Using the Records Store

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1 Introduction

East Renfrewshire Council has a corporate records store based at Williamwood School.

This document establishes the principles under which the store operates, as well as detailing the practicalities of its operation.

The facility is managed by the Council's Senior Information and Improvement Officer, and is for use by all departments of the Council.

2 Principles of Operation

To allow the Council Records Manager and his staff to efficiently manage the store, it is important to establish several principles which will govern the operation of the store.

- The Records store is used to store only records, and in particular those which - while they do need to be retained - are unlikely to be frequently referred to.
- Records will only be accessioned after they have been appropriately sorted, boxed and labelled by the depositing department to the satisfaction of the Records Management staff, and once all necessary documentation has been completed.
- Records will only be accessioned after they have been placed within an agreed retention schedule.
- Records Management staff are responsible for allocating space within the facility
- Records Management staff have the responsibility for the physical management of all material in the store. The records themselves, however, remain the property of the depositing department.
- Only Records Management staff have access to the store: all deposits and retrievals of records must go through them.

These principles are detailed further in the following sections.

3 Depositing Records

To properly manage the store, it is vital that the following conditions and procedures are met prior to the deposit of any records.

3.1 Make sure that only appropriate material is deposited

Space within the records store is at a premium, so please ensure that only records which are require to be retained but which are unlikely to be frequently referred to are deposited.

Examples of the type of records which might be appropriate could include:

- Case files for which there is a statutory obligation for continued retention and for which the likelihood of frequent reference has diminished.
- Financial records in years 2-5 after being current. Such material is only rarely referred to again in relation to the business purpose for which it was created, but may require to be retained for the purposes of possible future audit.
- Maps and plans. These can often be large and bulky. While they sometimes do have a longer period of currency, and should therefore be retained in situ in the creating office for a more significant period of time, such records could be appropriate for transfer to the records store at a later date.
- Personnel files of ex-staff. Again, there is a reasonable likelihood of requiring to access such material in the year or two after a member of staff has left the Council. Thereafter, while the requirement to retain may remain for some period of time, the likelihood of requiring access to the file will diminish.
- Records in relation to accidents or Health and Safety. Such material can have a very long retention period for statutory purposes or to defend actions against the Council in the years ahead. As with the examples above, while recent material might require to be retained in the creating office, older files may be appropriate for transfer to the store.
- Material no longer of significant administrative value to the department which created it, but which has a long-term value as part of the historic archive of the Council (such material is discussed in more detail at the section "Historic Archives" below).

Records in the store can be retrieved by the depositing department at any future time. Retrieval, however, may not be immediate, and will involve transportation of files or the retrieving officers visiting the store to uplift (see the section "Retrieving Records" below), so it is important that thought is given as to the type and age of material to be deposited.

3.2 Agree retention schedules

If records were to come into a store without prior agreement as to how long they have to be retained, the operation of the store would be impaired at a later date when backlogs of time-expired records start to build up. It is therefore imperative that prior to any records being deposited, they are fixed within a properly agreed retention schedule: that is it is made clear how long they have to be retained.

This is the responsibility of the depositing department, although the Senior Information and Improvement Officer can offer help and assistance. East Renfrewshire Council's records retention schedule lists records for which pre-determined disposal dates have been established and this is available on the Council website.

3.3 Weed and sort records

The efficient subsequent management and retrieval of records is to a large extent dependant on the condition they are in at the time of deposit. While Records Management staff will process and control the records as described below once they are in the store, they cannot be responsible for:

- weeding of ephemera and duplicate material
- proper sorting of files

Make sure that records are in distinct files or folders, or are bound, bundled or otherwise secured.

A4 and lever-arch folders take up unnecessary room in boxes: papers should be removed from such folders and put in cardboard folders instead. Also, wherever possible, please remove plastic wallets as these can be difficult to destroy when the records reach the end of their lifespan.

This must all be done prior to deposit. Files which are not in a fit condition for deposit will not be accepted into the corporate records store and will be returned to the department.

Further guidance on file creation, weeding of records, file structuring and numbering is available in the guidance note “Files and Filing”

3.4 Boxing files

All records entering the records store should be boxed in appropriate boxes. To maximise the capacity of the store, and to allow a reasonable ease of handling, it is recommended that records are boxed in:

Supplier: Office Depot
Name: Archive boxes
Ref No: 4875726

Other storage media can be accommodated, but please discuss this with Records Management staff prior to deposit.

The use of larger “records crates” should be avoided. They are too large to fit efficiently on the shelves, are more likely to break, and their movement can present health and safety issues, especially when being lifted from floor level or above head height.

Please don’t overfill boxes as they will not fit onto the shelves, tend to degrade more quickly, and can be a real danger to the staff who will have to move them.

Ensure that like records are boxed together, as disposals are carried out at box level. This means that if there are:

- different types of records, with different retention periods, or
- a broad range of dates of records of the same type;

then everything in that box will need to be retained until the last retention date of the material within it.

3.5 Label Boxes

On agreeing a deposit, Records Management staff will supply an “accession number” and a quantity of adhesive box labels with that number on it. These should be stuck on the front (small) side of every box, with a unique sequential box number on each. [For example, a deposit of, say, 20 boxes might be given an accession number “093”, and these should then be numbered as 093/01, 093/02… to 093/20]. Leave “location” blank; this will be filled out by staff at the store.

3.6 Fill out deposit documentation

Finally, a records deposit form and box list(s) have to be completed describing the contents of your deposit. This is a crucial part of the process. This documentation:

- serves as an interim finding aid, for occasions when a record needs to be retrieved before it has been entered in the records management database.
- acts as an initial receipt for the department to show that the records have been deposited.
- maintains the evidential integrity of the record.
- helps records management staff to populate the database and exercise control over the records.

Careful consideration should be given to the level of detail on your records deposit form in each case. For some material, a rough box description may be appropriate. For example, if your deposit consisted of four boxes containing invoices for a financial year, the only description of the contents you might need on the records deposit form would be:

“Invoices, 2013-14”;

while all that would be required on the box list would be

“Invoices, first quarter 2013-14”
“Invoices, second quarter 2013-14”, etc.

Usually, though, a file level description will be more appropriate, describing each file in the box.

Remember that the detail that you include at this stage is that which will be on all subsequent finding aids. With the first of the above examples, for instance, anyone wishing to retrieve an individual invoice would not be able to: records management staff would only be able to retrieve the appropriate box, and you would need to search through it yourself to find the document that you wanted. If records are properly listed to file level, however, the exact file would be immediately retrievable.

If you have a finding aid which already records all the information required for the box list that may be an acceptable alternative to filling out box lists. Please speak to the Records Manager prior to deposit to discuss if you feel that this may apply.

Keep a copy of all the deposit documentation: this will act as your copy of a receipt and make it easier to find material in the period before it is entered onto the system.

The records deposit documentation is all available on the Records Management pages of the intranet

There are examples of “model documentation” on the Records Management page of the intranet, but if you have any further questions please do not hesitate to ask Records Management staff..

3.7 Conclusion

It might seem that the requirements for work on your records prior to their deposit is onerous, but it is essential to ensure that the records are in a fit state so as to allow the subsequent smooth management of the material in the store.

Most records will be in a perfectly adequate state to be transferred to the store. For the remainder, a little work now will result in proper control of, and easier access to, your records in the years ahead and their prompt disposal at the end of their life.

4 Managing Records in the store

All records in the store are held securely and in appropriate environmental conditions. Only Records Management staff have access to the store, and are solely responsible for carrying out the management functions detailed in this section.

A database to manage the processes of locating, retrieving, securing, scheduling, and disposing of records covers all the records in the store.

After deposit, all records will be processed into the records system, with each checked against its deposit and box list description, given an individual file label and each box allocated a specific location on the shelves.

Records Management staff can produce a consignment list which will detail each accession of records. Additionally, reports can be generated on demand, detailing holdings, disposals, retrievals, etc, and structured by department, function, file type, date, etc.

Provided details have been properly entered on the accession form at time of deposit, records management staff will then be able to search for records on any of the following:

- file name
- records store reference number
- original departmental reference number
- dates, etc.

and will then retrieve records for the depositing department.

While records staff are responsible for locating records down to the listed level of description, it is up to staff who wish to retrieve records to interrogate them to find a higher level of information. For example, if a department is dealing with a Freedom of Information request, or if they are uncertain of in which record they might find a specific piece of information, it would be up to Records Management staff to locate the specified boxes or files, but up to the retrieving officer to search through the individual records.

Records staff will dispose of all records in accordance with their retention schedules and with careful consideration of both the confidentiality of the material and of broader environmental issues. Please note that, after the adoption of a retention schedule as described above, no further authorisation to destroy records requires to be sought.

A permanent record of disposals is maintained.

5 Retrieving Records

As stated above, records can be retrieved by the depositing department at any time during the entire period of their retention. Files can be immediately located at any time that records staff are at the store.

It should be noted, however, that this is not full time, and that the store is only manned on an occasional basis. On occasion, urgent retrievals may be required when there are no records staff at the store. Staff will endeavor to facilitate these wherever possible.

To retrieve a record, the retrieving officer should fill in a file retrieval slip. Again, this is in triplicate: retain one copy yourself, the Records Manager will retain one copy, and the final copy remains in place of the file until it is returned.

Alternatively, you can phone records staff and pass on the details of the record(s) you require.

Files can then be uplifted at a mutually convenient time.

As noted under "Depositing Records: fill out deposit documentation", the detail of retrieval can only be as good as that on your original documentation at the time of deposit. If files were deposited under "old records, 2013-4", records staff would not then be able to retrieve an individual file at a later date: the entire deposit would need to be retrieved and the retrieving officer would need to go through that themselves to locate the individual file.

Normally, any officer in a depositing section or department would be authorised to retrieve any file deposited by that department or section provided that it was required for a properly authorised business purpose. Some material, however, such as certain social work files, may require higher levels of security. In such cases, this matter should be discussed with Records Management staff and noted on the accession forms and restrictions on security can be agreed as appropriate: for example limiting future access to staff in a particular section or to those in a specified department and at or above a particular grade.

If there is any doubt as to whether an individual is authorised to access a record, Records Management staff will contact the depositing officer and discuss the matter with them.

The records management database monitors retrievals, and reminders for records which have been borrowed but not returned are issued after a specified period. This maintains an audit log of the location, retrieval and return of records at the store.

6 Electronic records and alternative media

There is, at present, no established facility for the storage of electronic records or alternative media; please contact the Senior Information and Improvement Officer to discuss if any issues arise in this area.

7 Historic Archives

While the main function of the records store is to provide management and storage for semi-current records, some limited provision is also made for the storage of historic archives.

A retention schedule describes how long a record should remain in the records management system. It should also state what will happen to that record at the end of this period. Normally, this will simply be “D”, or destroy. A small proportion of the Council’s records, however, will have been identified as appropriate for transfer at that stage to archival status to be held permanently as part of the Council’s historic archives.

In such cases, the management of such material will at that time pass to the Senior Information and Improvement Officer. In practice this would mean, for example, that if there was a request to view records management files from a department other than that which had created it, or a similar request from another agency or a member of the public, it would be the responsibility of the depositing department to authorise and facilitate such a request. The management, movement and access to historic archives, however, will be the responsibility of the Senior Information and Improvement Officer.

Historic archives of appropriate local relevance come not only as an end-product of the records management system, but are also accepted from throughout the Council, from other institutions, or from the general public (all of course, subject to the limitations of space and in accordance with the adopted archival accession policy).