

## **BEDFORD GROUP OF DRAINAGE BOARDS**

### **Incorporating Bedfordshire and River Ivel IDB, Buckingham and River Ouzel IDB and Alconbury and Ellington IDB**

## **DOCUMENT RETENTION AND DISPOSAL POLICY**

### **Introduction**

Records are vital assets which need careful management to enable the Boards to conduct their business and comply with their statutory obligations. This policy sets out the arrangements for records management.

The effective management of records in all formats depends as much on their efficient disposal as well as their long-term preservation. The untimely destruction of records may adversely affect service delivery but so will the unnecessary retention of outdated and potentially inaccurate records. Disposal is necessary not only to reduce administrative burdens but also to ensure that information is not retained for longer than necessary and that accurate records are maintained for appropriate periods to satisfy applicable operational and legal requirements.

This policy is important to contribute to compliance with the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts.

The Data Protection Act 1998 requires that personal data must be:

- adequate, relevant and not excessive;
- accurate and where necessary kept up to date; and
- not kept for longer than is necessary for its purpose.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 provides rights of access to information held by public bodies and the link between that Act and effective records management will be immediately apparent. The quality of the records which are held will affect the ability to respond to requests under the Act. If records are not created and managed effectively then they will not be found when needed.

### **Retention Periods**

The Retention Schedule which forms part of this policy sets out the length of time that records should be retained, irrespective of the media on which they are created or held including:

- paper;
- electronic files (including databases, Word documents, spreadsheets, web pages and e-mails); and
- photographs and videotapes.

Retention periods are determined based upon the nature of the information held, not the medium in which it is maintained. For example, information which is held in electronic form should only be retained for the same period as it would be kept if it was in paper form. However, it is not necessary to retain both paper and electronic versions of the same record, nor to retain duplicate copies of records. Retention arrangements for electronic records should ensure that they will remain complete, unaltered and accessible throughout the retention period.

The value of information tends to decline over time, so the majority of records should only be retained for a limited period of time and eventually be destroyed. A recommended minimum retention period, derived from operational or legal requirements, is provided for each category of record and applies to all records within that category.

During their retention period, operational needs may require records to be held in different locations and on different media, but they should always be properly managed in accordance with this policy.

A small proportion of records which are considered to be of permanent historical significance will be preserved in the archives. The Chief Executive is responsible for the selection of records for permanent preservation and the maintenance of the archives.

No data file or record should be retained for more than six years after it is closed unless a good reason for longer retention can be demonstrated. It may well be appropriate having regard to the nature of the record to opt for a shorter period.

Reasons for longer retention will include the following:

- Statute requires retention for a longer period;
- the record contains information relevant to legal action which has been started or is in contemplation;
- whenever there is a possibility of litigation, the records and information that are likely to be affected should not be amended or disposed of until the threat of litigation has been removed ;
- the record should be archived for historical or research purposes, e.g. the record relates to an important policy development or relates to an event of local or national purpose;
- the records are maintained for the purpose of retrospective comparison; and
- the records relate to individuals or providers of services who are judged unsatisfactory. The individuals may include employees who have been the subject of serious disciplinary action

### **Storage**

All data and records should be stored as securely as possible in order to avoid potential misuse or loss. All data and records will be stored in the most convenient and appropriate location having regard to the period of retention required and the frequency with which access will be made to the record.

Data and records which are active should be stored in the most appropriate place for their purpose. Data and records which are no longer active, due to their age or subject, should be stored in the most appropriate place for their purpose.

The degree of security required for file storage will reflect the sensitivity and confidential nature of any material recorded.

Any data file or record which contains personal data of any form can be considered as confidential in nature.

### **Disposal**

Records should be reviewed as soon as possible after the expiry of the retention period. It need not be a detailed or time consuming exercise but there must be a considered appraisal of the contents of the record.

A record should not be destroyed without verification that:

- no work is outstanding in respect of that record and it is no longer required;
- the record does not relate to any current or pending complaint, investigation, dispute or litigation; or
- the record is unaffected by any current or pending request made under the Freedom of Information Act or Data Protection Act.

A record must be made of all disposal decisions and destruction should be carried out in a manner that preserves the confidentiality of the record. Confidential paper records should be placed in confidential waste bins and electronic records will need to be either physically destroyed or erased

to the current standard. Deletion of electronic files is not sufficient. All copies of a record, in whatever format, should be destroyed at the same time.

### **Variation**

Information needs are dynamic and therefore this policy is a “living document” which will be amended as the need arises.

Any review of retention periods should take account of relevant statutory and legal requirements and consideration of the overall operational value of records, including:

- on-going operational, accountability and audit needs;
- best practice in the applicable professional field;
- the probability of future use;
- the long-term historical or research value of the record;
- the costs of retention or destruction; and
- the risks associated with retaining or destroying the record.

### **Other Records**

Many records have no significant operational or evidential value and are not subject to retention under this policy but may be destroyed once they have served their primary purpose. These include:

- requests for forms and brochures;
- compliment slips and similar items which accompany documents;
- superseded distribution or mailing lists;
- drafts of documents;
- working papers which are the basis of the content of other documents;
- notices of meetings and other events;
- invitations and notices of acceptance or apologies; and
- magazines, marketing materials, catalogues, directories, etc.

This is not an exhaustive list but merely indicates the types of record which have no significant operational or evidential value and may be destroyed once their effective use has ended.

### **Record Retention Schedule**

Board and Legal Records	Permanent
Articles of Incorporation	Permanent
By-Laws	Permanent
Agenda, Reports and Minutes of Meetings	Permanent
Policy statements	Permanent
Licenses Active/Expired	6 years after expiration
Deeds and Legal Agreements	Permanent
Bylaw Consents	Permanent
Leases Active/Expired	6 years after expiration
Contracts Active/Expired	6 years after expiration
<u>Employee Applications and Employment Listings</u>	
Job Announcements and Advertisements	2 years
Documentation on Individuals not hired	2 years
Individuals who are hired Active	+ 5 years
Individual employee files and wage history Active	+ 6 years

Personal Files / Payroll Records

Employee files/documentation	Permanent
Salary or current rate of pay Active	+ 6 years
Payroll Deductions Active	+ 6 years
Timesheets /expense claims Active	3 years
Employee manuals / Handbook	Permanent
Copy Payslips	6 years
End of year payslip, tax and pension returns	Permanent

Accounts and Financial Records

Sales and Purchase Ledger Records	6 years
VAT Returns	6 years
Year End accounting records	Permanent
Nominal Ledgers	6 years
Account Ledgers	6 years
Auditor's reports	Permanent
Bank Statements	6 years
Investment Details	Permanent
Expired Supplier BACs Details	1 Year

Rating /Land Records

Land maps	Permanent
Land Valuation	Permanent
Ratepayer Active/Expired	6 Years after expiration

Electronic Documents

Emails	2 years or longer if deemed necessary
Facsimiles	2 years

This policy will be reviewed with a period not extending beyond 5 years.

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