

Summary

This factsheet intends to outline what records management is and why it is important to actively manage the records which are created and used. You will discover:

- The key principles involved in the application of records management
- Why it is important to manage records
- What the benefits of records management are
- What the risks are of not managing records
- Who is responsible for managing records

The guidance which follows is not prescriptive and should be adapted wherever necessary to meet local circumstances.

Definitions and key principles

Records are recorded information held in any format, created or received by an organisation in the course of its business and retained as evidence of its activities.

Records management is the efficient and systematic control of records, throughout their lifecycle. The management of records ensures efficiency and economy in their use, storage and disposal and the selection of those of value for permanent preservation.

The key principles of records management include:

- Records should be **created** that are accurate and complete in order to support work carried out.
- Records are **accessible** to those who need to see them and they can be easily retrieved as soon as they are required.
- Records should be held in **consistent** filing systems and be routinely **maintained** to remain in a good condition.
- Records must be held **securely** with appropriate levels of access applied to prevent unauthorised access.
- Records should not be retained unnecessarily. They should be held according to **agreed retention policies**, to ensure either timely disposal or transfer to a permanent archive.

Why is records management important?

Records can act as a testimony of the Churches various activities and as part of its continuing witness to Christians, those of other faiths and Society at large. Good records management practice is part of the Church's wider accountability to Society in relation to a wide area of responsibilities which include such diverse areas as demonstrating compliance with child protection legislation and the Church's commitment to preserving historic Churches. Records which are held should ideally reflect this complexity and diversity.

It is clear from this that one of the most valuable assets held by an organisation is the records they create and use. Records can support accountability and transparency, by providing evidence of decisions made and actions taken. They can also support current work by identifying and helping to understand previous experiences to assist with future decision making, and help to protect interests. Perhaps therefore most

importantly records management allows the fast access to records when needed with confidence of their accuracy.

What are the benefits of effective records management?

By investing time to employ the practices associated with records management, benefits include:

- **Time is saved** as good organisation aids quick and easy retrieval
- **Space is saved** by not retaining information longer than necessary
- **Quality of information is improved** by facilitating access to accurate and reliable records
- **Compliance is improved** by adhering to legal and regulatory requirements
- **Records vital to ongoing work are identified**, with those of an ephemeral nature prevented from accumulating
- **Records of archival value are clearly identified** for long term storage and preservation

What are the risks involved in not managing your records?

An inability to adequately manage records can be damaging to an organisation, with implications including financial loss, reputational damage, poor decision making, staff frustration and a risk that legal and regulatory requirements are not fulfilled.

It is important to note that the Church holds a considerable amount of personal information which must be managed in line with the Data Protection Act. Mishandling of this information not only has a risk of reputational damage, but now also a significant financial risk. This is due to increased powers of enforcement available to the Information Commissioner from late 2010, which has resulted in the issuing of 6-figure fines. For more information on this, look at the Data protection factsheet.

Who is responsible for records management?

All people working with an organisation's records have a responsibility to manage the records which they create and use. It is, however, strongly recommended that one named individual is responsible for co-ordinating the management of records. Whilst they may pass on responsibility for particular categories of records to others, they should have the overall control for records in an organisation or department. It is recommended that they should be responsible for authorising the opening of new paper files and electronic folders at the top level of a shared filing system. They should also routinely monitor use of filing systems to ensure best practice and the continued deployment of retention schedules. This will help to ensure consistency in the management of records held.

Factsheets available in the records management toolkit

- What is records management
- Organising your records
- Looking after your paper records
- Looking after your electronic records
- Looking after your emails
- Looking after your multimedia records

Records management toolkit
What is records management?

- Agreements with record offices
- Access to records
- Data protection
- Copying and copyright
- Glossary

Further guidance

For further guidance please contact the Church of England Record Centre:

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