



Records Management Guidance Note

Document & Version Control

Key Information:

Title:	<i>Document & Version Control</i>
Document Type:	<i>Records Management guidance document</i>
Document Status:	<i>Approved</i>
Author:	<i>Council Records Manager</i>
Owner:	<i>Chief Officer, Legal & Procurement</i>
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Revision History:

Version:	Date:	Summary of Changes:	Officer:
0.1	14/7/11	<i>First draft [titled "Version Control"], including initial thoughts and research notes</i>	CMG
0.2	15/7/11	<i>Tidied text, restructured order. Passed to ED and GM for comment</i>	CMG
1.0	3/8/11	<i>Added section numbers, published on internet</i>	CMG
1.1	27/11/14	<i>Amended text, changed title to "Document & Version Control"; added "document control sheet"</i>	CMG
1.2	10/4/15	<i>Included note re. the retention of previous versions; and note re. overwriting of electronic versions</i>	AC & CMG
1.3	10/9/15	<i>Included ref. to using job titles or their abbreviations rather than names in the "Name" column.</i>	RM
1.4	27/08/18	<i>Amended "Name" Column to "Officer"</i>	RM

1 Introduction

Version control is the process by which different versions of a document are managed.

This:

- differentiates one version of a document from another;
- makes it clear which version is current;
- provides an audit trail;
- allows access to the version of a document which was current at a previous time.

Version control should be used when developing policies, procedures or publications, or for any other document which will have contributions from more than one author or which will continue to change and evolve. In fact, version control, as described below, is very straightforward – and can be used any time that more than one version of a document exists or where that is likely to be the case at a later date.

Note that this guidance note does NOT cover the more detailed “version control” as used with some software; rather this is a simple procedure for use with individual documents.

This guidance also covers basic document control, noting authorship, assigning responsibility and detailing the status of the document.

2 Revision History

Each time a new version of a document is developed, it should be saved with a new version number. This should be included in the file name *and* a note included on the version control box.

A suggested version control box to maintain revision history is given in the appendix

The box should have columns to record:

- version number;
- amendments made and other notes;
- author;
- date.

The numbers should be written in two parts, separated by a period, for example

- Version 1.2; or
- Version 3.07

The first part of the number (“1” or “3” in the example above) should indicate a substantial revision of the document, for example the addition or removal of significant sections of the document or a major rearrangement of paragraphs, sections or chapters. It should also be used to indicate a “finalised” version, for example when it is being submitted to Council or when it is being published on the website.

The second number (".2" or ".07" in the example above) should indicate minor revisions, such as an updated contact, correction of errors in punctuation or spelling, or minor additions of text.

As well as being noted in the box, the numbers should also be used in the file title: for example

- "Publication Scheme 2.0"
- "Report on Fees 1.3"

Leading zeros - that is using "02" rather than "2" - can be used at both major and minor revision points if it is likely that the document will undergo more than 9 versions or sub-versions. This is not necessary, but can aid automatic sorting, for example in Windows Explorer.

Amendments should be recorded under "notes". Do not put so much detail here that the box becomes unwieldy, but do include a meaningful summary of the changes made.

Where there is only likely to be one author, that column can be left out. Initials can be used here rather than individuals' names - provided that will not lead to confusion at a later date. Job titles (or abbreviations thereof) can be used instead of individuals' names where appropriate.

3 Document Management

Even more important to maintaining the accuracy, authenticity and currency of a document is the organisational aspects of its management. As well as adopting the version control system outlined above, it is also good practice to:

- Define ownership – be clear about which officer is responsible for a document;
- Agree where it is to be stored – where and on which shared drive the document will reside;
- Consider retention and disposal – all records should be held within an agreed retention schedule;
- Have clear naming conventions – names must be consistent and useful;
- Where multiple copies exist, define which is the authority copy.

The Records Manager can advise further on these issues if required.

One other point on good practice: to ensure against the accidental or malicious amendments to records, a "read-only" tag can be applied. This is simple to do, and means that if someone attempts to amend the document, they will be prompted to save it with a new title.

- In Windows Explorer or My Computer, right click on the document and select 'Properties';
- On the 'General' tab check the 'Read-only' box;
- Click 'Apply' and 'OK'.

Finally, the “track changes” tool in word processing programs such as Microsoft Word can be useful to help manage version control. With a heavily re-edited document, however, or one with several different authors, this can quickly become rather cumbersome and can also greatly increase the file size.

4 Document Control Sheet

A Document Control Sheet is particularly important for documents that go through a lot of revision and rewriting. The Control Sheet helps make those changes to a document clear as well as inform of when they were done and by whom.

The Control Sheet should be updated each time a change is made to the document, with answers to the following questions:

- What is the new version number?
- What was the purpose of the change, or what was the change?
- Who made the change?
- When was the change made?

An example Document Control Sheet is given as an appendix below, and this should be included at the front of all new documents. This document control sheet also includes a “Linked Documents” table which can be included where appropriate.

5 Retention

Once a new version has been agreed, a decision can be made on whether the previous version is to be retained or whether they can be deleted.

Earlier versions should only be retained for as long as business use requires it; in many instances it may be suitable to destroy previous versions at the point of approval. This will help to lessen the confusion caused by the duplication of documents and means that there is less risk of earlier versions being accidentally made available.

A decision may be made to keep an earlier version for information management purposes. For example, if it is necessary to preserve a record of the process of developing the document or to evidence processes or procedures that were in place at the time.

In terms of storage on a shared drive, ensure that different versions (where previous versions are being retained) are all held together.

Appendix: Document Control Sheet

Key Information:

Title:	<i>Title of document</i>
Document Type:	<i>e.g. policy, guidance, training etc.</i>
Document Status:	<i>Draft/Final/for Review etc.</i>
Author:	<i>Job title of the author of the document</i>
Owner:	<i>Normally Head of Service/Director</i>
Contact:	<i>Job title of the officer who should be contact for further information</i>
Date of publication	<i>Date of publication</i>
Date of review	<i>Date of review</i>

Revision History:

Version:	Date:	Summary of Changes:	Officer:
<i>0.1</i>	<i>DD/MM/YYYY</i>	<i>Description of the changes made to the document</i>	<i>Initials</i>
<i>0.2</i>	<i>DD/MM/YYYY</i>	<i>Description of the changes made to the document</i>	<i>Initials</i>
<i>0.3</i>	<i>etc.</i>	<i>etc.</i>	<i>etc.</i>

Linked Documents:

Title:	Location/Link: