Paper and Electronic File House-Keeping

All Council employees have a responsibility for managing the records they create, receive and use in the course of their work. To compliment the background file maintenance work that is already carried out by ICT, it is good practice to perform file housekeeping tasks. This will enable you to self-monitor and ensure that you are managing Council records in the best way possible. It will help to support your own working, that of your colleagues and fulfil the information and record keeping requirements of you, your team, your service and the Council as a whole.

1. Managing Personal Drives

It is bad practice to save Council records on 'P' or 'C' drives as these are not easily accessible to anyone other than you. Impacts of this include wasted time searching for inaccessible information, file duplication, compromised decision making due to incomplete information and compromising of compliance with Data Protection and Freedom of Information requirements.

If you do have any Council records on the "P" or "C" drives, please review these and move them to a more suitable and accessible drive.

2. Tidying Up Your Email

While email is a very effective communication and distribution tool, poor email working practices can also impact adversely on your productivity and lead to stock piles of temporary information that very quickly becomes obsolete, scattered with isolated valuable business records.

Email storage and management is not free to the Council. Costs need to be considered by all employees and along with operational efficiencies, should provide the impetus to maintain your emails in an efficient way. Applying the following good housekeeping rules to your email inbox and sent items will help your email work for you and the Council rather than against you.

- Use your inbox only to store those emails that have still to be actioned. You can organise and prioritise tasks by creating personal 'to do' lists. Using the 'To Do' function in Lotus Notes allows you to organise personal 'To Do' items and schedule group 'To Do' tasks. For further guidance, choose the 'To Do' option on your Lotus Notes home page. By choosing the function key F1 you can access information about this task.

- Save any emails and attachments that are business records to the appropriate location on the shared drive and remember your sent items too as this will also contain records that will need to be accessed for information and evidence in the future. Follow this link to view 'Saving an email'.

  http://cmssql.eastdunbarton.gov.uk/Intranet/pdf/CROD%20Cust%20Serv/CROD-CS%20Saving%20an%20email.pdf

- Regularly clear out emails in in-boxes, sent items and private folders.

- Where appropriate, use Quickplace to share project work with large or complicated communication workstreams.

3. Tidying Up Shared Server Drives

Many of the electronic documents saved on shared drives will only need to be retained for a short period of time and can be destroyed as soon as they are no longer of immediate business use. Only retain documents and records according to the appropriate retention and disposal policy. Guidance from the Scottish Council on Archives will assist.

http://www.scoarch.org.uk/projects/retentionschedules/retentionschedules

When performing a clear out, either on your own or as a team exercise, use the following list to identify items that can be routinely be destroyed after immediate business use:

- Files kept "just in case".
- Convenience copies of policies, procedures, guidance, memos etc.
- Files that have been downloaded from the Council intranet and internet.
- Files which have been created for temporary use and for one-off exercises to do calculations, data manipulations, labels, signs, posters, etc.
- Information collected for a specific project long completed and for which you were not the lead officer or where specific issues have been resolved.
- Files of a personal nature, e.g. photos, social events, joke, etc. – these should never be saved on a shared drive.

4. Misfiling and Misnaming

When we are in a rush it is easy to misfile information or name files in a way that, at a later date, makes no sense to ourselves or others. Also, when we can't work out which folder to save a file to, it is tempting to create a new one, e.g. miscellaneous or general. Unfortunately, this leads to us losing information and wasting time trying to find and potentially recreate the information. The guidance note entitled 'Naming Electronic Records' sets out good practice naming conventions and should be adopted to aid indexing and retrieval of files.

http://cmssql.eastdunbarton.gov.uk/Intranet/pdf/CROD%20Cust%20Serv/Naming%20Electronic%20Records%20V1-0.pdf

Guidance on structuring and managing the shared drive provides guidance on setting up effective filing systems.

http://cmssql.eastdunbarton.gov.uk/Intranet/pdf/CROD%20Cust%20Serv/Information%20managment%20strategy%20employee%20guidance.pdf

When you come across paper and electronic files that have been misfiled, take the time to move them to the correct place. If you come across files that need be opened in order to find out what they are about then clearly the file name could be more meaningful. Again take the time to rename the file to aid future retrieval.

Team Leaders should monitor the use of folders and file naming conventions and organise staff training and clear-up sessions to ensure that the effective and efficient file creation, filing and naming becomes part of normal working practice.

5. Paper Filing Systems - Retention and Disposal

It is very easy for piles of paper to build up on your desk and filing area. The volume and length of time this paperwork is left will have a detrimental effect on the proper management and disposal proced of and the longer it will take to find what you still need to keep. Use the appropriate records retention and disposal schedule to list the files that should be routinely destroyed. This list should be stored in the shared drive to allow employees to refer when reviewing personal and team paper files held in the office. Teams should destroy those records that no longer need to be kept and file those that do in the appropriate paper filing location. Move paper records that need to be kept but no longer need to be accessed to the appropriate off-site records storage area.

Formal paper filing collections should be monitored for accuracy of filing on a regular basis. Misfiled records should be refiled and training provided on good paper filing practice where required.

6. Guide to Records of Potential Historical Value

6.1 Purpose of Guidance

The purpose of this guidance is to help Services identify records of potential historical value when reviewing records for disposal either as part of office moves or clear outs or when implementing records retention schedules as part of normal working.

6.2 East Dunbartonshire Archives

The objective of East Dunbartonshire Archives is to preserve, and provide public access to, the official records which document how East Dunbartonshire Council and its predecessors have carried out their core functions and statutory duties. The Archives also collects other records of historical or research interest relating to East Dunbartonshire in general. East Dunbartonshire Leisure and Culture Trust manages the Archives on behalf of the Council.

6.3 Council Records of Archival Value

Archives are original records which have been selected for permanent preservation because of their continuing value. They provide evidence and information about past decisions, events, and activities. Council departments can identify which records have archival value by consulting the Records Retention Schedules. If the retention period is given as 'Permanent', and the records are no longer required for business purposes, they can be transferred to the Archives. If the Retention Schedule states 'Review for historical value' contact the Archivist who will decide if the records need to be retained or not.

6.4 Records of Archival Value Include:

- Original signed minutes and accounts
- High level strategies, policies and reports
- Statutory registers e.g. Building Standards Register, Planning Registers, Tree Preservation Orders
- Building plans
- School admission registers and log books
- Legal documents e.g. deeds, compulsory purchase records
- Records of landfill and contaminated waste sites
- Burial registers and lair plans
- Records of civic events e.g. photographs, text of speeches etc
- Corporate identity and branding e.g. artwork

6.5 Transferring Archival Records

If you identify official records that are no longer required for business purposes and may be of archival value, please contact the Archivist, Janice Miller on X6014418. The Archivist will determine whether or not the records can be transferred to the Archives. Records must be carefully packed in boxes with a list of contents. The Archivist will then complete a formal Transfer Agreement and give you a copy for your records.