

# Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service

## Records of Town and Parish Councils and Parish Meetings

### A note of guidance on their retention and preservation

Records are an essential part of your Council's business, and you are required by law to keep certain records, as well as comply with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Records need to be cared for so they can be accessed as needed and do not deteriorate with time.

A small proportion of your records merit permanent preservation as archives because of the unique evidence they contain about your community. These guidelines have been produced to offer advice on what to keep, for how long and finally what to do when they are no longer needed for business purposes.

### Tips to keep your records safe:

- **Have a policy and procedures for your records which identifies the records you create, what form they are kept in, who needs access and how long they should be kept**
- **Consider the physical conditions in which you create and store records**

Paper records are vulnerable to damage particularly from damp or poor storage conditions and careless handling. To counter these problems:

- Store your records in a clean, dry environment with reasonable ventilation  
Keep them out of direct sunlight
- Avoid the use of metal clips (which can rust), rubber bands and adhesive tape (which perish or dry out) or plastic bags (which are acidic and will stop ventilation and hasten the decay of paper).
- When a record is known to be for permanent preservation (e.g. minutes) try to use the best quality paper and ink that you can (acid free paper and avoid biro ink). Unfortunately, much recycled paper, which there are good reasons to use for items not to be permanently preserved, is very acidic.
- Use sturdy storage boxes
- Keep the store locked
- List the records so they can be found without damaging rummaging
- Don't allow items to be 'borrowed' and separated from the main body of the records

Electronic storage is becoming the norm for many record series and this brings its own problems. Records in this form are very vulnerable to sudden loss, corruption or damage.

- Keep them secure and protect passwords
- Don't rely purely on storage on disk for prime records
- Back up vital records on a server and check them regularly to ensure they can still be opened.
- Ensure you migrate data when you change systems so older records are still accessible
- Keep metadata (e.g. when created, by whom, format etc.) with the records to ensure they can be put in context.
- Keep important records as .pdf files rather than in 'Word'.

## Retention Guidance:

The following schedule attempts to list the main types of parish and town council records and to give recommendations for their retention and disposal.

Where complete and detailed series of minute books and general accounts have survived there should be less need to preserve other records, but individual clerks will be best placed to judge which documents relate to significant or contentious local issues about which more detailed information needs to be preserved.

## Final action:

Where no term of years is indicated records should be kept until the day-to-day administrative use to your Council has ceased. At that point, or after the indicated term of years, the following actions are indicated:

**P** means preserve **permanently**: deposit in the Record Office

**D** means destroy when no longer needed. Ensure documents are destroyed confidentially by shredding. Many routine documents can be destroyed after a few years. These include many financial records which can be destroyed after the audit period of 6 years, and many administrative files that can be reviewed after about 5 years and routine material disposed of.

**R** means where the recommendation is **review** you will need to consider any remaining evidential value. Then, in conjunction with Record Office staff, any long-term historical value can be assessed. The role of the local clerk is vital to identify material that is of particular local significance, but where this may not be obvious to an outsider. There may be cases where the Record Office does not consider an item to be of value, but the Parish Council still chooses to retain it in its own custody.

Remember, Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service is always happy to discuss and advise on issues relating to the storage or disposal of your records. Any archives deposited will remain the property of your Council. You will receive an initial receipt for any deposit and in due course a more detailed list will be prepared. You are welcome to use our original archive area during staffed hours to consult your records, but if any item needs to be temporarily withdrawn back into your custody we can make appropriate arrangements.

## Schedule

Type of record	Minimum Retention Period	Final action	Notes
<b>Administration</b>			
Minutes of council/meeting and committees (signed series)	Permanent	<b>P</b>	
Agendas	End of administrative use	<b>D</b>	Consider <b>P</b> if minutes don't survive
Reports/documents circulated with agendas	Keep as related agendas	<b>D</b>	But <b>R</b> if not with signed minutes
Councillors' declarations of Office	2 years from end of term of office	<b>D</b>	But <b>P</b> if minutes don't survive
Councillors' register of interests	18 months from end of appointment	<b>R</b>	
Routine correspondence and papers	End of administrative use	<b>R</b>	Possible representative sample
Correspondence and papers on important local issues and activities	End of administrative use	<b>P</b>	At Clerk's discretion in consultation with Archives
Planning applications for minor works	End of administrative use	<b>D</b>	
Planning applications and related papers for major and/or controversial developments	End of administrative use	<b>P</b>	At Clerk's discretion in consultation with Archives
Planning appeal decisions	6 years from conclusion of appeal	<b>D</b>	
Staff files	6 years after left employment, unless there are potential health or tribunal issues (keep until age 65)	<b>D</b>	
Ballot papers	6 months from close of poll	<b>D</b>	Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) (Amendment) Rules 2004,s.48(1)
Nomination forms for candidates	6 months from close of poll	<b>D</b>	
Register of electors	End of administrative use	<b>D</b>	
<b>Legal and Property</b>			
Byelaws and orders	permanent	<b>P</b>	One copy
Grouping orders	End of administrative use	<b>R</b>	Held in County series
Title deeds (more than 100 years old)	permanent	<b>P</b>	Clerk to retain deeds required for proof of title
Title deeds (less than 100 years old)	As required for title	<b>R</b>	

<b>Type of record</b>	<b>Minimum Retention Period</b>	<b>Final action</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Contracts, wayleaves, agreements and other legal deeds other than title deeds	Permanent	<b>R</b>	
Insurance policies	40 years from end of policy	<b>R</b>	
Property register/terrier	Permanent	<b>P</b>	
Maps, plans and surveys	Permanent	<b>P</b>	
Maps created under the provisions of the Rights of Way Act, 1932	Permanent	<b>P</b>	
Tenders and quotations (successful) – for contracts under hand	6 years after term of contract has expired	<b>D</b>	Statute of Limitations
Tenders and quotations (successful) - for contracts under seal	12 years after term of contract has expired	<b>D</b>	Statute of Limitations
Tenders and quotations (unsuccessful)	1 year after start of contract	<b>D</b>	
Boundary change plans and correspondence	Permanent	<b>P</b>	
<b>Financial</b>			
Account books and receipt and payment books	6 years from end of current financial year	<b>P</b>	
Precept books and contribution orders	6 years from end of current financial year	<b>D</b>	
Financial returns to District Auditors	6 years from end of current financial year	<b>D</b>	But if general accounts do not survive, P
Rent books	6 years from end of current financial year	<b>D</b>	But if general accounts do not survive, R
Cash and petty cash books	6 years from end of current financial year	<b>D</b>	
Vouchers	6 years from end of current financial year	<b>R</b>	Possible sample
Receipt books (various)	6 years from end of current financial year	<b>D</b>	
Postage and telephone books	6 years from end of current financial year	<b>D</b>	
Bank statements	Last completed audit year	<b>D</b>	

<b>Type of record</b>	<b>Minimum Retention Period</b>	<b>Final action</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Paying-in books	Last completed audit year	<b>D</b>	
Cheque book stubs	Last completed audit year	<b>D</b>	
Paid invoices	6 years from end of current financial year	<b>D</b>	
Paid cheques	6 years from end of current financial year	<b>D</b>	
VAT records	6 years from end of current financial year	<b>D</b>	
Time sheets	Last completed audit year	<b>D</b>	
Wage books	12 years	<b>D</b>	
Members' allowance register	6 years from end of current financial year	<b>D</b>	
Lettings of parish halls, recreation grounds, applications to hire etc	6 years from end of current financial year	<b>D</b>	
Scale of fees and charges	5 years after new fees introduced	<b>D</b>	
<b>Miscellaneous</b>			
Community magazines/newsletters	Permanent	<b>P</b>	One copy of each
Press cuttings books	Permanent	<b>P</b>	This does not imply a duty to compile such volumes
Photographs	Permanent	<b>R</b>	Need to be identifiable and dated
<b>Records of other or predecessor bodies</b>			
Any records dating from before 1894 now held by the Council/Meeting (e.g. Poor law, vestry, surveyors of the highway, inclosure)	Permanent	<b>P</b>	It is advised that these are transferred to the Archives as soon as possible
Records of other bodies such as burial boards, charities, fire brigades, Home Guard units, local societies or ad hoc committees	Permanent	<b>R</b>	

Type of record	Minimum Retention Period	Final action	Notes
Reports, guides, handbooks etc received from other organisations	End of administrative use	R	
Records listed in the Local Authorities Cemetery Order 1977, S.12	End of administrative use	R	Where the Council or Meeting is a Burial Authority