What to Keep Desk Guide for Defra Information

This Desk Guide provides advice on what information should be kept, where it should be saved and for how long. It applies to digital information (including emails) and paper information on registered paper files. Evidential information (information that supports business decisions, policies and activities) must be saved in SharePoint Team Sites, Defra's official information repository. Information retention has already been applied at library level within Team Sites; your Local Information Champion (LIC) can assist with any initial questions on retention (LIC's are named on your Team Site home page). Evidential information (including emails) must NOT be saved exclusively in Vault, One Note, personal drives, pst folders, Huddle, Yammer or other networking areas; this limits effective team working and collaboration as well as creating compliance risks.

There is a legal and regulatory framework covering government information and recordkeeping and everyone has a responsibility to ensure Defra is compliant. This Desk Guide clarifies what must be kept for business, legislative or historical reasons. Conversely if information is kept too long then there is a risk of failing to meet legal responsibilities. This Guide should be used in conjunction with any additional specialised instructions that may have been issued for information in your business area by Knowledge and Information Management (KIM).

- **Retention Lifecycles: Definition of Temporary, Short, Medium and Long**

- **Keeping information secure**

- **Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA)**

- **Social networks and collaborative working sites, Vault and One Note**

- **EU Exit (BREXIT) Information**

- **Personal information held by managers and individuals**

- **Corporate Services/Administration**

- **Finance, Accounting and Contracts**

- **Information Requests**

- **Liaison with Legal Services**

- **Ministerial Business**

- **Policy and Legislation Development**

- **Projects, Research and Reviews**

Retention Lifecycles: how long to keep digital information* created or last modified in SharePoint Team Sites and registered paper files.

* Information can be in many formats: email, document, spreadsheet, presentation, photo, video, Visio etc.

We define the lifecycle of a piece of information as Temporary, Short, Medium or Long:

Temporary lifecycle: delete at or before 12 months. Low value, short-lived information that has no business benefit beyond weeks or months for example agendas, photos from away-days, conference slideshows, training arangements, duplicates, invitations etc.	**Short lifecycle: delete at or before three years from the date it is saved (or last modified).** Limited lifespan information such as minor drafts, copies, routine FoI/EIR requests, PQs, Director/DG/ Minister briefings, complaints, local management issues, business continuity plans, and information that has been published in full in paper (has an ISBN number) or on the Defra website.
Medium lifecycle: store for seven years from the date it is saved (or last modified) and then delete. This includes most routine business correspondence, financial information, operational /casework files, some legal cases, and routine information produced by policy units (but not policy decisions). ***Note** – for registered paper files with financial information, keep for 6 years after the last financial transaction of the file (not the date of first paper). In many cases this will mean retaining the paper file for 11 years (ie 5 years for the usual lifespan of the file + 6 years).*	**Long lifecycle: has a business life of longer than seven years** or is of potential historical value and must be included in the Defra Appraisal programme. **Do not delete or destroy this information**. Includes evidence of principal policy funding decisions, key research, information from major Defra-led committees, Ministerial submissions/decisions, significant organisational changes affecting the way Defra works, details of high profile events such as a disease outbreak and precedent cases, significant Legal advice, HR files, Property files.

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Keeping information secure

Most of the information used for our business is classified 'Official' and can be saved in Team Sites. Information with a 'Secret' or 'Top Secret' classification must never be created or handled on Defra's IT network, or saved in the Team Site or other commonly used digital repositories (see Security of information). Special arrangements should already be in place if your team handles and stores material classified as 'Secret' or above. If nothing is in place or you have any concerns about how this material is being handled, consult with your line manager who if necessary will contact Defra Security for advice.

Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA)

This Inquiry is investigating whether public bodies and other non-state institutions in England and Wales have taken seriously their responsibility to protect children from sexual abuse, and will eventually make meaningful recommendations for change in the future. All Departments including Defra are obliged not to destroy any information that may impact on the Inquiry findings. Within Defra this means there is a moratorium on the destruction of any records that pertain to the nomination and agreement of honours awards and all personnel files.

Social networks and collaborative working sites, Vault and One Note

What to keep?			

Facebook, Twitter and other networking options: wikis, blogs and social networks of any kind **must not** be used for official decision or record keeping purposes. Likewise **Yammer, Huddle, Google Drive* and other collaborative working sites** are not official information repositories. Users must be careful that any documents saved on these sites are purely there for reference purposes; the original document must be saved in the Team Site. If any business related decisions or agreements do take place then the text should be pasted into a Word document and saved into the Team Site. Staff must comply with Defra's Social Media Policy as well as the guidance in the Civil Service Code of Conduct on the appropriate use of social media. (*Google Drive can be used as an interim collaboration tool, but will be discontinued once Office 365 is rolled out).

Vault: Vault is an email storage tool that enables users to hold work-related emails for personal reference for a limited period rather than clutter up inboxes. It is only accessible to the individual staff member and emails within it are not officially reviewed therefore it must not be used for emails that should form part of the corporate record. Vault is not a records repository; official emails must be saved into the Team Site.

OneNote: OneNote is not an official records repository and should only be used as a digital scrapbook for personal reference or for sharing reference material across teams. It is unsuitable for storing records because the integrity and context of the document, through its properties and relationship to other documents is lost when documents and emails are copied across.

EU Exit (BREXIT) Information

What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	How long should it be kept?
Any information relating to the EU Exit negotiations must be retained	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Originator	Long lifecycle Keep for more than 7 years Do not Destroy

Personal Information held by managers & individuals

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What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	How long should it be kept?
Information relating to recruitment, appointments, promotion, TARA, substitution.	Appropriate folder in Team Site (restricted access)	Recruiting officer	Temporary lifecycle Destroy at 12 months
Annual leave and flexi-time information Disciplinary records (*routine; not impacting on terms & conditions or pay*) Draft Personal Management Reports (PMRs) and feedback Security clearance forms Reward and recognition	Personal drive	Line manager/ individual	Short lifecycle Destroy at or before 3 years
Special leave & sickness absence is recorded by line managers and accessible within SOP. However individuals should retain their own medical sick/fit-notes in the event of any subsequent queries.	Keep sick/fit notes securely in a locked drawer/locker or scan & retain a digital copy in personal drive.	Individual	Destroy at 4 years
Learning, development and training records Information affecting pay and grading information (*should be retained by HR*) Agreed Personal Management Reports (PMRs) Season ticket and pay advance applications	Personal drive	Line manager/ individual	Medium lifecycle Destroy at 7 years
Honours awards and nominations – there is a moratorium on any correspondence relating to honours awards – See IICSA.	Appropriate folder in Team Site (restricted access)	Lead official	Long lifecycle Do not destroy

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Corporate Services/Administration

What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	How Long should it be kept?
Complaints	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official	Short lifecycle Destroy at or before 3 years
Business Continuity Plans (BCPs)	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official	Short lifecycle or delete when superseded
Vital records i.e. information essential for preserving, continuing or recovering a business area's critical business activities (vital records that are logged in BCPs)	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official	Short lifecycle or delete when superseded
Desk instructions, guide books.	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official	Short lifecycle or delete when superseded
Routine, low-level team meetings: agendas, minutes, notes, instructions etc	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official	Short lifecycle Destroy at or before 3 years
Audit – all information	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official	Medium lifecycle Destroy at 7 years
Health and Safety general information (*note special instructions will apply to some cases e.g. exposure to harmful substances*)	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official	Medium lifecycle Destroy at 7 years
What to keep?	**Where to keep it?**	**Who should save it?**	**How Long should it be kept?**

Internal services management	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official	Medium lifecycle Destroy at 7 years
Machinery and equipment including IT – supply, programming, maintenance, stocktaking	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official	Medium lifecycle Destroy at 7 years
Press and Public Relations	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official	Medium lifecycle Destroy at 7 years
All information relating to: Framework documents Management Board reviews Privatisation and mergers Review of Agency status	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official	Long lifecycle Keep for more than 7 years Do not destroy
Buildings and estates – legal information eg leases, deeds, maps, plans, surveys, asbestos reports, project information, and maintenance. Records of the sale and acquisition of land and properties.	Appropriate folder in Team Site or if paper, place significant documents on to appropriate registered file	Lead official	Long lifecycle Keep for more than 7 years Do not destroy

Finance, Accounting and Contracts

What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	How long should it be kept? For registered paper files see 'Note'
Monitoring of spending including travel and subsistence	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official	Short lifecycle Destroy at or before 3 years
Routine, low-level finance meetings; minutes, notes etc	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official	Short lifecycle Destroy at or before 3 years
Casework on bids	Appropriate folder in Team Site / Bravo Solutions	Lead official	Medium lifecycle Destroy 6 years after the final transaction
Financial/accounting transactions ie invoices, receipts, loan repayments, grant applications	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official	Medium lifecycle Destroy 6 years after the final transaction
Funding decisions, budget management & monitoring, asset management	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official	Medium lifecycle Destroy 6 years after the final transaction
Minor cases of fraud, misappropriation, write-off, recovery or overpayments	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official	Medium lifecycle Destroy 6 years after the final transaction
What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	How long should it be kept? For registered paper files see 'Note'

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Contracts valued at £5000 or less: contracts and tendering process documents	Retain on the Bravo Solutions system.	Contract manager	Medium or Long lifecycle - *Keep for 2 years after the expiry of the contract*
Contracts valued at more than £5000: signed contracts and tendering process documents. Contract amendments	Retain on the Bravo Solutions system. Also signed contracts & tendering process documents must be printed & placed on the appropriate registered file	Contract manager	Long lifecycle. Keep for 6 years after the expiry of the contract *NB - Special contracts executed under seal must be retained for 12 years after the expiry of the contract.*
Direct Defra involvement in public expenditure and select committees	Appropriate folder in Team Site Accredited	Lead official	Long lifecycle Keep for more than 7 years Do not destroy
Original strategy and policy decisions on Defra national accounts	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official	Long lifecycle Keep for more than 7 years Do not destroy

Information Requests

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What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	How long should it be kept?
Routine FoI or EIR requests/cases and Subject access requests (Data Protection Act). Internal reviews	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official in business area	Short lifecycle Destroy at or before 3 years
Public interest disclosure (whistle blowing investigations) – investigation and resolution of an allegation made by a member of the public under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official	Medium lifecycle Destroy at 7 years
Information requested under the Freedom of Information (FoI) Act or Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) Non-routine case records leading to a precedent	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official in business area	Long lifecycle Keep for more than 7 years Do not destroy

Liaison with Legal Services

What to keep?	Where to keep	Who should	How long should it be kept?

	it?	save it?	
Routine information concerning legal issues including standard/routine casework	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official in business area	Medium lifecycle Destroy at 7 years
EC Legislation: Direct involvement in proposals for new or amended EC legislation High profile casework Policy to implement EC legislation Significant contributions to draft legislation	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official in business area	Long lifecycle Keep for more than 7 years Do not destroy
National Legislation: Application of legislation Contributions to Defra-led legislation, proposals for new legislation, amendments and revisions to existing law including deregulation Statutory Instrument material recording controversial or high profile issues	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official in business area	Long lifecycle Keep for more than 7 years Do not destroy
Non-standard/non-routine Casework: High profile or precedent prosecution cases Instructions to Defra Legal from the business area Specific legal advice, opinions, rulings and interpretations of legislation affecting Defra's legal framework, governance, responsibilities or operations.	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official in business area	Long lifecycle Keep for more than 7 years Do not destroy

Ministerial Business

What to keep?	Where to keep	Who should	How long should it be kept?

	it?	save it?	
Advice on and briefings for Ministerial visits/visitors	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official	Short lifecycle Destroy at or before 3 years
Parliamentary Questions (PQs), Ministers' and Dealt With Officially (DWO) correspondence, Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), petitions	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Drafting officer	Short lifecycle Destroy at or before 3 years
Ministers' official diaries (electronic and paper) – these are public records. The final version of each day's engagements must be preserved by the relevant Private Office either in electronic or paper form and passed to the Departmental Records Officer (DRO) for safe keeping at agreed intervals.	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Private Office	Send to DRO each month and again at the end of the minister's tenure in office. Do not destroy
Submissions requiring: • A funding decision and the funding decision taken • A policy decision and the policy decision taken	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official	Long lifecycle Keep for more than 7 years Do not destroy

Policy and Legislation Development

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What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	How long should it be kept?
Early and minor drafts	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Originator	Short lifecycle Destroy when superseded or before 3 years
Minutes and information of bodies not directly concerned with the business area or where Defra is consulted in an advisory capacity	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official	Short lifecycle Destroy at or before 3 years
Boards, committees, commissions and councils led by Defra and directly concerned with the work of the business area – constitution, minutes, and committees of enquiry. Keep constitution, briefings, agendas and minutes	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official	Long lifecycle Keep for more than 7 years Do not destroy
Consultations with trade & industry and public consultations, keep only: • When Defra is the lead Department on the policy or legislation; and • key information not captured elsewhere; and • Information gathered during the consultation that has a clear impact or sets a precedent in the development of policy or legislation. *Where information does not fit these criteria it should be stored with a Short lifecycle*	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official	Long lifecycle Keep for more than 7 years Do not destroy
Drafts reflecting significant changes in approach relating to the principal policies, and the formulation, development and implementation of national and EC legislation	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Originator	Long lifecycle Keep for more than 7 years Do not destroy
Final versions of principle policy information concerning the structure, objectives and functions of Defra	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Originator	Long lifecycle Keep for more than 7 years; Do not destroy

Projects, Research and Reviews

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What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	How long should it be kept?
Published reports, research and statistics – *published material may be kept for a short period for reference, but as data is in copyright libraries, it does not need a Long lifecycle.*	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official	Short lifecycle Destroy at or before 3 years
Working parties, project areas, study areas	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official	Short lifecycle Destroy at or before 3 years
Routine projects or study/steering areas **Routine research** and statistical data including information routinely reported to the EC	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official	Medium lifecycle Destroy at 7 years
High profile or innovative projects concerning changes in Defra-wide policy, implementation, high level functions, response to a significant event such as disease outbreak etc: PIDs, interim and final evaluation reports Project proposals, research, feasibility studies, plans, specifications ToR, minutes, agendas, briefings and reports for high level project boards and steering areas **High profile or unique research** including interim, summary and final reports, expert advice and specialised statistical data	Appropriate folder in Team Site	Lead official	Long lifecycle Keep for more than 7 years Do not destroy