**Scottish Government
Records Management Policy
(February 2021)**

Table of Contents

Introduction

The Scottish Government handles a very large amount of information. This information can relate to specific topics, people, organisations and events. This information can also form part of records of decisions made by Government, actions taken and the rationale behind them. The Scottish Government recognises that its records are an important public asset and are a key resource in the effective operation, policy making and accountability of Scottish Government. Like any asset, records require careful management and this policy sets out the Scottish Government's responsibilities and activities in respect of this.

Scope

All employees of Scottish Government (permanent and temporary), contractors, consultants and secondees have a responsibility to effectively manage information and records in accordance with specified legislation and policy guidelines.

This policy applies to all records created, received or maintained by Scottish Government staff in the course of carrying out their functions.

Definitions

Records contain information that is a unique and invaluable resource and an important operational asset that is needed to support the day to day work of Scottish Government. Records are defined as recorded information in any form which is created or received in the conduct of government business and which can provide evidence of activities, transactions and decisions made for, or on behalf of, the organisation. Their purpose is to provide reliable evidence of, and information about, 'who, what, when, and why' something happened. E-mails, SMS messages, tweets, documents, spreadsheets, presentations, database entries, photographs, WhatsApp messages, telephone conversations, sound recordings and videos may all be records.

Objectives

We recognise that a systematic approach to the management of Scottish Government records is essential to protect and preserve records as evidence of our actions.

Our approach to records management is to ensure processes, systems and controls are in place which support the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use, distribution, storage and disposal of records.

We will maintain a framework of integrated good practice and effective systems related to the core processes of Scottish Government which ensure that evidence of, and information about, its activities and transactions are captured and maintained as viable, accurate and up to date records.

We will ensure the effective transfer of Scottish Government records to the National Records of Scotland (NRS) which are selected by them for permanent preservation.

Policy principles

We will:

- create and capture accurate, authentic and reliable records along with ensuring that we produce minutes for meetings including those involving ministers and external organisations/parties;

- maintain records to meet the Scottish Government's business needs;

- operate a "digital first" policy, maintaining only one corporate copy of a record in one location;

- dispose of records that are no longer required in an appropriate manner;

- protect vital records;

- conform to any legal and statutory requirements relating to record keeping;

- comply with rules on best evidence in Scottish law courts;

- comply with government directives.

Responsibilities

The Scottish Government has a corporate responsibility to maintain its records and record keeping systems in accordance with the regulatory environment. The senior official with overall responsibility for this policy is the Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO). This role is performed by the Director General, Corporate.

Under the oversight of the Head of Knowledge and Information Management and the Corporate Records Manager, the Knowledge and Information Management (KIM) Branch is responsible for the Records Management Plan, the administration of the organisation's electronic records and documents management (eRDM) system and the development and provision of guidance for good records management practice. The KIM Branch is also responsible for promoting good practice and supporting the wider business to be compliant with this policy and legislation. The KIM Branch also advises senior officials on policy and best practice and reports to the SIRO.

Scottish Government Directors have overall responsibility for the effective management of records generated by their business area's activities. They are responsible for ensuring that a complete record of the business undertaken by their area is captured, and that systems (electronic or otherwise) and procedures are used appropriately. This includes ensuring the use of the corporate eRDM system as the primary platform for managing records. They are supported by Divisional Information Asset Owners (usually Deputy Directors) and are further assisted by local Information Management Support Officers (IMSOs), who are nominated by the business area, and provide a key point of contact between business areas and the KIM Branch. IMSOs have a vital role in ensuring that records are maintained and disposed of in accordance with Scottish Government's published retention policies. They also advise local business teams and promote good record keeping in their areas.

All employees of Scottish Government (permanent and temporary), contractors, consultants and secondees must ensure that the records for which they are responsible are complete and accurate.

Minuting meetings

Business areas and individual Chairs and Secretariats have a responsibility to consider the appropriate recording and minuting of business meetings and committing them to the corporate record. In line with normal practice across the UK civil service, it is for Scottish Government departmental policy areas, not ministerial private offices, to retain full and accurate corporate records of meetings/conversations which involve ministers. Departmental policy areas would also be responsible for ensuring that any letters, e-mails and briefings involving a minister which relate to Scottish Government business are captured on the corporate record.

Corporate Record Keeping Systems

Paper Records

Scottish Government had a purely paper based records management system until 2004. A project is in progress to digitise all paper records (where it is possible to do so) in order to meet with our "digital first" policy. This will ease access to files and vastly reduce the storage space required to hold our legacy material prior to its destruction/transfer to National Records of Scotland in line with the arrangements in our Records Management Plan.

Electronic Records and Document Management (eRDM) System

Scottish Government has had an eRDM system since 2004. It is the corporate repository for the majority of information created and received by officials in the course of their duties, this includes e-mails that must be retained for business purposes as evidence of a decision or transaction carried out by or on behalf of Scottish Government. eRDM can hold information up to Official level (including Official Sensitive), any information marked as Top Secret or Secret must be retained in a paper file which is registered on eRDM.

The Use of Local Drives

It is not technically feasible to store databases in eRDM. These are permitted to be stored on local drives, provided a snapshot is taken for the corporate record and stored on eRDM at intermittent periods during the life of the database. All other information which may form a record of business should be stored and managed in eRDM and not on network drives or other ungoverned repositories. Any information held in such repositories which is identified as a record of business should be transferred to eRDM and deleted from the original store. This includes emails.

Microsoft Teams and Office 365

Any information created or managed in Microsoft Teams or Office 365 that is a record or documents which are in development and will become a record should be transferred to eRDM.

Retention and Disposal

Information and records shall be retained only as long as they are required to support Scottish Government in its business requirements and legal obligations. At the end of that time, the records will either be destroyed or transferred to the National Records of Scotland for permanent preservation.

The Scottish Government's retention schedules are the key to effective management of our records, they set out the periods for which particular classes of records are retained in accordance with legal, audit and operational requirements. They provide a formalised, accountable system for the retention and disposal of records, and can help to save time, money and space by ensuring that information is not kept unnecessarily.

Training

All Scottish Government staff receive training so they are aware of their responsibilities as individuals with respect to record keeping and management and to ensure they are competent to carry out their designated duties. This includes online training in the use of the eRDM system which is then complemented by organisational policies and procedures and guidance documentation.