Policy | Procedure

Records Management Strategy 1: Creating and maintaining filing systems

New policy number: **575**
Old instruction number: **MAN:A015:a1**
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Owner: **Chief Information Officer (CIO)**
Responsible work team: **IM Document Management**

Contents

1   Introduction

1.1   One of the general principles which underpins the LFB's records management strategy states that 'Records created or received by the LFB shall be arranged in records systems that enable staff to obtain the maximum benefit from them by quick and easy retrieval of information.'

1.2   The records strategy further states that

- A system for holding records, whether electronic or paper, must have a logical structure and be based on consistently applied rules for referencing, titling, indexing and, if appropriate, security marking.
- The system should be easily understood and enable the efficient retrieval of information.
- Staff must be aware of the filing system structure (whether electronic or paper-based).
- The structure should enable staff to easily locate and add documents and help make sure that documents are stored in the most appropriate place and avoid the chances of duplicating documents in different systems.
- A local system administrator should be appointed as the focal point for maintaining the structure of the filing system and for creating new files/folders.

1.3   This policy sets out how a structured filing system should be created and maintained.

Is every document a record?

1.4   Not every document is a record, but it is likely that most documents and many emails will be records and will need to be managed in accordance with good records management principles. Where the policy talks about records it is safe to assume that this may mean documents as well.

1.5   The use of paper-based structured filing systems is increasingly rare and where possible records should be held electronically. However, the record keeping principles should be maintained, decisions were taken daily about which documents to keep in files, this should apply to electronic libraries and folders. This may mean every document that is relevant to the activity or transaction is kept. This results in the requirements of the records management strategy being met.

1.6   All electronic documents created or received should be saved to libraries. Particular attention needs to be given to:

- emails: Policy number 580 - records management strategy 8 - managing emails that are records deals with capturing emails as records.
- paper-based documents from outside the organisation; if most documents on an activity or transaction are only held electronically, then paper-based documents need to be scanned and saved alongside other electronic documents. Where document scanning facilities exist locally then they should be used to capture the paper document(s); where scanning facilities are not available locally documents can be passed to the ICT Document Management Team (DMT) which runs a document scanning service.

2   Paper filing systems and electronic storage

2.1   Increasingly there is a reliance on electronic storage and paper-based filing systems are often not maintained. Heads of service and principal managers need to be satisfied that electronic storage is adequate to protect key records of business activity with documents including emails captured consistently to provide a full and adequate audit trail/record of an activity or transaction and that documents are secured from deliberate or accidental alteration and/or deletion.

2.2   In general terms, electronic storage on shared drives is not adequate to satisfy the requirements of the Brigade's records management strategy and should no longer be used. Advice should be sought to move information to the Brigade DMS SharePoint.

2.3   Where a paper filing system is still necessary to support electronic systems, the structure and groupings should be replicated in any electronic structure.

2.4   A structure should be set-up in the DMS that reflects the activities of the business area concerned. Where paper filing systems need to be maintained alongside the DMS they should, ideally, replicate the structure in the DMS.

3   Designating a local records administrator

3.1   Each business area should designate at least one person who is responsible for the filing structure (paper-based and/or electronic). The role can be shared between officers so long as there is consistency of approach throughout the business area. The role of the local records administrator will be to:

- manage the structure (creating new sites, libraries and folders or deleting them) – whether paper-based or electronic.
- overseeing housekeeping (like regular deletion of files).
- making sure that inactive records are properly archived (i.e. hard copy sent to the Records Centre or electronically archived when available).

4   Creating new filing systems

4.1   A filing system should be maintained to properly manage documents and records. A structure needs to be created for this purpose. Ideally, the structure should be the same for paper filing systems, sites and folders in the DMS. This is particularly important for compliance with the Data Protection Law and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and the ease with which information can be located when requested.

The structure

4.2   There are different types of structure that can be implemented for paper files and electronic folders (in sites, libraries and folders in the DMS). Filing structures should be created so related topics are placed together in easily identifiable groups. This is done using a recognised method known as FAT – Functions, Activities and Transactions. A layered structure can then be built which reflects the way a section works, uses, retrieves and needs to store documents.
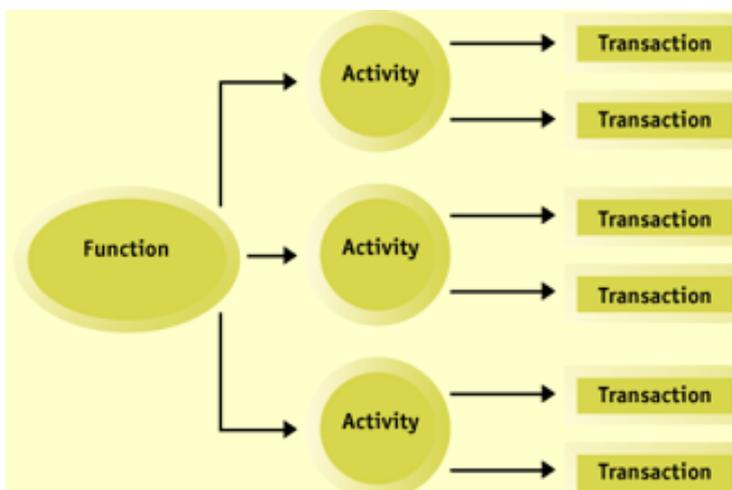
4.3 An example of a structure that follows these principles might be:

- Level 0 (Department) e.g. People Services.
- Level 1 (Function: Branch/Team) e.g. HRM Recruitment and Assessment.
- Level 2 (Activity) e.g. Recruitment of specialist ICT staff.
- Level 3 (Transaction) e.g. Recruitment of Chief Information Officer.

4.4 Ideally structures should not exceed 3 levels. The structure and number of levels is dependant on the number of categories in each system. An approximate guide for this is under 100 categories require about two levels, and over 100 categories three levels become necessary. Generally speaking, levels 0 and 1 should reflect organisational structure (as in the example above); it is not necessary to reflect every organisational level in the structure.

4.5 Terms used to describe the different levels – particularly level 2 and level 3 in the example above – should, ideally, be chosen from the corporate subject list (also called the taxonomy) which is available from the Information Management Knowledge Management Team (KMT).

4.6 A simple single level alphabetical system may be appropriate in some cases. The approach is generally successful when dealing with fewer than 50 categories. If a system is never likely to grow beyond 50 categories, then an alphabetical arrangement is usually adequate. Places, addresses, people and company names are more suited to an alphabetical arrangement irrespective of the number of categories.

Advice on structures

4.7 The DMT can work with business managers to produce an appropriate folder structure for their work area.

5 Maintaining the structure and creating sites, libraries and folders

5.1 Business managers need to make sure that the local records administrator (see paragraph 3.1 above) maintains the system for keeping documents and records whether this is paper-based or held electronically (in the Brigade DMS). Users of records need to be able to identify folders/sites, sub sites and libraries easily and to keep their contents intact whilst in use. A system based on the principles outlined above will help to achieve this.

Paper-based systems

5.2 The requirement for paper-based file systems should now be the exception. The DMT can be contacted for guidance where necessary.

Libraries and folders within the Brigade DMS (SharePoint)

5.3 The structure within SharePoint needs to be kept up-to-date with new subjects.

5.4 The local records administrator will consult the existing structure before creating a new sub site, library or folder to ensure that it is placed in the correct part of the structure. Where a folder is created, the administrator will need to ensure that the term used also exists in the corporate subject or document type list.

6   Closed files

Paper files

6.1   Except where business needs dictate otherwise, individual files should be closed when the amount of papers become difficult to manage or when they have not had any additions for over a year. A new volume should be opened, and the previous volume moved to a separate closed system. Old files that need to be kept but are not referred to on a regular basis should be sent to the Records Centre for archiving. The DMT will advise on procedure.

SharePoint libraries and folders

6.2   It may be possible in the future for the local records system administrator to archive individual SharePoint libraries and folders. This needs to be done according to prescribed criteria.

Document history

Assessments

An equality, sustainability or health, safety and welfare impact assessment and/or a risk assessment was last completed on:

| EIA | 17/08/08 | SDIA | L - 27/02/26 | HSWIA | 12/05/23 | RA | NA |

Audit trail

Listed below is a brief audit trail, detailing amendments made to this policy/procedure.

Page/para nos.	Brief description of change	Date
Page 2

Throughout | Warning removed.

References to paper-based methods removed and updated. All references to SharePoint subsites replaced with SharePoint folders. Reviewed as current. | 10/05/2023 |
| Page 6 | SDIA updated. | 19/05/2023 |
| Page 6 | SDIA date updated. | 09/03/2026 |

Subject list

You can find this policy under the following subjects.

Records management	

Freedom of Information Act exemptions

This policy/procedure has been securely marked due to:

Considered by: (responsible work team)	FOIA exemption	Security marking classification