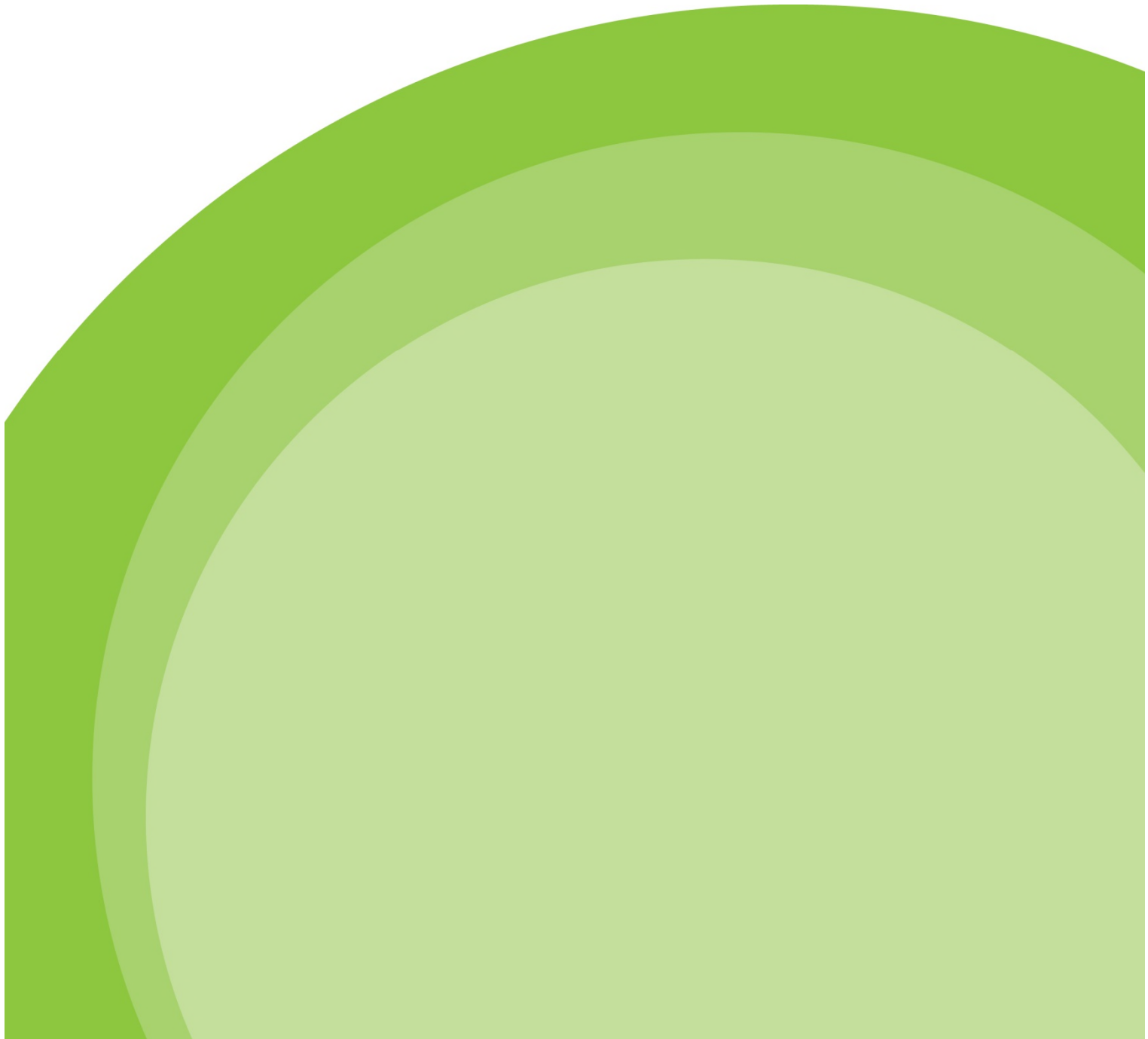




A Guide to Records Management

July 2016



A guide to Records Management

A record is defined as 'information created, received and maintained as evidence and information by an organisation or person, in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business'¹.

Records can be in any format such as paper files, excel documents, business & information systems (such as case management, finance geographical information systems) and website contents.

Why Are Records Kept

Organisations keep records to provide information about what happened, what was decided and how to do things. It ensures current and future staff have something to refer to.

'Records and information are the lifeblood of any organisation. They are the basis on which decisions are made, services provided and policies developed and communicated'¹.

If well kept, records are a reliable source of evidence and information.

What is records management?

Records management is a process that is used to ensure that reliable evidence of actions and decisions are kept and that they remain accessible for use when needed.

It does not exist in isolation but it connected to other functions such as management of personal information for compliance with the Data Protection Act, Information Security and Information Assurance.

Why is Records Management Important?

Good records management provides several benefits, one of which is that it will assist the council with the compliance of FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) and the EIR (Environmental Information Regulations).

Some other benefits are:

- It ensure that information on past activities can be located and used for current business

- It supports compliance with other legislation and rules that the council have to adhere to
- It provide more effective use of resources e.g. disposing of records that are no longer required, or outside of there retention period, both physical space in buildings and virtual space on our servers. It also reduces the time that staff will spend trying to locate the information they require

There are also several risks that come with not using good records management:

- Poor decisions can be made based on incomplete or inadequate information
- Financial loss due to unreliable information
- Reputational damage due to criticism from the Information Commissioner for failing to comply the legislation he regulates
- Handle confidential information with the incorrect level of security
- Failure to protect information vital to the continued function of the organisation
- Costs incurred due to storing information no longer required and/or staff wasting time considering issues which have already been addressed and resolved

Records Management Policy

Central Bedfordshire Council has a records management policy which can be found on the [Information Governance](#) pages on the intranet.

Storage and Maintenance of Records

We must ensure that the method we use to store records is not only security from damage and unauthorised access but that it is appropriate to the record.

Times are changing and the aim is for Central Bedfordshire Council to have all of their records stored digitally. There are several reasons for this e.g. cost saving on off site storage and ease of access.

Due to this, where possible, your records should be stored on either the s: drive or our cloud storage system BOX.

Any records that cannot currently be scanned in should be stored in a location that is

- Secure
- Dry
- Away from direct sunlight
- Off the ground

CBC is currently using Stor-a-file as our preferred off-site storage provider therefore paper files can be stored with them via ECM.

ECM guidance is available on [intranet](#).

For more information on how to do this please contact the [Information Hub Team](#) via email.

Security and Access

Access to information is another important part of good records management. The council, and its staff, have a responsibility to ensure that confidential information is stored securely and that only authorised personnel have access to it. By using CBC's records management processes this will help to ensure this.

Why we dispose of Records

Disposal, or destruction, of records is another important part of records management. It ensures that the council keeps records for as long as required whether this for a business requirement or to adhere to legislation. Some benefits are:

- It avoids unnecessary storage costs
- Supports compliance to various legislations
- Makes finding and retrieving information quicker and easier
- Makes responding to FOI requests more effective

Deciding what is to happen to a record and the duration of how long we have to keep it is based on the councils [Document Retention Schedule](#).

There are 2 things that can be done with a record after it is no longer required:

- Securely disposed of via approved methods
- Offered to County Archives Service for permanent preservation

How to dispose of a records

As discussed above once records reach the end of their retention period we are required to either dispose of these records or offer them to County Archives.

Secure Disposal

Paper files can be securely destroyed via the blue bins that can be found in CBC offices or using a shredder is one is available to you in the office. If your document is stored with either of our off-site storage providers you should

- Withdraw the record/s
- Ensure it is the correct record
- Advise off-site provider of permanent withdrawal
- Destroy securely within a CBC office

Offer to National Archives

CBC's archiving service is run by Bedford Borough Council. There are some records that this service would like to permanently preserve once they have reached the end of their retention period, please see [Historical Records of Interest](#) and the councils [Document Retention Schedule](#), appendix 1, for examples. This service also keeps records that have a retention period of permanent.

All records that are destroyed or transferred must be recorded on the transfer and destruction register which should be kept and updated by each area. It should then be sent through to CBC's Records and Risk Officer at the end of the month where they will be recorded on the Master transfer and destruction register.



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