

Case Study

LG Inform Plus records retention guidance

LG Inform Plus offers records retention guidance, which saves councils time and money when developing their own records retention schedules. It guides councils on the types of records that could be kept for each service as well as for how long records should be kept, both to ensure compliance with Section 12 of the Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the management of records, and to meet likely business needs.

The guidance was put together by Elizabeth Barber and the Kent County Council's Legal Services team in partnership with LG Inform Plus.

The records retention guidance

The guidance can be used by councils to check and improve their own retention schedules. LG Inform Plus subscribers can use the tool to generate full or partial retention documents for editing or copying into their own personalised schedules. Councils need a records retention schedule to:

- manage compliance with legislative retention requirements and the Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice
- manage proper disposal in line with Data Protection rules
- improve efficiency by allowing easier access to relevant documents by removing old and out of date ones
- reduce storage and backup costs, bringing major savings in the cost of physical space
- improve the accessibility of information requested under the Freedom of Information Act and Environmental Information Regulations
- operate in line with the principles of open government by identifying which information is held.

As Elizabeth explains:

“We envisaged [local authorities] using it as a reference tool. When they have undertaken an information audit and they have a list of records that they need retention periods for, then they can map either what they are being told against the national guidance or if they have not got a retention period then they can use the national guidance to actually create that”.

Development

The tool was developed by gathering together the existing records retention schedules of partner organisations and adding everything else that needed to be in the guidance by law, to ensure that compliance was met. A three stage peer review was undertaken by the partner organisations and approval was reached before the tool went live.

Benefits and savings

The tool allows authorities to save a significant amount of time that would otherwise be spent researching legal retention periods. As Elizabeth explains, authorities can now go straight to the retention tool database for this information. For those authorities who have not previously had a retention schedule that is up to date then using the guidance can also assist with information which will help when clearing out and dealing with overfull storage. Although the main driver for using the tool is compliance, the tool can help with cost saving. As Elizabeth explains:

“...actually the compliance might save time, using the tool may lead to reduced storage which makes things streamlined. It’s more about encouraging staff to work smarter”.

Figure 1: Example of guidance for records on abandoned vehicles

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL retention.esd.org.uk/retention/308. The page header includes the Local Government Association logo and navigation links: Search, Help, About, and Kate Cooper. The main content area is titled "Guidance for Abandoned vehicles (service 372)". Below the title, there is a table with the following data:

Impact level	IL0	Contains personal information	No
Legal requirement	Yes	Retain permanently	No
Archive	No		

Below the table, there is a section for "Legislation" with a link to [Limitation Act 1980 \(Section 2\)](#). The "Retention" section states "Retain from year records created for 6 years." The "URI for this guidance" is <http://retention.esd.org.uk/retention/308>. At the bottom, there is a "SPARQL query for this item" link and a disclaimer: "Retention information is provided for guidance only. You must check requirements with your council's own legal team."

Improvements and developments

The guidance is reviewed and updated annually so authorities can rely on it being relevant and up to date. Elizabeth highlights that there is a forum attached to the guidance where users can flag up anything that they think is missing, for instance missing terms. She then shows users where the information is in the guidance or alternatively gives them her expertise on what are likely to be the recommended retention periods.

Where these recommendations are made Elizabeth ensures they are included in the guidance reviews and a final definitive view is given once the peer review has taken place. As Elizabeth explains, the retention periods haven't changed a great deal thus far so this is usually a straightforward process:

“The guidance is organised against service lists so we will populate any new services that come onto the service list as part of the review and hopefully that will cover a lot of the missing terms. Generally where users query missing terms, it is because people are using slightly different language and they just need to be guided to where it is in the retention schedule”.

Elizabeth encourages authorities to use the tool and recommends its cost and time saving elements to those authorities who are creating their own records retention policies.

To view the records retention tool visit: <http://retention.esd.org.uk/>

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