What is a Record?

RECORDS MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK

GUIDANCE TITLE: **03: What is a Record?**

GUIDANCE PURPOSE: **Guidance on how to decide whether a document needs to be retained as a record**

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VERSION: **1_01: June 2019**

Question: **Why do we need to understand which pieces of information are actually records?**

Answer: **To keep the Trusts 'corporate memory', do our jobs and comply with legislation**

Records Management is concerned with ensuring the Trust, manages our records- from birth (creation or receipt), through to death (destruction or preservation) – through their lifecycle. This is to ensure accountability, accessibility, efficiency and the ability to perform work. Records serve as a 'memory' of the business- this is known as the 'Corporate Memory.'

When we create or receive a new piece of information a decision needs to be made as to whether it is a record. Blanket rules do not exist unfortunately. However, there are some general principles which can be applied to the decision making process.

…The key question is *'what is a record?'*

Question: **How do we know what a record is?**

Answer: **It depends on the content, structure and context of the information.**

1. **Definition of a record:**

   The British Standards Institute (BSI) defines a record as:[1]

   "Information created, received and maintained as evidence and information by an organisation or person in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business."

   (Records Management Standard: British Standards Institute- BS ISO 15489)

   What is evident from this definition is that we should not be concerned with the physical nature of the record, but whether:

   1. *It is evidence of a business decision,*
   2. *It was created in pursuance of our legal obligations, or,*
   3. *It was created during a business activity.*

2. **Format:**

   Records can be held in:
   - Any medium/ format- Paper, microfilm / microfiche or electronic;
     - (E.g. Databases, electronic systems, e-mails, pictures- digital and drawn, maps, entries on social media, sound recordings…)
   - Any location-
     - Offices (any sites), network drives on computers, off-site storage providers, backs of filing cabinets, CD ROMs, desk drawers/ cabinets, basements/ attics, memory sticks, etc…

3. **Points to consider when deciding:**

   The information box below asks a series of questions. If yes is answered to one or more in relation to a document, the document is a record and needs to be treated appropriately.

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[1] Records Management Standard: British Standards Institute- *BS ISO 15489 (www.bsi.org.uk)*

HOW TO DECIDE WHAT…… **IS A FORMAL RECORD?**

Ask yourself the following questions in relation to the document/ information:

1. *Is it part of a case (case-file)?*
   - E.g. Social care file, a project or planning application?
2. *Could it potentially be used as evidence in court?*
   - E.g. Is the issue highly contentious?
3. *Does it show part of a financial transaction?*
   - E.g. An order form, or an invoice
4. *Is it evidence of a decision or action?*
   - E.g. A signed contract, or, an approved policy?
5. *Could it have historical value (is it an archival record)?*
   - E.g. Committee minutes, children register etc…?

If the answer to one or more of these questions is 'yes' the document has corporate value and should be preserved as a record.

NB: REMEMBER FORMAT IS IRRELEVANT

EXAMPLES:
- Paper/ Manual records including,
  - patient records, e.g. correspondence, handover sheets, etc…
  - Corporate records, e.g. attendance lists, post it notes,
  - loose papers of any description,
  - registers etc.
- Electronic formats,
  - formal Trust information systems/ assets, e.g. Care Portal, ESR, PICS, etc…
  - Meeting agendas, minutes and action logs,
  - e-mail,
  - microfilms,
  - digital dictation recordings.
- Different services/ specialties
  - Case files, e.g. Complaints files, Legal files, Investigation files, IT projects etc…
  - MDT documents, handover sheets, clinic lists, etc…
  - Finance and Procurement information

CAVEAT!!!

Officers are experts on the information they work with, and this knowledge should be used when deciding whether to keep (save) a document as a record.

The information above is not definitive, just a guide!!

Contact Details/ Further Information

If you have any question regarding the creation/ receipt of files please contact:

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