



Argyll and Bute Council

Records Management

**MANAGING AND ARCHIVING EMAIL & MESSAGES
POLICY**

Document Control Sheet

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Approvals

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1. INTRODUCTION

POLICY STATEMENT – To ensure that where business is conducted by email and or Teams Chat/Posts, those communications are identified and maintained as records.

Email is the primary business tool for both internal and external communication and as a result, should be treated with the same level of attention given to drafting and managing formal letters and memos. As well as taking care over how email messages are written, it is necessary to manage email messages appropriately after they have been sent or received. The email system is not a suitable place for emails to be stored permanently if they form part of a formal record, and it is important that these are managed appropriately and captured as records at the appropriate stage.

The widespread and often informal use of email means that messages with corporate value will frequently be sent and received alongside many others of temporary or inconsequential value. Users need to know how to differentiate between these and recognise whose responsibility it is to capture relevant emails within the council's record keeping systems. Email records which remain in personal mailboxes will be less accessible to the wider organisation and run the risk of being lost.

This email policy sets out the obligations that all members of staff have when dealing with email messages. To ensure staff members are familiar with the policy, training will be provided as part of the Records Management training arranged by Legal and Regulatory Support.

Further information and guidance on use of the email system can be found within the ICT Acceptable Use Policy.

2. IDENTIFYING AND MANAGING EMAIL RECORDS

It is the responsibility of all members of staff to manage their email messages appropriately. It is important that all email messages are managed in order to comply with legislation, including:

- The Data Protection Act 2018
- Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002
- Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011

Managing email messages appropriately will also mean that work can be conducted more effectively, as it will help towards locating all the information relating to specific areas of business.

To manage email messages appropriately members of staff need to identify email messages that are records of their business activities, and messages that are ephemeral. It is important that email messages which are records are moved from mailboxes and managed with, and

in the same way as, other records. Ephemeral email messages (which are not recording business or important information) should be managed within the mailbox and kept only for as long as required before being deleted. Additional guidance for staff is provided at Appendix A.

Important note: Email messages which are not moved from the email system will not be stored indefinitely in the archives (see Archiving Arrangements below). Once the archive period is complete, **users will no longer be able to retrieve these emails if they have not been stored elsewhere.**

Guidance on determining which emails should be retained as records:

Type of message	Examples	Value	Retention
Messages that provide evidence of business activities	Emails recording policy decisions, evidence of business transactions with stakeholders, service requests	Records required for ongoing business	In accordance with the retention schedule
Messages with a business context but not part of a business transaction	Notification of meetings, general circulars to staff, travel arrangements, discussions you were involved in but where another member of staff has responsibility for documenting and recording	Records of short-lived value	Destroy when administrative use is concluded
Ephemeral emails	Information conversation, meeting arrangements, any personal or social emails etc	None	Destroy when no longer required

3. ARCHIVING ARRANGEMENTS

Email messages will be stored in the archiving system for a period of 3 years plus 1, i.e. the current year, plus the 3 previous years. Emails older than this will be automatically removed and securely destroyed. It will not be possible to recover emails that have been removed from the archiving system; therefore, it is essential that staff follow the guidelines identified above and ensure that email messages that are required as a formal record are moved from the email system.

The current archiving period has been temporarily frozen due to the national ongoing Covid enquiry.

4. TEAMS CHAT & POSTS

With the introduction of Microsoft Teams, the Chat and Post function is being increasingly used throughout the Council. Teams Chat/Posts should be used for short conversations. If a decision is made and agreed within Chat/Posts then these should be formalised by a short email confirming the agreement to all parties which would then form part of a formal record. Teams Chat should not be used to discuss personal information as this would then be subject to a Subject Access Request for the period they are retained. Teams Chat and Posts retention is currently being reviewed by the M365 Project board and will be confirmed in due course. Please be aware that this will be a short retention period therefore it is imperative that the guidance above is followed.

5. REFERENCES

- Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002
- Data Protection Act 2018
- National Archives of Scotland – electronic records guidance
- Argyll and Bute Council – ICT Acceptable Use Policy
- Guidance for staff – managing our records effectively



Managing email and messages – Guidance for Staff

Who does this apply to?

Everyone! This guidance applies to everyone, at every level, within Argyll and Bute Council.

Why is this necessary?

A huge amount of our day-to-day business is conducted by email or within chats and posts in M365. It is essential that records of the Council's business are managed correctly and are filed just as other records would be. Chat, Posts and emails are designed to be a communication tool, and these platforms should not be used as a filing system.

The “Managing and archiving email and messages” policy advises that emails will only be archived for a maximum of 4 years and Teams chat and posts will be held for a much shorter period, therefore, it is even more important that emails are moved to an appropriate filing place separate from the email system.

How do I decide which emails are records?

In broad terms, an email will be a record where it provides evidence of Council business related activities, events and transactions which have ongoing business, compliance, operational or historical value.

The following questions may help you decide whether an email needs to be retained as a record.

Does the message:

- Contain information which may need to be provided as evidence in a court of law if the Council's decision is challenged?
- Contain information which documents Council decisions, including the discussion showing how the decision was arrived at?
- Document the formulation and execution of policy?
- Contain information upon which Council business decisions will, or are likely to be, based?
- Commit the Council or its staff to certain courses of action including the commitment of resources and provision or purchase of goods or services?
- Record contractual undertakings entered into by the Council?
- Have long term value for future reference or historical purposes?

Is it needed to:

- Prove a business-related event or activity did or did not occur?
- Demonstrate the initiation, authorisation or completion of a business transaction?

- Identify who took part in a business activity?
- Satisfy legal/compliance purposes?
- Facilitate business analysis and reporting?
- Display public accountability for policies or decisions?

If the answer is **YES** to any of the questions in either of the lists above, then the email is a record.

Emails should **not** be considered as records where they are:

- Circulated for information or reference purposes only e.g. event announcements
- Of short-term operational value e.g. meeting arrangements
- Mass circulated communications received from external agencies which require no action and are not required for 'record' purposes. These may include newsletters, magazines, product information and flyers
- Personal

Non-record emails can be deleted as soon as they are no longer needed. This should be done as soon as possible.

Where should emails be stored?

Emails which are kept within Outlook can only be accessed by those with access to that Outlook account. Emails which are part of a record should be stored (securely) where they are accessible to all appropriate staff. This may be in shared network drives, in Teams sites, Sharepoint sites or in existing document or case management systems.

How do I file an email message?

Emails can be stored as follows:

- Open the email
- Click on File, Save as
- Choose the file type "Outlook message format – Unicode"
- Name it appropriately and select where you wish to save it
- Click ok

Some services operate electronic document or case management systems – in this case, you should seek guidance from your system administrator if you are unsure how to save emails into it.

How do I deal with Teams Chats and Posts that are records?

If you have Teams chats or posts that answer "Yes" to any of the questions raised in the "**How do I decide which emails are records?**" section, then these also need to be dealt with as a record.

In the first instance you need to consider whether the conversation/topic has been recorded elsewhere i.e. was a decision that was made in a Post then followed up and recorded in the minute of a meeting? Or was there confirmation of the decision by an email? If not, then this should be formalised by a short email confirming the agreement to all parties. This email will then become the record and stored following the steps above.

Further Guidance

Governance, Risk & Safety Manager - Iain Jackson

Compliance & Regulatory Team - Alison McGinty, Kirsty Robertson & David Sinclair

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