



Controlled Document

Title	Document Retention and Disposal Policy
Author	Lenham Parish Council
Owner	Lenham Parish Council
Subject	Main Policy Documents
Government Security Classification	Official
Document Version	Version 1
Created	13.01.2025
Approved By	Full Council
Review Date	June 2028

Version Control

Version	Date	Author	Description of Change	Sign/Date
1	04.06.2025	Lenham Parish Council	Original Policy	L. Westcott



Document Retention and Disposal Policy

1. Introduction

The Council accumulates a vast amount of information and data during the course of its everyday activities. This includes data generated internally in addition to information obtained from individuals and external organisations. This information is recorded in various different types of document.

Records created and maintained by the Council are an important asset and as such measures need to be undertaken to safeguard this information. Properly managed records provide authentic and reliable evidence of the Council's transactions and are necessary to ensure it can demonstrate accountability.

Documents may be retained in either 'hard' paper form or in electronic forms. For the purpose of this policy, 'document' and 'record' refers to both hard copy and electronic records.

It is imperative that documents are retained for an adequate period of time. If documents are destroyed prematurely the Council and individual officers concerned could face prosecution for not complying with legislation and it could cause operational difficulties, reputational damage and difficulty in defending any claim brought against the Council.

In contrast to the above the Council should not retain documents longer than is necessary. Timely disposal should be undertaken to ensure compliance with the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018 so that personal information is not retained longer than necessary. This will also ensure the most efficient use of limited storage space.

2. Scope and Objectives of the Policy

The aim of this document is to provide a working framework to determine which documents are:

- Retained – and for how long.
- Disposed of – and if so by what method.

There are some records that do not need to be kept at all or that are routinely destroyed in the course of business. This usually applies to information that is duplicated, unimportant or only of a short-term value. Unimportant records of information include:

- 'With compliments' slips.
- Catalogues and trade journals.
- Non-acceptance of invitations.
- Trivial electronic mail messages that are not related to Council business.
- Requests for information such as maps, plans or advertising material.
- Out of date distribution lists.

Duplicated and superseded material such as stationary, manuals, drafts, forms, address books

and reference copies of annual reports may be destroyed.

Records should not be destroyed if the information can be used as evidence to prove that something has happened. Where records containing personal data are destroyed, disposal must be carried out securely and in accordance with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

3. Roles and Responsibilities for Document Retention and Disposal

Councils are responsible for determining whether to retain or dispose of documents and should undertake a review of documentation at least on an annual basis to ensure that any unnecessary documentation being held is disposed of under the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Councils should ensure that all employees are aware of the retention/disposal schedule.

4. Document Retention Protocol

Councils should have in place an adequate system for documenting the activities of their service. This system should take into account the legislative and regulatory environments to which they work.

Records of each activity should be complete and accurate enough to allow employees and their successors to undertake appropriate actions in the context of their responsibilities to:

- Facilitate an audit or examination of the business by anyone so authorised.
- Protect the legal and other rights of the Council, its clients and any other persons affected by its actions.
- Verify individual consent to record, manage and record disposal of their personal data.
- Provide authenticity of the records so that the evidence derived from them is shown to be credible and authoritative.

To facilitate this the following principles should be adopted:

- Records created and maintained should be arranged in a record-keeping system that will enable quick and easy retrieval of information under the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.
- Documents that are no longer required for operational purposes but need retaining should be placed at the records office.

The retention schedules in Appendix A: List of Documents for Retention or Disposal provide guidance on the recommended minimum retention periods for specific classes of documents and records. These schedules have been compiled from recommended best practice from the Public Records Office, the Records Management Society of Great Britain and in accordance with relevant legislation.

Whenever there is a possibility of litigation, the records and information that are likely to be affected should not be amended or disposed of until the threat of litigation has been removed.

5. Document Disposal Protocol

Documents should only be disposed of if reviewed in accordance with the following:

- Is retention required to fulfil statutory or other regulatory requirements?
- Is retention required to meet the operational needs of the service?
- Is retention required to evidence events in the case of dispute?
- Is retention required because the document or record is of historic interest or intrinsic value?

When documents are scheduled for disposal, the method of disposal should be appropriate to the nature and sensitivity of the documents concerned. A record of the disposal will be kept to comply with the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Documents can be disposed of by any of the following methods:

- Non-confidential records may be disposed of through normal waste or recycling arrangements.
- Confidential records or records giving personal information: shred documents.
- Deletion of computer records.
- Transmission of records to an external body such as the County Records Office.

The following principles should be followed when disposing of records:

- All records containing personal or confidential information should be destroyed at the end of the retention period. Failure to do so could lead to the Council being prosecuted under the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.
- Failure to appropriately dispose of records may lead to breaches of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, UK GDPR, or reputational damage to the Council.
- Where computer records are deleted steps should be taken to ensure that data is 'virtually impossible to retrieve' as advised by the Information Commissioner.
- Where documents are of historical interest it may be appropriate that they are transmitted to the County Records office.
- Back-up copies of documents should also be destroyed (including electronic or photographed documents unless specific provisions exist for their disposal).

Records should be maintained of appropriate disposals. These records should contain the following information:

- The name of the document destroyed.
- The date the document was destroyed.
- The method of disposal.

6. Data Protection Act 2018 – Obligation to Dispose of Certain Data

The Data Protection Act 2018 ('Fifth Principle') requires that personal information must not be retained longer than is necessary for the purpose for which it was originally obtained. Section 1 of the Data Protection Act defines personal information as:

Data that relates to a living individual who can be identified:

- a) from the data, or

- b) from those data and other information which is in the possession of or is likely to come into the possession of the data controller.

It includes any expression of opinion about the individual and any indication of the intentions of the Council or other person in respect of the individual.

The Data Protection Act provides an exemption for information about identifiable living individuals that is held for research, statistical or historical purposes to be held indefinitely, provided that the specific requirements are met.

The Clerk/RFO is responsible for overseeing compliance with this policy and ensuring records are reviewed and disposed of appropriately, namely:

- Personal data is processed fairly and lawfully and, in particular, shall not be processed unless specific conditions are met Personal data shall only be obtained for specific purposes and processed in a compatible manner.
- Personal data shall be adequate, relevant, but not excessive.
- Personal data shall be accurate and up to date.
- Personal data shall not be kept for longer than is necessary.
- Personal data shall be processed in accordance with the rights of the data subject.
- Personal data shall be kept secure.
- External storage providers or archivists that are holding Council documents must also comply with the above principles of the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

7. Litigation

Where litigation, investigation, complaint, audit, FOI request or subject access request is ongoing or anticipated, relevant records must not be destroyed until the matter has concluded

8. Scanning of Documents

In general once a document has been scanned on to a document image system, the original paper document may be securely destroyed where electronic copies are considered adequate and legally admissible. There is no specific legislation covering the format for which local government records are retained following electronic storage, except for those prescribed by HM Revenue and Customs.

As a general rule, hard copies of scanned documents should be retained for three months after scanning.

Original documents required for VAT and tax purposes should be retained for six years unless a shorter period has been agreed with HM Revenue and Customs.

9. Review of Document Retention

It is planned to review, update and where appropriate, amend this document on a regular basis (at least every 3 years in accordance with the Code of Practice on the Management of Records issued by the Lord Chancellor.

Appendix A - Table of records kept and retention period

Record Type	Retention Period	Reason / Notes
Administration		
Signed minutes of Council and Committee meetings	Indefinitely	Archive
Audio/recorded minutes used to prepare official minutes	Until minutes are approved, then delete	Management
Draft minutes	Until confirmation of minutes	Operational
Agendas	Until no longer administratively required	Operational
Reports and documents circulated with agendas	Until no longer administratively required	Operational
Councillors' declarations of office	4 years or until office vacated	Statutory
Register of electors	Until no longer administratively required	Common practice
Byelaws and orders	Indefinitely	Common practice
Policy documents	Until updated or superseded	Operational
Property registers	Indefinitely	Common practice
Maps, plans, and property surveys	Indefinitely	Common practice
General correspondence and emails	As long as useful (minimum 6 months)	Management
Correspondence relating to significant local issues/activities	Indefinitely	Archive
Finance & Payroll		
Receipt and payment accounts	Indefinitely	Archive
Annual audited accounts	Indefinitely	Archive
BACS listings	6 years	Financial records
Bank reconciliations	3 years	Audit
Bank statements	6 years	Audit
Bank paying-in books	Until completion of audit year	Audit
Budgetary control papers	6 years	Audit
Cheque book stubs	Until completion of audit year	Audit

Lenham Parish Council – Document Retention Policy

Audit correspondence	Until completion of audit year	Audit
Expenses and travel claims	6 years	Audit
Grant applications and supporting documents	5 years	Funding compliance
Internal audit records	3 years	Audit
Fraud investigation records	7 years after final outcome	Investigation records
Loan and investment records	6 years after redemption	Audit
Paid invoices	6 years	VAT Act 1994
Payroll records	12 years	Superannuation
Postage and telephone books	6 years	Audit
Precept forms	Indefinitely	Statutory
Quotations and tenders	6 years	Limitation Act 1980
Receipt books	6 years	VAT
Scale of fees and charges	5 years	Management
VAT records	6 years	VAT Act 1994
Wage books	12 years	Superannuation / Limitation Act 1980
Insurance		
Employers' liability certificates	40 years	Legal requirement
Public liability certificates	21 years	Legal requirement
Insurance claim records	While valid or while claim possible	Legal requirement
Management insurance claim records	7 years after obligations concluded	Legal requirement
Policy renewals and correspondence	While policy valid	Management
General Management		
Member allowances	6 years	Tax statute limitations
Investment records	Indefinitely	Management
Successful quotations/tenders	12 years	Statute of limitations

Lenham Parish Council – Document Retention Policy

Unsuccessful quotations/tenders	2 years	Statute of limitations
Title deeds, leases, and agreements	Indefinitely	Audit / Management
Health & Safety		
Accident books (adults)	25 years from closure	Management
Accident books (children)	25 years from closure	Management
Equipment inspection records	25 years	Management
Premises inspection records	25 years	Management
Risk assessments	3 years from last assessment	Operational
Miscellaneous		
Asset register	Indefinitely	Asset management
Complaints records	6 years after case closure	Management
CCTV recordings	30 days	Data protection
Burial records	Indefinitely	Operational
Information requests	6 years after closure	Management
Press releases	5 years	Management
Public consultation surveys and returns	5 years	Management
Register of officers' interests	Indefinitely	Governance
External management reports/newsletters	Retain while useful	Management bodies
Council newsletters	One archive copy retained indefinitely	Archive
Newsletter mailing lists	Until consent withdrawn or no longer valid	GDPR compliance
Planning application consultation documents	12 months	Management
Personnel / HR		
Personnel files (excluding payroll)	6 years after employment ends	Employment management
Unsuccessful job applications	6 months	Recruitment

Lenham Parish Council – Document Retention Policy

Personnel and training records	5 years after employment ends	Employment management
Timesheets	6 years	Audit
Disciplinary records	Duration of employment	Management
Annual leave records	Employment duration + 5 years	Employment management
Annual appraisal records	Current year plus previous year	Performance management
Disciplinary or grievance investigations (unproven)	Destroy immediately after investigation/appeal	Data protection

There are no firm guidelines for the retention of general correspondence. However, an annual review of all documentation should become a regular practice, with ephemeral items marked for destruction and the remainder considered for archiving or transfer to the City Records Office as appropriate.