



Records naming guidance

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0.1	First Draft, based on previous guidance "Managing your Files" and "Taking Control of our digital records",	SIIO	10/10/22
0.2	Changed title from "File" to "Records", reformatted, incorporated comments from "20220802 conventions..." PowerPoint discussion document.	SIIO	21/10/22
1.0	Minor typos; adopted for inclusion in the RMP	SIIO	26/01/23
1.1	Refreshed, checked links	SIIO	29/08/24

Introduction

Proper provision for the creation, management and preservation of Council records was given a statutory basis by the Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011. Better management of the information which we holds will help to deliver:

- Legislative and regulatory compliance
- Economy in office space
- Effectiveness in information retrieval
- Efficiency in record handling and disposal.

Information is a key corporate resource, and every officer has a responsibility for the records that they work with. Naming your records in a clear and consistent manner is an important element of this management.

This guidance provides practical guidance on naming your records, and should be applied to material in all media.

The document should be captured with sufficient information - known as metadata - to indicate the context and content of the records and enable it to be retrieved, used and interpreted and to prove the record is reliable and has integrity. Some metadata, such as creation date, who created it and what format it was created in, is captured automatically when it is saved. Some metadata needs to be created manually – and the most important of these is the name of the file which, along with the folder you store the file in, should enable others to identify what the file is about without having to open it.

Using standard terms and following consistent rules for how we name individual files has a number of benefits. This:

- groups related records and documents together and in a logical order
- saves time naming files and searching and browsing for the information we need
- helps determine the relevance of documents without having to open them
- helps identify the most current version of a document
- helps identify obsolete, superseded and out-of-date documents
- helps avoid data incidents.

Naming your records

Consistency

Services and teams should have standardised naming protocols and these must be followed when creating or saving records. Develop and apply naming conventions to folders and files, including lists of standard terms (including abbreviations and acronyms) to ensure consistent terminology is used. These can be set up as controlled terms lists within SharePoint Online.

Avoid vague or generic file names

Ensure that titles of documents, files, and of folders are meaningful. While “Miscellaneous” or “General” or “Committee Report” will often be adequate at the time that you are working on a record it is unlikely to be helpful at a later date or to assist colleagues in identifying a record.

Provide short, meaningful titles

Document titles should not be so large and detailed as to become cumbersome, but they must identify the unique nature of that file as far as possible. Consider including the following elements:

- Subject – what the document is about e.g. the “subject” of this guidance is “Records naming guidance”
- Document type – e.g. minute, report, invoice, etc.
- Depending on the content and context of the document, you should include additional information
 - e.g. for correspondence:
 - Date – the date sent or received
 - e.g. for documents going through a review and approval process e.g. policies, reports, meeting minutes
 - Status – e.g. draft, copy, final
 - Version number – e.g. V0_1, V2_1

Use templates to embed naming conventions for consistency and efficiency.

Change titles of auto-generated file titling, incoming documents and emails

When saving items such as digital photographs, scanned images or received emails the title should be changed from the system-generated number to a something meaningful.

Avoid spaces when separating elements in the title

As a general best practice, use underscores “_” or dashes “-” between words in file names. For example: Records_naming_guidance.docx. When you use spaces in file names, all of the spaces will be converted to the characters "%20" in hyperlinks.

Only add dates in file names where you need them

Every document has a Created By and Modified By date in network shared drives and MS Team File libraries, so dates are usually not needed as part of the name of a document. Examples where they might be required are for events, meetings and dates of sent or received correspondence.

If dates are used in folder or file names, order them in the format YYYYMMDD so they will be listed chronologically. When files are held within annual folders, use MMDD.

Numbers

When using numbers in titles, consider the highest number that will be required and use the following format with initial zeros so they are listed in order:

- Up to 9: 1,2,3...9
- Up to 99 – 01,02,03 ...99
- Up to 999 – 001, 002, 003, ...033, 034, ...999

Personal names

Consider whether it is necessary to include an individual's name in the file name, or whether instead a reference number would be more appropriate – for example use "SAR039" rather than "SARJoeBloggs". When it is appropriate to include a personal name in the file title it should be given as surname first followed by initials as it is most likely that the record will be retrieved according to the surname of the individual.

Surnames:

- Enter prefixes such as O' without the apostrophe
- Von, Van as part of the surname.
- Mc or Mac as they are spelt.
- Enter surnames with hyphens as whole units, e.g. Smithers-Brown becomes SmithersBrown

Forename(s):

- Enter only initials, unless the combination Surname+Initial already exists. In this case, enter the full forename.

Special characters

Avoid non-alphanumeric characters, such as ? ; / \ < > * & \$ £ + = as they may not be recognised by the software and could prevent the document being saved. Even if Council systems allow you to save the file, if you send it to someone outside the Council, they may not be able to open it:

Hyphens and underscores can be used.

Dots/full stops should only be used to separate the file name from the file extension and not used within the title.

Avoid unnecessary information

People often include information in the file title that is unnecessary or automatically captured elsewhere: Avoid repetition and redundancy: in particular, the title of a folder should not be repeated in the document title. This will aid efficient searching.

- avoid words that add no value to the title meaning e.g. “a”, “the”, “of”
- so long as the file remains in its current parent folder, do not repeat information already made clear in the folder name
- do not include creation or modified date as this information is automatically captured in the properties of the file
- do not include the file type as this indicated in the file extension and icon

Order of elements and common words

Order the elements in a file name in the most appropriate way to retrieve the record, with the most important element first. Avoid unhelpful or common words at the start of file names, for example 'draft', 'letter', 'presentation', as these will appear altogether in search results.

Abbreviations and acronyms

Avoid using unfamiliar abbreviations or acronyms, especially if the information or records might be widely shared. Only use commonly recognised acronyms or abbreviations as agreed and documented for each service.

Version Control

Some records go through a number of versions, starting out as working drafts and then moving on to a review and approval process prior to release as a finalised record. It is important to be able to differentiate between these different documents, using a consistent version numbering protocol at the end of the file name. See version control guidance for details: [link](#)

Naming folders

As with individual records, the names given to folders should enable the viewer to quickly identify the contents.

As well as the conventions detailed above, when naming folders:

- Folders must be clearly named with a relevant and meaningful subject area
- You may have spaces between words but no dashes, commas or abbreviations
- Folder titles should not be repeated in the hierarchy. For example, if the top level is **Procurement**, the second level should read **Strategy**, rather than **Procurement Strategy**. The only exception to this rule is where a proper noun is concerned, e.g. where the second level reads **Procurement Strategy Committee (PSC)**, as that is the name of the committee itself.

- Use date subfolder folders to help manually manage retention and disposal of information and records in line with the Council's record retention schedule: [link](#)