

COLNEY HEATH PARISH COUNCIL

- ✉ **Postal Address:** Highfield Park Visitor Centre, Hill End Lane AL4 0RA
- ☎ **Telephone:** (01727) 825 314
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Records Management and Retention Policy

1. Introduction

Under Section 46 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (Code of Practice on the Management of Records), Colney Heath Parish Council (“the Council”) is committed to adopting best practices for the retention, management, and disposal of its documents and records. Effective records management ensures the availability of complete, accurate, and reliable information to meet legal, regulatory, and operational requirements, while promoting transparency and accountability.

This policy sets out how the Council will manage its records to ensure compliance with the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR), the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and other applicable laws.

2. Objectives

The purpose of this policy is to ensure:

- The Council keeps the records it needs for business, legal, and accountability purposes.
- Records are stored, retrieved, and disposed of in a consistent and controlled manner.
- The secure management of records, including access controls and retention schedules.
- Compliance with statutory requirements, including the FOIA, EIR, and GDPR.
- The efficient use of resources by retaining only necessary records and securely disposing of records when no longer required.

3. Key Elements of Good Records Management

The Council’s records management will be based on the following key elements:

a. Records Management Policy

The Council will have a formal records management policy, supported by appropriate organisational arrangements, to ensure consistent management of its records.

b. Retention of Records

The Council will retain records for business, legal, regulatory, and accountability purposes, ensuring they remain accessible and usable for as long as necessary.

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c. Storage and Retrieval

Records will be kept in systems that allow for easy retrieval. The Council will know what records it holds, where they are stored, and ensure they are usable for the required retention period.

d. Secure Storage

Records will be stored securely, with access controls in place to protect against unauthorised access, modification, or loss.

e. Retention and Disposal Schedule

The Council will define how long particular records are retained and will dispose of records in a controlled and secure manner when they are no longer needed. It will also ensure that it can explain why records have been disposed of or transferred to third parties.

f. Records Shared with Third Parties

Records shared with or held by third parties on behalf of the Council will be managed in accordance with the FOIA and GDPR regulations.

g. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed regularly to ensure it meets the current needs of the Council, including after major changes in technology or organisational structure.

h. Publication

The policy will be published to ensure transparency for members of the public regarding how the Council manages its records.

4. Handling Freedom of Information, Environmental Information, and Data Protection Requests

Requests for information under FOIA, EIR, or GDPR will be handled in accordance with statutory requirements. In line with best practice, any requested information will be retained for at least six months after the last communication about the request to allow for appeals or further inquiries.

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5. Paper Filing and Digital Systems

a. Filing and Labelling

Records stored in paper filing systems will be clearly labelled to reflect their nature and contents, ensuring easy retrieval. Records that are no longer frequently used but need to be retained long-term will be digitally scanned where appropriate.

b. Archiving

Records not required for immediate reference but necessary for long-term retention will be archived securely. Paper records will be transferred to an appropriate archive service, while electronic records will be backed up regularly.

c. Backup Procedures

The Council will maintain regular backups of digital records. Backups will be stored securely, with copies kept in separate locations to ensure data recovery in the event of an emergency.

d. Security and Access

Access to digital and physical records will be controlled and protected with passwords or physical security measures as appropriate.

e. Electronic Documentation

All supporting documents for Council meetings, including Agenda Supporting Documents (ASD) and emails, will be retained electronically. Where electronic records are accessible and regularly backed up, hard copies do not need to be retained.

6. Disposal of Records

a. Retention Periods

Records will be retained for as long as they are needed for legal, regulatory, or business purposes, in line with the Council's retention schedule (see Retention and Disposal Schedule). Once the retention period has expired, records will be securely destroyed.

b. Destruction of Records

The Parish Clerk is responsible for overseeing the secure destruction of records. Confidential or sensitive records will be destroyed by shredding or secure deletion (in the case of digital records).

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c. Record of Disposal

Details of record disposal will be maintained to ensure a complete audit trail, documenting which records have been destroyed, when, and by whom.

d. Review of Records for Destruction

If records not included in the retention schedule are identified for destruction, the Clerk will assess whether they should be destroyed or archived for preservation, documenting the decision and rationale.

e. Disposal of Ephemeral and Trivial Records

Ephemeral records, such as printouts of electronic documents, should be disposed of routinely. Trivial emails should be deleted immediately after they are no longer required.

7. Retention and Disposal Schedule

The following table outlines the minimum retention periods for specific records held by the Council:

Document	Minimum Retention Period	Reason
Council and Committee Minutes	Indefinite	Archive, Legal Requirement
Agendas and Supporting Papers	18 months	Administrative Purposes
Financial Records (Audit, Assets)	Indefinite	Audit, Management
Paid Invoices	6 years	VAT, Statutory Requirement
Bank Statements	Last completed audit year	Audit
Personnel Files	Indefinite	Management
Job Applications	6 months or as long as relevant	Administrative Purposes
General Correspondence	2 years minimum	Administrative Purposes

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8. Monitoring and Compliance

The Council will monitor compliance with this policy to ensure effective records management practices are in place. Regular audits will assess the effectiveness of the policy and ensure it meets statutory requirements.

9. Review and Publication

This policy will be reviewed annually or following major changes in legislation or Council operations. The policy will be published on the Council's website to ensure transparency and public accessibility.

10. Review

This policy ensures that Colney Heath Parish Council adheres to best practices for records management, ensuring compliance with statutory obligations and supporting efficient Council operations.

This policy was adopted by Full Council 31 October 2024 and will be reviewed in November 2026 or as required if until legislation changes.