



Surrey Heath Borough Council

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000

Records Management Policy and Procedures

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Key Definitions**
- 3. Policy Statements**
- 4. Responsibilities**
- 5. Creation of Records**
- 6. Maintenance of Records**
- 7. Retention and Disposal of Records**
- 8. Further Guidance**

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (“the Act”) is intended to promote a culture of openness and accountability amongst public authorities by giving people rights of access to information held by those authorities.
- 1.2 The Act imposes two main obligations on the Council.
- 1.3 The first obligation is that the Council has to adopt and maintain a publication scheme that sets out details of information it will routinely make available, how the information can be obtained and whether there is a charge for it. The Council’s publication scheme was adopted by full Council on the 18 December 2002 and approved by the Information Commissioner in February 2003.
- 1.4 The second obligation is that from 1 January 2005, any person who makes a request to the Council for information must be informed whether the Council holds that information and, subject to certain exemptions, be supplied with that information.
- 1.5 In his Code of Practice on the Management of Records issued under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Lord Chancellor states: -

“Any freedom of information legislation is only as good as the quality of the records to which it provides access. Such rights are of little use if reliable records are not created in the first place, if they cannot be found when needed or if the arrangements for their eventual archiving or destruction are inadequate.”

- 1.6 Whilst the Council presently does not operate an electronic document and records management system it however recognises that good records management is also essential to its everyday “business” needs. The Council has adopted this policy in order to assist it in discharging its functions under the Act.

2.0 KEY DEFINITIONS

- 2.1 A “record” is information held by the Council that relates to a specific topic, area of work or an individual. The record can be held in paper or electronic format.
- 2.2 “Records Management” is the planning, control, organisation and training activities relating to the creation, distribution, utilisation, storage, retrieval, maintenance, protection, preservation and final disposal of all types of records required for the conduct of the Council’s activities.

3.0 POLICY STATEMENTS

- 3.1 The Council recognises that its records are an important public asset and a key resource for the effective conduct of its activities.
- 3.2 The Council is committed to the creation, keeping and management of records that properly document its principal activities.

4.0 RESPONSIBILITIES

- 4.1 Service Heads shall ensure that adequate arrangements are in place for the proper management of records in their service areas.

- 4.2 Each Service Head must therefore identify the record keeping requirements of his or her service area. A records management system that meets these requirements shall be maintained in each service area (a single system may fulfil this requirement for more than one service area). These arrangements shall be documented.
- 4.3 The Head of Legal and Support Services shall have lead responsibility for records management within the Council. He/she shall be responsible for monitoring that each service area has introduced, and is operating, appropriate records management systems.
- 4.4 Pending the appointment of the Head of Legal and Support Services, the Executive Head of Corporate Services shall undertake the lead responsibility.

5.0 CREATION OF RECORDS

- 5.1 Records should be created and captured in a timely manner. This should either be done by someone who has direct knowledge of the event or transaction, or generated automatically as part of a routine operation of a computerised system.
- 5.2 Records should be complete and accurate enough to allow staff (and their successors) to undertake all actions for which they are responsible.

6.0 MAINTENANCE OF RECORDS

- 6.1 The movement and location of records should be controlled to ensure that:-
- the record can be easily retrieved at any time,
 - any outstanding issues can be dealt with, and
 - there is an audit trail to record transactions.
- 6.2 Storage accommodation for records should be clean and tidy, prevent damage to the records, and protect against unauthorised access.
- 6.3 A contingency or business recovery plan should be in place to provide protection for records that are vital to the continued functioning of the Council.

7.0 RETENTION AND DISPOSAL OF RECORDS

- 7.1 Retention periods for all records should be determined and recorded. These should be based on statutory requirements, codes of practice, common sense and the periods contained in "Retention Guidelines for Local Authorities" published by the Records Management Society of Great Britain (2003). The Council's Record Retention and Disposal Schedule is attached as Annex 1.
- 7.2 At the end of the retention period, the record should be assessed to see whether it ought to be selected for permanent preservation, e.g. if it is of historical interest. Such records should either be retained by the Council or be offered to the Surrey History Centre for archiving.
- 7.3 Records not selected for permanent preservation should be destroyed in as secure a manner as is necessary for the level of confidentiality that relates to them. A written record showing the reference, Service Heads shall maintain description and date of destruction of these records.

8.0 FURTHER GUIDANCE

- 8.1 Further guidance on records management can be obtained from Mrs Lesley Dolan, Legal Services Practice Manager/Data Protection Officer who may be contacted by email lesley.dolan@surreyheath.gov.uk or telephone 01276 707342 or the Legal Services Team.