

Guidance on which emails should be kept and which deleted?

Which emails should be kept?

Emails, like all other information held by the Authority, need to be retained for as long as they are required and no longer.

An email will be considered a record where it provides evidence of Authority business related activities, events and transactions which have ongoing business, compliance, operational or historical value.

Emails are of no use to anyone except the person who has access to the email account. Whilst you might be able to find an email in seconds using your outlook search it does not help your colleagues if they need to access information contained within an email when you are not there.

There is no one rule for defining which emails can be kept and which ones should be deleted. As with all records, it will all be dependent upon the content and context of the email. When managing emails the following should be considered. If the answer to any of these is 'Yes' then the email should be considered a record and archived appropriately:

Does the message:

- Contain information which documents Authority decisions, including the discussion showing how the decision was arrived at? E.g. safeguarding of children or adults.
- Document the formulation and execution of policy?
- Contain information upon which Authority business decisions will, or are likely to be based?
- Commit the Authority or its staff to certain courses of action e.g. the commitment of resources?
- Document the establishment, negotiation and maintenance of business relationships with customers?
- Record contractual undertakings entered into by the Authority?
- Have long term value for future reference or historical purposes?

Is it needed to:

- Prove a business related event or activity did or did not occur?
- Demonstrate the initiation, authorisation or completion of a business transaction?
- Identify who took part in a business activity?
- Satisfy legal/compliance purposes?
- Facilitate business analysis and reporting?
- Display public accountability for policies or decisions?

Which emails should be deleted?

If the emails are purely administrative then they do not need to be retained e.g. confirmation of attending a meeting or circulated for information purposes only. This includes:

- An email that was sent internally and you are a recipient. In these circumstances the email should be stored by the sender.
- Short term operational value e.g. meeting requests
- Mass circulated communications received from external agencies including newsletters, product information and flyers
- Personal Emails (whilst staff are not encouraged to use a work email account for personal emails, it is natural that some might be sent from time to time. These are not Authority records and should never be retained).
- Spam emails.

Non-record emails should be deleted as soon as they are no longer needed.

How long emails should be kept for?

The content of the email will determine how long it should be kept. There are agreed retention periods associated with the work the Authority carries out and these should be used to help determine what should be kept and for how long e.g. if the email relates to a grievance investigation against a member of staff, the retention period will be entirely dependent upon the outcome of the investigation. Contact the Information Governance Team for help or advice around retention periods information.governance@northtyneside.gov.uk.