

Dorset History Centre: Parish Council Records – Retention and Preservation guidance

Tips to keep your records safe:

- Have a policy and procedures for your records which identifies the records you create, what form they are kept in, who needs access and how long they should be kept
- Consider the physical conditions in which you create and store records

Paper records are vulnerable to damage particularly from damp or poor storage conditions and careless handling. To counter these problems:

- Store your records in a clean and dry environment with reasonable ventilation
- Keep them out of direct sunlight
- Avoid the use of metal clips (which can rust), rubber bands and adhesive tape (which perish or dry out) or plastic wallets, folders, and/or bags (which are acidic and will stop ventilation and hasten the decay of paper).
- When a record is known to be for permanent preservation (e.g. minutes) try to use the best quality paper and ink that you can (acid free paper and avoid biro ink).
- Unfortunately, much recycled paper, which there are good reasons to use for items not to be permanently preserved, is very acidic.
- Use sturdy storage boxes
- Keep the store locked
- List the records so they can be found without damaging whilst rummaging
- Don't allow items to be 'borrowed' and separated from the main body of the records

Electronic records and storage is now the standard for many record series and this brings its own problems. Records in this form are very vulnerable to sudden loss, corruption or damage.

- Keep them secure and protect passwords
- Don't rely purely on storage on disk for prime records
- Keep backups of vital records on a server and check them regularly to ensure they can still be opened.
- Ensure you migrate data when you change systems so older records are still accessible
- Keep metadata (e.g. when created, by whom, format etc.) with the records to ensure they can be put in context.
- Keep important records as pdf files rather than in 'Word'.

Retention Guidance:

The schedule accompanying these guidelines lists the main types of parish and town council records and gives recommendations for their retention and disposal. The following notes provide an explanation of the terms used in the schedule and give additional guidance to clerks on how to assess the records in their care.

Please recognise that storage at the Dorset History Centre has a cost to Dorset and BCP council and that records which will duplicate those supplied by the Councils' departments should not be included in records permanently retained.

Records to be preserved permanently at the Dorset History Centre (P)

Records in this category when no longer regularly consulted in the parish or town should be deposited in the Dorset History Centre. They are generally easy to identify; the obvious examples are the main series of signed council and committee minutes and the receipt of payment books. Other records may be less easy to select, in particular correspondence files on important local issues and planning applications and papers for major or controversial developments. Here individual clerks should be best placed to judge which documents relate to significant or contentious local issues about which more detailed information needs to be preserved. The following points, however, may assist clerks. Firstly, where detailed minutes survive there should be less need to preserve large amounts of correspondence. Secondly a filing system arranged by subject can ease considerably the process of selecting material on important issues. Lastly, important files can often be overloaded with material of an ephemeral nature; it is a good idea therefore to remove such papers from the files at a regular interval.

Records to be reviewed for possible permanent preservation (R)

Records in this category should be reviewed, either when the prescribed minimum retention period is over, or when they are no longer required in the parish or town for administrative purposes. In conjunction with History Centre staff, any long-term historical value can be assessed, and items of particular historic interest should be selected from these files for permanent retention. The role of the local clerk is vital to identify material that is of particular local significance, but where this may not be obvious to an outsider. There may be cases where the History Centre does not consider an item to be of value, but the Parish Council still chooses to retain it in its own custody

Records that may be destroyed by the parish or town clerk (D)

A large number of parish and town council records, mainly financial, may be safely disposed of by the parish or town clerk, usually after a minimum retention period prescribed for audit or other statutory purposes generally 6 years. Where no minimum period is given records in this category may be destroyed when they are no longer required in the parish or town council administrative purposes. We would recommend reviewing these files after 5 years or when an office holder retires if sooner. All documents should be treated as confidential waste and shredded.

Prior to Deposit

Material earmarked for deposit at the History Centre should be box-listed prior to being brought in, so that staff are aware of the potential quantity and types. The parish council retains ownership of the records; any items which following appraisal by DHC staff are deemed unsuitable for permanent preservation will be offered back to the council or destroyed securely, depending on what was agreed at time of deposit.

For any records not covered by the schedule below or for any material held in digital form, please ask History Centre staff for specific advice.

Records	Action	Minimum Retention Period	Reason
<u>Administration</u>			
Minutes of Council/meeting (signed series)	P	Transfer to DHC as soon as there is no longer an administrative requirement	
Reports and other documents circulated with agendas	R, but D if copies are included with signed minutes	Items of particular historic interest should be selected for permanent retention.	
Agendas	D, but P if minutes do not survive		
Councillors' declarations of office	P	Transfer to DHC as soon as there is no longer an administrative requirement	
Register of Interests	P	Transfer to DHC as soon as there is no longer an administrative requirement	
Grouping orders	R	Items of particular historic interest should be selected for permanent retention.	
Nominations forms parish council elections	D	[Ballot papers are destroyed after 6 months (statutory) so presumably nomination forms do not need to be kept for any length of time]	
Byelaws and orders	P, one copy of each	Transfer to DHC as soon as there is no longer an administrative requirement	
Policy documents	R	Items of particular historic interest should be selected for permanent retention.	
Title deeds	P	Transfer to DHC as soon as there is no longer an administrative requirement	

Property registers and terriers including registers of allotments	P	Transfer to DHC as soon as there is no longer an administrative requirement	
Maps, plans and surveys of property owned by the council or meeting	P	Transfer to DHC as soon as there is no longer an administrative requirement	
Correspondence and papers on important local issues or activities	R	Items of particular historic interest should be selected for permanent retention.	Note: these files should be heavily weeded
Routine correspondence and papers	R with the view to D	Items of particular historic interest should be selected for permanent retention.	Note: these files should be heavily weeded
Village/parish appraisals, plans and millennium projects	R with the view to P	Transfer to DHC as soon as there is no longer an administrative requirement	
Planning applications and related paper for <i>major controversial</i> developments; also planning appeal decisions	R with the view to D	Items of particular historic interest should be selected for permanent retention.	
Planning applications [general]	D	15 years	
Leases, agreements, contracts and wayleaves	R	Items of particular historic interest should be selected for permanent retention.	
Quotations and tenders (successful)	D	12 years	Statute of Limitation
Quotations and tenders (unsuccessful)	D	2 years	
Planning applications for minor works where permission is refused	D	6 years	Statute of Limitation
Scale of fees and charges	D	Once replaced by new charges	

Insurance policies and Risk assessments	D	7 years after expired	
Playground assessments	D	Once replaced by new charges	
Loan sanctions	D	6 years after end of loan	Statute of Limitation
Staff files	D	6 years after left employ unless through ill-health or industrial tribunal case (keep until person is 65)	
<u>Finance</u>			
Receipt and payment books	P	Transfer to DHC as soon as there is no longer an administrative requirement	
Vouchers before 1950	D	6 years	VAT
Financial returns to district auditors	D, but P if the receipt and payment books have not survived	Transfer to DHC as soon as there is no longer an administrative requirement	
Cash and petty cash books and rent books	D, but P if the receipt and payment books have not survived	6 years	Tax, VAT, Statute of Limitation
Receipt books of all kinds	D	6 years	VAT
Postage and telephone books	D	6 years	Tax, VAT, Statute of Limitation
Bank statements including deposit/saving accounts	D	Last completed Audit year	Audit
Bank paying-in books	D	Last completed Audit year	Audit
Cheque book stubs	D	Last completed Audit year	Audit
Paid invoices	D	6 years	VAT
Paid cheques	D	6 years	Statute of Limitations
VAT records	D	6 years	VAT
Time sheets	D	Last completed Audit year	Audit

Wage books	D	12 years	Statute of Limitations
Members' allowances register	D	6 years	Tax, Statute of Limitations
Records relating to parish halls, centres and recreation grounds, applications to hire, letting diaries, copies of bills to hirers and records of tickets issued	D	6 years	VAT
Precept books and contribution orders	D	6 years	VAT
<u>Miscellaneous</u>			
Maps created under the provision of the Rights of Way Act 1932	P	Transfer to DHC as soon as there is no longer an administrative requirement	
Community magazines newsletter	P one copy of each issue	Transfer to DHC as soon as there is no longer an administrative requirement	
Press cuttings book	R	Items of particular historic interest should be selected for permanent retention.	
Photographs [annotated with date and event/place]	P	Transfer to DHC as soon as there is no longer an administrative requirement	
Photographs [not annotated with dates and events/places]	D		
Any records dating from before 1894 now held by the town or parish council (e.g. poor law, surveyors of the highway, enclosure awards etc)	P	Transfer to DHC as soon as there is no longer an administrative requirement	

Any records of the parish council dating to before 1920	R	Transfer to DHC as soon as there is no longer an administrative requirement	
Records of other bodies such as burial boards, charities, fire brigades, home guard, local societies or ad hoc committees	P, but R ephemeral with view to D	Transfer to DHC as soon as there is no longer an administrative requirement	
Burial ground records listed in Local Authorities Cemetery Order 1977 No 204 Section 12	R	Transfer to DHC as soon as there is no longer an administrative requirement	
General reports, guides, handbooks etc, received by the parish council from other Dorset bodies	D	Replace with new guides as issued	