

# **West Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Authority**

## **Records Management Policy Statement**

This document sets out an outline and statement of intention for a records management policy within West Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Authority. The policy statement will be kept under review as appropriate strategies are agreed and implemented in order to enable detailed records management systems to be designed. This policy statement should not be read in isolation and regard should be had to the Authority Retention and Destruction of Records Schedule.

### **Purpose of the policy statement**

The goal of any statement/policy on records management should be “the creation and management of authentic, reliable and useable records, capable of supporting business functions and activities for as long as they are required.... “ (ISO 15489-1:2002, clause 6.2)

The Lord Chancellor’s Code of Practice on the management of records under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 is intended to support the objectives of the FOI legislation by outlining the practices which should be followed by public authorities in relation to the creating, keeping, managing, and disposal of records. This policy intends to highlight the key areas that need to be considered in order to develop records management practices, which are compliant with the Code.

### **Background**

Records can be classed as ‘recorded information, in any form, created or received and maintained by an organisation or person in the transaction of business or conduct of affairs and kept as evidence.’

The Authority holds a vast amount of records all of which are important sources of information and are vital to the operation of the Authority as well as forming historical documents. Management of these records is an administrative discipline which controls all aspects of the life cycle of the records from creation, through to disposal in an appropriate manner.

### **The needs for records management**

There are a number of pieces of legislation which require access to and/or effective management of Authority records

- The Freedom of Information Act 2000 provides a statutory right of access to information held by public authorities (subject to exceptions). There is an associated Code of Practice on Records Management with which authorities are obliged to comply.
- The Data Protection Act 1998 (“the DPA”) entitles individuals to access their personal information which is being processed by another, upon request. Records should be managed in compliance with the procedures under the DPA audit policy
- The Local Government Act 1972. (Section 224) provides that principal Council’s must make proper arrangements with respect to any documents which belong to or are in the custody of the Council or any of its officers.

Effective records management will not only meet these requirements but enable the Authority to:

- Make better use of space and storage facilities both physically and electronically. Make better use of staff time.
- Have improved control over records.
- Comply with best practice and other Authority policies.
- Reduce costs.

### **Aims of record management**

A records management system should aim to ensure:

- That records are present;
- That they can be easily accessed;
- That they can be interpreted with ease;
- That the record is a reliable representation of that which it is supposed to document;
- That the qualities of the document can be maintained despite any alterations or adaptations over time.

### **Key requirements of record management and Authority commitments.**

The Authority is committed to the creation, storage, management and eventually disposal of records in a manner which accurately documents the functions of the Authority and is compliant with this policy.

The Authority commits to providing a programme for records management and making it a key function within the authority. The programme should cover responsibility for all types of records from creation to disposal and will be adequately resourced and supported. The programme will encompass records in all media and will be organisation wide, although specific implementation policies may be established in different departments. Once appropriate strategies have been devised then it will be possible to design the management systems in detail.

### **Responsibility for records management**

It is the role of the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive to endorse this policy, support the resultant policies and provide resources. The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive will also have a duty to ensure that the Authority complies with the legislation concerning records management. A group with management expertise will assist in implementation of the policy and decision making.

A member of staff will be designated as having the lead role and being responsible for the function of records management. Where possible the person appointed with responsibility for this function will either already have responsibility for other information management functions within the Authority or establish close links with others that do. The Authority will appoint/designate staff to assist with this function and they shall have appropriate skills and receive relevant training.

**All staff that create, receive and use records will have records management responsibilities at some level.**

## **Records registration**

When establishing a records management programme and system of registration it is first necessary to establish the activities, functions and structures of the Authority. Information surveys/audits will therefore be carried out in order to determine what is required in order to implement a system for managing records. The audit will assess the main series of records held and relate them to the functions etc. carried out by each of the relevant Authority departments.

The Authority will ensure that it has in place adequate mechanisms for documenting its activities and registering its records. Rules will be developed to ensure that records can be quickly and easily accessed and this will include the implementation of systems to register, index and classify documents. This system will be implemented where possible across the Authority departments to achieve uniformity.

The system of record keeping will include rules for referencing, indexing and where necessary security marking records. It should also include metadata (providing descriptive and technical documentation). In designing a management system regard should be had to both existing records and those which will be created in the future. The sequence of reference numbers should seek to cover series of records that are both electronic and paper.

In order to maintain records efficiently there should be a tracking system in place so that the location of particular records can be established and they can be easily retrieved.

Regards will also be had to the storage of documents. This should be safe and secure whilst at the same time allowing access. Where records are no longer required for use by the Authority then it will seek to place them in a specific records centre. The Authority will establish and maintain a contingency plan to provide protection for important records in the destruction or mishap i.e. fire, flood etc.

The Records Manager will develop guidance on the indexing and registration of records.

## **Retention/disposal of record**

Disposal of records (transfer to the archives or destruction) will take place in accordance with set guidelines. The Records Manager will either develop a schedule for the retention and disposal of records after consultation, or adopt the schedule contained within the Guidelines for Local Authorities on Records Retention.

Once records are selected for disposal in accordance with the schedule and any guidelines the method of disposal should be appropriate to the confidentiality of the record and in accordance with any security markers. Where documents are destroyed then this should be done in a secure manner and a record should be kept, containing the reference, a description and the date of destruction.

A system will be developed to record the decisions that have been made in relation to the disposal of records and appraisal of those decisions.

Where a record that is due for destruction becomes the subject of a request for information then destruction should be delayed until the request has been

satisfied or in the case of a refusal, until any complaint and appeal mechanisms have been exhausted. However, before a formal request for information has been received, routine amendments or even deletion can take place.

### **Historical records**

The Authority aims to protect records that are deemed to have permanent value for legal, administrative or research purposes.

A selection policy will be implemented which will outline the functions of records which are likely to be selected for permanent preservation. Those records selected which are no longer of active use shall be transferred to an archival institution. There are additional responsibilities for authorities subject to the Public Records Act and there is a duty to seek to ensure that public records are opened to public access from the earliest opportunity.

### **Electronic Records**

In relation to the management of the Authority's electronic records, the principles of this policy are of equal application. There are however different means of addressing compliance where the information has been captured electronically.

- Effectively managing these records will require.
- Maintaining structured folders which logically group information together.
- Security arrangements to ensure that the integrity of the records can be maintained i.e. operating password systems so that unauthorised users cannot access material.
- Protection from loss or destruction.

It should be remembered that it may be necessary for electronic records to be transmitted from one system to another and their format should be consistent with this. It should also be possible to cross reference electronic records to the corresponding paper records.

### **Security of records and maintenance**

Records management systems will be designed so that records can be maintained securely, with appropriate safeguards and access controls in place. Staff will be trained how to use the systems to their best advantage so that all the potential benefits are realised.

The Authority undertakes to regularly audit its records management procedures to ensure compliance with this policy statement and the resultant policies to incorporate any major change that need to be made.

### **Related Policies**

The Data Protection Policy constitutes the framework document to guide the Authority's practice in relation to meeting its requirements under the Data Protection Act 1998.

It links into the Code of practice on the implementation of the Data Protection Act 1998 and will be linked to the future policy on the Freedom of Information Act.

### **Related documents:**

#### **Freedom of Information Policy**

**Disclosure of Information Policy**

**Disclosure of Incident Information to Third Parties**

**Security and Conduct Policy for Information Systems**

**Records Retention and Disposal Policy**