



Document Retention & Disposal Policy

Adopted: October 2026, minute reference 26/139 (c)

1. Purpose of the Policy

Stoke sub Hamdon Parish Council generates and holds a wide range of records in both electronic and hard-copy formats. These records must be retained for appropriate periods to meet statutory, financial, administrative, and audit requirements, and to protect the Council's interests in the event of legal challenge. This policy sets out the Council's approach to the retention, archiving, and secure disposal of its records.

2. Legislative & Regulatory Framework

Retention periods are informed by (non-exhaustive):

- Limitation Act 1980 (minimum 6 years for most financial records)
- VAT Act 1994 (VAT-related documentation retention)
- NALC Legal Topic Note 40 – Local Council Documents & Records (best-practice guidance)
- Requirements of external audit, HMRC, and employment law.

3. Principles of Retention

Records fall into three categories:

3.1 Permanent Preservation

Certain records have long-term historical, legal, or evidential value and must be preserved indefinitely. These should be transferred to the Local Archive Service once they are no longer required for day-to-day administration. Examples include:

- Signed Council and Committee Minutes
- Annual audited accounts / payment & receipt books

3.2 Time-Limited Retention

Many records must be retained for a statutory minimum period or for as long as they are administratively useful.

3.3 Secure Destruction

Records that have reached the end of their retention period and have no archival value must be securely destroyed. Best practice requires:

- Shredding or pulping confidential paper records
- Two-step destruction of electronic records:
 1. Deletion of digital files
 2. Use of specialist software to remove residual data from storage devices

4. Retention Schedule

4.1 Governance & Administration

- Signed Minutes (Council & Committees) – *Indefinite*
- Draft Minutes / Audio Recordings – *Until minutes are approved*
- Agendas & Supporting Papers – *5 years*
- Policies, Procedures & Standing Orders – *Current version + 3 years*
- Correspondence (general) – *3 years*
- Complaints files – *6 years after closure*

4.2 Finance & Audit

- Annual Accounts (audited) – *Permanent*
- Receipts & Payments Books – *Permanent or 6 years depending on archival value*
- Invoices, Bank Statements, Payroll Records – *6 years (Limitation Act / VAT Act)*
- VAT Records – *6 years*
- Grant Applications (submitted/received) – *6 years*

4.3 Employment

- Employee Contracts & Personnel Files – *6 years after employment ends*
- Timesheets, Leave Records – *3 years*
- Recruitment Records – *1 year (unsuccessful candidates)*

4.4 Land, Property & Assets

- Title Deeds, Leases, Agreements – *Permanent*
- Maintenance Records – *6 years*
- Insurance Policies – *6 years after expiry*
- Risk Assessments – *3 years (retain longer if incidents occur)*

4.5 Planning

- Planning Applications (Council copies) – 3 years
- Planning Responses – 3 years

4.7 Communications & Digital Records

- Website Content / Social Media Posts – 2 years (unless forming part of statutory notice)
- Emails – 3 years (unless part of a formal case file)
- Photographs / Event Records – *As long as relevant; review every 3 years*

5. Archiving Procedures

- Records identified for permanent preservation will be transferred to the Somerset Archives & Records Service
- Prior to transfer, financial records should be weeded to remove unnecessary attachments (e.g., receipts) as recommended in best-practice guidance .

6. Secure Disposal Procedures

The Council will ensure:

- Confidential paper records are shredded or pulped.
- Electronic records undergo file deletion plus data-wiping using appropriate software or specialist contractors.

7. Review of Policy

This policy will be reviewed every three years or earlier if legislation or best practice changes.