	6 years	Destroy	VAT Act 1994
VAT claims	6 years	Destroy	VAT Act 1994
Time sheets	Last completed Audit year	Destroy	Council financial regulations
Wage books	12 years	Destroy	Statute of Limitation

Members' allowances register	6 years	Destroy	Statute of Limitation
Records relating to parish halls, centres and recreation grounds, applications to hire, letting diaries, copies of bills to hirers and records of tickets issued	6 years	Review with the view to destroy	Council financial regulations
Miscellaneous			
Maps created under the provision of the Rights of Way Act 1932	Transfer to HRO once they become inactive	Preserve	Common practice
Papers concerning Rights of Way	Until there is no longer an administrative requirement	Destroy	Operational
Community magazines or newsletters(not created by the parish council)	Until there is no longer an administrative requirement	Review	Operational
Charity papers	Until there is no longer an administrative requirement	Review	Operational
Press cuttings book	Until there is no longer an administrative requirement	Review	Operational
Photographs	Until there is no longer an administrative requirement	Review	Operational
Any records predating the establishment of Parish Councils (1894), e.g. poor law, surveyors of the highway, tithe maps and apportionments, enclosure awards etc.	Transfer to HRO immediately	Preserve	Common practice
Records of other bodies such as burial boards, charities, fire brigades, Home Guard unit, local society or ad hoc committee	Transfer to HRO once they become inactive	Preserve	Common practice
Reports, guides, handbooks etc received from other organisations	Until there is no longer an administrative requirement	Review	Operational