

What to Keep Desk Guide for Defra Information

This Desk Guide provides advice on what Defra information should be kept, where it should be saved and for how long. It applies to digital information and paper information on registered paper files. Information can be in many formats: email, document, spreadsheet, presentation, photo, video, Visio etc.

It clarifies what must be kept for business, legislative or historical reasons. This Guide should be used in conjunction with any additional specialised instructions that may have been issued for information in your business area by the Information Management Team.

There is a legal and regulatory framework covering government information and record keeping and everyone has a responsibility to ensure Defra is compliant.

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Where to Store Information

Information	Where to store
Evidential Information: Information that supports business decisions, policies and activities Emails needed for evidential or recordkeeping purposes	SharePoint: In an appropriate folder, in an appropriate location with a meaningful title SharePoint Online (SPOL) Guidance .
Personal Information: Information that relates directly to the individual that holds it	OneDrive OneDrive Guidance
Some Financial, Contract and Accounting Information	Bravo Solution Systems

Where Not to Store Evidential Information (Anywhere that is not SharePoint)

Evidential information (including emails) must NOT be saved exclusively in Outlook, Teams, OneDrive, Viva Engage or in unsupported Web based tools such as Google Drive and Trello.

Other Web based tools such as Google Drive, Facebook, Twitter and Trello should not be used to hold material for official decision making and record keeping purposes. Where they are used staff must comply with Defra [security policies](#), [Defra's Social Code of](#)

[Conduct](#) and the [Civil Service Code of Conduct](#). Where information that needs to be retained for record keeping purposes is created in these sorts of tools it should **also be saved in SharePoint**.

Best practice is to avoid the use of Non-Corporate Communications Channels for conducting government business. The Cabinet Office document sets out the extra responsibilities on the use of private email using non-corporate communication channels (for example, WhatsApp, Private email, SMS) for government business.

[Using non-corporate communication channels guidance](#)

Keeping information secure

Most of the information used for our business is classified 'Official' or 'Official-Sensitive' and can be saved on SharePoint. Information with a 'Secret' or 'Top Secret' classification must never be created or handled on Defra's main IT systems, or saved on SharePoint or other commonly used digital repositories (see [Security of information](#) and [Handling information](#)).

[Guide to managing information classified as Secret or Top Secret.docx](#)

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.

Still need help?

Visit the [Defra Digital Information and Records Management Portal - Home](#) for information on policies and best practice, or contact the [Information Appraisal Team](#) for questions on what you should be keeping.

Retention Periods:

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

Temporary	Destroy at 12 months.	Low value, short-lived information that has no business benefit beyond weeks or months.
Short	Destroy at 3 years from last modified.	Limited lifespan information.
Medium	Destroy at 8 years from last modified.	Most routine business.
Long	Do not delete or destroy this information.	Has a business life of longer than seven years or is of potential historical value and must be included in the Defra Appraisal programme .

Personal Information held by managers & individuals

It is best practice to keep personal information on your OneDrive and share links to the documents with your line manager rather than a copy of the information.

What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	How long should it be kept? (From last modified)
Promotion, TARA, substitution.	OneDrive	Line Manager	Temporary – Destroy at 12 months.
Pay slips and P60s (retained on iPayview).	OneDrive	Individual	Temporary – Destroy at 12 months.
Identification documents e.g. passports, drivers licences and counterparts.	OneDrive	Individual	Temporary – Destroy at 12 months.
Information relating to recruitment, and appointments.	OneDrive	Lead/chair	Short – Destroy at 3 years.

Annual leave and flexi-time information. My Conversations form	OneDrive	Individual	Short – Destroy at 3 years.
Applications for special leave including MA1/2 (maternity/paternity), fertility leave, paid special leave (should be retained under long lifecycle by HR).	OneDrive	Individual	Short – Destroy at 3 years.
Disciplinary records (routine; not impacting on terms & conditions or pay). Reward and recognition. Security clearance forms.	OneDrive	Line manager	Short – Destroy at 3 years.
Sick or fit notes. Self-certificates for sickness absences. Employee passports.	OneDrive	Individual	Short – Destroy at 3 years.
Death in service information including death certificate (should be retained under long lifecycle by HR).	OneDrive	Line Manager	Short – Destroy at 3 years.
Honours awards and nominations (Cabinet Office is responsible for their retention and disposal).	Restricted access folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Short – Destroy at 3 years.
Information affecting pay and grading information (should be retained under long lifecycle by HR).	OneDrive	Line manager	Medium – Destroy at 8 years.
Learning, development and training records. Season ticket and pay advance applications.	OneDrive	Individual	Medium – Destroy at 8 years.

Corporate Services and Administration

What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	How long should it be kept? (From last modified)
Technical Audit Logs that record IT processes.	Appropriate application	Lead official	At IT Discretion based on business need but not longer than 12 months.
Complaints.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Short – Destroy at 3 years.
Business Continuity Plans (BCPs). Vital records that are logged in BCPs e.g. information essential for preserving, continuing or recovering a business area’s critical business activities.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Short – Destroy at 3 years or when superseded.
Desk instructions, user guides.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Short – Destroy at 3 years or when superseded.
Routine, low-level team meetings: agendas, minutes, notes, instructions etc.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Short – Destroy at 3 years.
Audit – all information.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Medium – Destroy at 8 years.
Health and Safety general information (note: special instructions will apply to some cases e.g. exposure to harmful substances).	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Medium – Destroy at 8 years.

Internal services management.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Medium – Destroy at 8 years.
Machinery and equipment including IT – supply, programming, maintenance, stocktaking.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Medium – Destroy at 8 years.
Press and Public Relations.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Medium – Destroy at 8 years.
All information relating to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Framework documents • Management Board reviews • Privatisation and mergers • Review of Agency status 	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Long – Do not destroy.
Buildings and estates – legal information including but not limited to leases, deeds, maps, plans, surveys, asbestos reports, project information, and maintenance. Records of the sale and acquisition of land and properties.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint, or if paper, place significant documents onto appropriate registered file	Lead official	Long – Do not destroy.

Finance, Accounting and Contracts

Note: for registered paper files with financial information, destroy at 8 years after the last financial transaction of the file.

What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	How long should it be kept? (From last modified)
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Monitoring of spending including travel and subsistence expenses.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Short – Destroy at 3 years.
Routine, low-level finance meetings; minutes, notes etc.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Short – Destroy at 3 years.
Casework on bids.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint / Bravo Solutions	Lead official	Medium – Destroy at 8 years after the final transaction.
Financial/accounting transactions e.g. invoices, receipts, loan repayments, grant applications.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Medium – Destroy at 8 years after the final transaction.
Funding decisions, budget management & monitoring, asset management.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Medium – Destroy at 8 years after the final transaction.
Minor cases of fraud, misappropriation, write-off, recovery or overpayments.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Medium – Destroy at 8 years after the final transaction.
Major cases of fraud, misappropriation, write-off, recovery or overpayments.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead Official	Long – Do not destroy.
Contracts valued at £5000 or less : contracts and tendering process documents.	Retain on the Bravo Solutions system.	Contract manager	Short – Destroy at 3 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. Signed contracts and tendering process documents should be scanned and saved in	Contract manager	Medium – Destroy at 8 years after the expiry of the contract Note: Special contracts executed under seal must be

	the appropriate folder in SharePoint		retained for 12 years after the expiry of the contract.
Direct Defra involvement in public expenditure and select committees.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Long – Do not destroy.
Original strategy and policy decisions on Defra national accounts.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Long – Do not destroy.

Information Requests

What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	How long should it be kept? (From last modified)
Routine Freedom of Information (Fol) or Environmental Information Regulation (EIR) requests or cases and Subject access requests (Data Protection Act). Internal reviews.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Short – Destroy at 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 SharePoint	Lead official	Medium – Destroy at 8 years.
Non-routine Fol or EIR requests or case records leading to a precedent.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Long – Do not destroy.

Policy and Legislation Development

What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	How long should it be kept? (From last modified)
Early and minor drafts.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Originator	Short – Destroy at 3 years or when superseded.
<p>Minutes and information where Defra is consulted in an advisory capacity.</p> <p>Minutes and information not directly concerned with the business area.</p>	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Short – Destroy at 3 years.
<p>Boards, committees, commissions and councils led by Defra and directly concerned with the work of the business area including constitution, minutes, and committees of enquiry.</p> <p>Keep constitution, briefings, agendas, meeting papers and minutes.</p>	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Long – Do not destroy.
<p>Consultations with trade & industry, and public consultations</p> <p>Keep only:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When Defra is the lead department on the policy or legislation; and • <u>key</u> information included is not captured elsewhere; and 	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Long – Do not destroy.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information gathered during the consultation has a clear impact or sets a precedent in the development of policy or legislation 			
Consultations with trade & industry and public consultations where the three criteria listed above are not met	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Short – Destroy at 3 years.
Drafts reflecting <u>significant</u> changes in approach relating to the principal policies, and the formulation, development and implementation of national legislation.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Originator	Long – Do not destroy.
Final versions of principle policy information concerning the structure, objectives and functions of Defra.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Originator	Long – Do not destroy.

Liaison with Legal Services

What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	How long should it be kept? (From last modified)
Routine information concerning legal issues including standard or routine casework.	Appropriate folder	Lead official	Medium – Destroy at 8 years.
EC Legislation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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	Lead official	Long – Do not destroy.

<p>National Legislation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<p>Appropriate folder in SharePoint</p>	<p>Lead official</p>	<p>Long – Do not destroy.</p>
<p>Non-standard or non-routine Casework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High profile or precedent setting 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 	<p>Appropriate folder in SharePoint</p>	<p>Lead official</p>	<p>Long – Do not destroy.</p>

Projects, Research and Reviews

<p>What to keep?</p>	<p>Where to keep it?</p>	<p>Who should save it?</p>	<p>How long should it be kept? (From last modified)</p>
<p>Published reports, research and statistics</p> <p>(Published material may be kept for a short period for reference, but as the information is in copyright libraries, it does not need a long lifecycle.)</p>	<p>Appropriate folder in SharePoint</p>	<p>Lead official</p>	<p>Short – Destroy at 3 years.</p>
<p>Working parties, project areas, study areas.</p>	<p>Appropriate folder in SharePoint</p>	<p>Lead official</p>	<p>Short – Destroy at 3 years.</p>

<p>Routine projects or study/steering areas</p> <p>Routine research and statistical data.</p>	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Medium – Destroy at 8 years.
<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documentation, interim and final evaluation reports • Project proposals, research, feasibility studies, plans, specifications • Terms of Reference, minutes, agendas, briefings and reports for high level project boards and steering areas <p>High profile or unique research including interim, summary and final reports, expert advice and specialised statistical data.</p>	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Long – Do not destroy.

EU Exit (BREXIT) Information

What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	How long should it be kept? (From last modified)
Any information relating to the EU Exit negotiations where Defra is the lead department.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Long – Do not Destroy.
Routine information relating to the EU Exit negotiations or information where Defra is not the lead department.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint	Lead official	Medium – Destroy at 8 years.

Ministerial Business

Ministerial Offices must follow the agreed process for managing information as set out in [Records Management for Senior Leaders](#).

If the Minister prefers to use paper over digital please seek advice from the [Information Appraisal Team](#).

What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	How long should it be kept? (From last modified)
Advice on and briefings for Ministerial visits and visitors.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint or as agreed in specific guidance	Lead official	Short – Destroy at 3 years.
Communications including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministers’ and Dealt with Officially (DWO) correspondence • Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) • Parliamentary Questions (PQs) • Petitions 	Appropriate folder in SharePoint or as agreed in specific guidance	Drafting officer	Short – Destroy at 3 years.
Routine administrative meetings. Initial notes of meetings or discussions after an official record of the meeting has been created. Notes of meetings, conversations or communications of a party-political nature. Meetings that lead to immediate action e.g. press statement.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint or as agreed in specific guidance	Drafting officer	Short – Destroy at 3 years.

<p>Transparency returns.</p> <p>Documents are retained by the Cabinet Office (for further details, check with the Private Office lead).</p>	<p>Appropriate folder in SharePoint or as agreed in specific guidance</p>	<p>Lead Official</p>	<p>Short – Destroy at 3 years</p>
<p>Meetings on substantive issues.</p>	<p>Appropriate folder in SharePoint or as agreed in specific guidance</p>	<p>Drafting officer</p>	<p>Long – Do not destroy.</p>
<p>Ministers' official diaries (electronic and paper) – these are public records.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Appropriate folder in SharePoint</p> <p>Emailed monthly via pdf to the appraisal team via the defra.records@defra.gov.uk mailbox.</p> <p>PDF of diary engagements sent to Ministers, fortnightly.</p> <p>Follow the guidance in Saving a Calendar as PDF.docx.</p>	<p>Private Office</p>	<p>Long – Do not destroy.</p>
<p>Ministers Notebooks.</p>	<p>Appropriate folder in SharePoint or as agreed in specific guidance</p>	<p>Private Office</p>	<p>Long – Do not destroy.</p>

Submissions (with ministers comments and subsequent correspondence) requiring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A funding decision and the funding decision taken • A policy decision and the policy decision taken 	Appropriate folder in SharePoint or as agreed in specific guidance	Lead official	Long – Do not destroy.
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Permanent Secretary Business

Permanent Secretary Offices must follow the agreed process for managing information as set out in [Records Management for Senior Leaders](#)

What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	How long should it be kept? (From last modified)
Advice on and briefings for Permanent Secretary visits and visitors.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint or as agreed in specific guidance	Lead official	Short – Destroy at 3 years.
Routine administrative meetings. Initial notes of meetings or discussions after an official record of the meeting has been created.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint or as agreed in specific guidance	Lead official	Short – Destroy at 3 years.
Routine correspondence.	Appropriate folder in SharePoint or as agreed in specific guidance	Lead official	Short – Destroy at 3 years.
Transparency return. Documents are retained by the Cabinet Office (for further details, check with the Private Office lead).	Appropriate folder in SharePoint or as agreed in specific guidance	Lead official	Short – Destroy at 3 years.

<p>Meetings on substantive issues.</p>	<p>Appropriate folder in SharePoint or as agreed in specific guidance</p>	<p>Lead official</p>	<p>Long – Do not destroy.</p>
<p>Submissions (with permanent secretaries comments and subsequent correspondence) requiring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A funding decision and the funding decision taken • A policy decision and the policy decision taken 	<p>Appropriate folder in SharePoint or as agreed in specific guidance</p>	<p>Lead official</p>	<p>Long – Do not destroy.</p>