

# Aberdeenshire Council Information Strategy

## Contents

Our Vision .....	2
Information Management Principles.....	3
Information is valued.....	3
Information is protected .....	4
Information is managed .....	4
Information is available to the right people .....	6
Information is fit for purpose .....	7
Information is standardised and integrated.....	8
Information is reusable and reused.....	9
Governance.....	9
Roles, responsibilities and accountabilities.....	9
Policies, standards, procedures and processes .....	10
Strategies and plans .....	10
Policies and Codes of Practice.....	10
Legislative framework.....	10
Ethical and social responsibility .....	11
Delivering and Measuring Progress .....	11
Version Control .....	12

## Our Vision

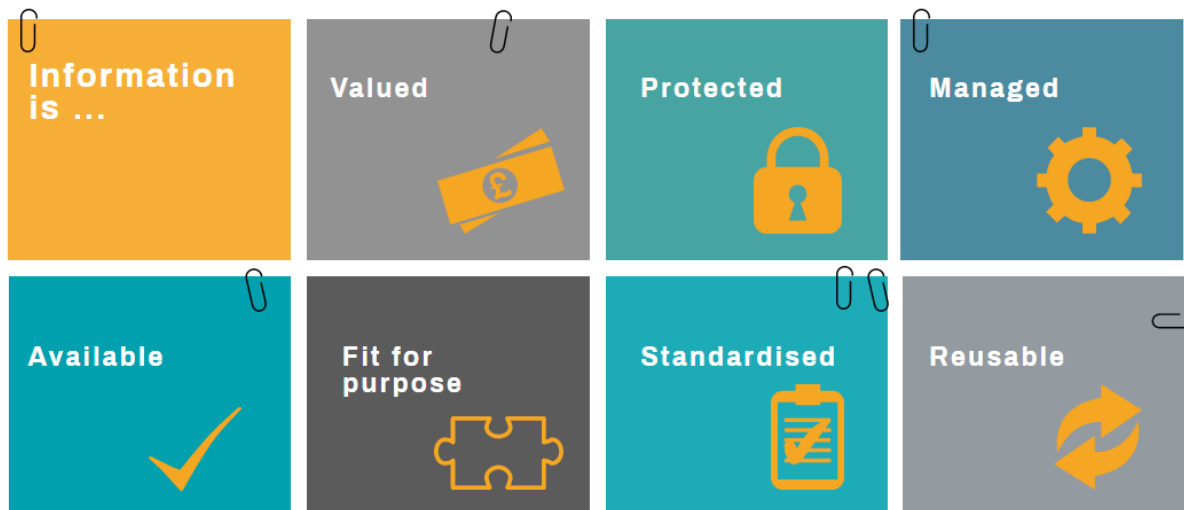
**Information is a vital corporate asset and must be managed properly to support effective decision making and delivery of services.**

Information can give us an insight into our residents, customers, and services. It can help the council innovate and achieve strategic goals. Deriving such value from information requires commitment, planning and coordination, and the development, implementation and ongoing use of plans, policies, and practices. Information management is necessary throughout the information lifecycle for the information to be used and leveraged effectively and efficiently to support and meet strategic goals. Not only is information a strategic asset, but it is also vital to our day-to-day operations; we cannot carry out our functions without information. With reliable, up-to-date, accurate information we can make better decisions about our services, operations, and residents.

This strategy provides the foundations for achieving our vision for information, and ensuring we have the right information available to the right people at the right time and in the right format.

# Information Management Principles

This strategy is based around a set of principles on how we use and manage information.



## Information is valued

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At all levels of the Council there must be a recognition of the importance and value of information.

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What we do with data and the information it forms can make it valuable. There is intelligence to be gathered from the analysis of information: service improvement and problem solving.

There are methods for quantifying the value of information assets. Where possible we should express the value of information in economic terms. Placing a financial value on information can support change management, helping those involved better understand the importance of good information management in economic terms.

We can consider the economic value of:

- obtaining and storing information
- replacing information if it is lost
- the impact of missing information
- the consequences of losing information
- risks associated with information
- improving information
- benefits of higher quality data and information

- any expected revenue – either to the council directly or to the local economy – from innovative uses of information or data.

Some information will become more valuable over time as the data behind it becomes richer. Similarly, data and information may be more valuable when combined – or integrated – with other data or information.

## **Information is protected**

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We are committed to protecting our information assets and keeping information in our custody appropriately secure.

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The council collects, creates, and holds both personal data and sensitive organisational information. Aberdeenshire Council is committed to keeping information appropriately secure, to protect our assets in line with legislation and regulations, contractual agreements, and organisational requirements.

We will endeavour to keep our systems and data secure from external threats. Internally, we will limit access to data and systems to those with genuine need. Access controls will be applied in all systems where possible based on the requirements of job roles, following the principle of least privilege.

Data protection legislation sets out responsibilities for personal data. These responsibilities support the protection of information, and help ensure it is accurate, up-to-date and used appropriately. Effective information security and data protection policies must balance the need for security and privacy with the ability of those who legitimately need access to use and update data.

## **Information is managed**

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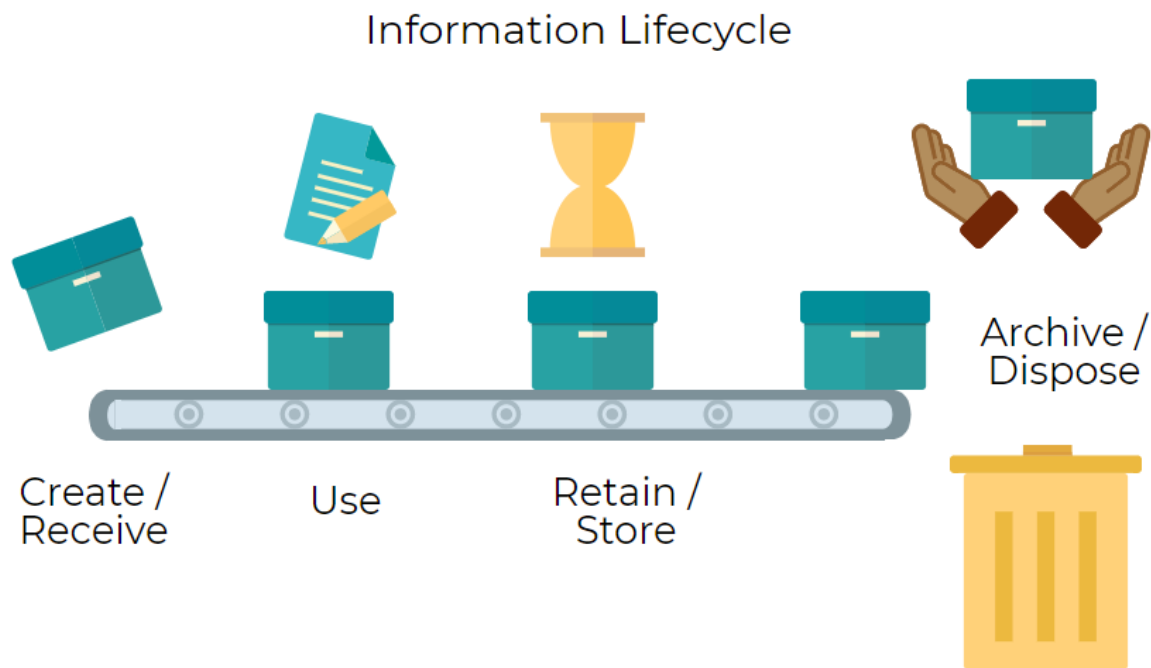
Just as we manage our other resources, we will manage our information throughout its lifecycle.

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As a council we manage our other resources: our property, our personnel. Similarly, we must manage our information.

- We should only create and collect information that is needed.
- We must ensure information is appropriately secure.
- We should ensure accuracy and completeness of information.
- We should ensure information is kept up-to-date where appropriate.
- We should keep information until it is no longer required.

- Where appropriate, information should be passed to the council's Archive Service or disposed of appropriately.



We should endeavour to identify information asset owners, and sources and repositories of information.

We may keep information for many reasons, including legislative and regulatory compliance, organisational need, historical or social importance, and corporate memory. Aberdeenshire Council's records must only be kept for as long as necessary. Information should be kept and disposed of in a consistent manner using the council's retention schedules to guide this process. Some information will need to be preserved indefinitely. Preservation may be a legislative requirement, or may be because the information is of historical, cultural or social importance. Where information is to be preserved, it should be transferred to the Archive Service.

We must balance the need to keep information with the economic cost of storage and the risk of holding the information. We must also consider the implications of long-term management of information and the risk of software and hardware obsolescence.

Information should have appropriate associated metadata. Metadata provides a way of understanding the lineage and dependencies of the information it is associated with. It provides visibility of the context and usage of information. It can help us understand how information is being accessed and used, allowing for proactive analysis.

Good information management should be a requirement of our technology, our contractors, and our agents. We must have appropriate technological solutions to

the management of information, and we must build good information management into technology. Information management requirements must be a consideration of any new technology procured by the Council. Third parties carrying out functions of the council, for example data processors, must practise good records management.

As a part of our information management, we must manage our records. The good management of our records is a requirement of the Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011 (PR(S)A). Aberdeenshire Council has a joint Records Management Plan with the Aberdeenshire Licensing Board. This Plan is approved by the Keeper of the Records of Scotland (the Keeper). The Records Management Plan and associated Improvement Plan sets out how we practise good records management within the Council, and how we will improve. The council will continue to improve its management of records in line with the Records Management Plan, the improvement plan, and the assessment of the Keeper. The council will engage with the process, the PR(S)A team and the Keeper.

Building on the roll out of Microsoft 365 across the Council, part of our plan for improvement is a Council-wide electronic document and record management system (EDRMS). The system will improve the management of our data and information, and allow for better legislative compliance, improved access and greater efficiencies.

## **Information is available to the right people**

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We will make information available to the public unless there are privacy or security reasons not to do so.

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In addition to the obligation to respond to requests for information under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOISA), the Act also places a duty on the Council to proactively publish information. The Council proactively publishes Open Data in line the Aberdeenshire Council Open Data Strategy.

FOISA requires Scottish local authorities to produce, publish and maintain a publication scheme detailing the classes of information made routinely available, along with information on how the public can access this information and any associated costs. Aberdeenshire Council has adopted the Model Publication Scheme, which was produced by the Scottish Information Commissioner. The Council publishes the details of the information available under the Scheme on the Council website. Similarly, the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations (2004) (the EIRs) also place an obligation on the Council to proactively publish environmental information.

We have a duty to consider the public interest in the information we hold and have regard to what we ought to make available, including information on our decisions and the data that supports these decisions, and the costs and performance of the services we provide.

Proactive publishing of information reduces the work and resources involved with reactive requests for information under FOISA and the EIRs, particularly where there is information that is repeatedly requested.

As a minimum, we should publish information where:

- there is a public interest as stipulated in FOISA
- there is a statutory requirement to publish
- it is widely considered good practice to publish
- the information is often requested and disclosed under FOISA.

Proactive publishing also supports the Council's commitment to transparency, promoting better relationships with stakeholders. The information we publish can help stakeholders understand the work we do and the decisions we make and supports them to engage meaningfully with the Council.

This principle goes beyond the legislative and regulatory requirements to which the Council is subject. The Model Publication Scheme sets out the minimum information the Council should publish. We must aim to go beyond the minimum and make more of our information available and accessible.

In addition to information about Council's decisions, functions and services, residents and businesses should be able to access information about themselves and understand how we use that information. Information about our residents is entrusted to our care. We can meet this responsibility to make information accessible through information access requests, but also working to make this information available by default, allowing, where possible, residents to access, amend and control their own personal data.

## **Information is fit for purpose**

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Information must be fit for both its primary purpose, but also for any other potential purposes.

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We cannot always anticipate what other uses information can be put to, however if users can be sure of the quality of data behind information, and the governance around it, then they can decide on its suitability.

Data quality depends on certain characteristics including information being:

- Accurate
- Available
- Complete
- Consistent
- Current
- Understandable

- Usable

Information does not need to be perfect, but we must understand the limitations of our information and the rules that govern it. It must be of an adequate quality for the purposes for which it is used.

We must establish appropriate thresholds for data quality to ensure consistency across data and trust in the data we hold and provide. The council's Master Data Management project will help drive forward improvements in data quality across the council and be the impetus for improved governance. We must improve the quality of our data and co-ordinate and integrate disparate sources. We must:

- remove duplicate data
- reconcile data across systems
- put in place standards across systems
- break down data silos
- improve the accuracy of data being entered into systems.

These steps will improve trust in our data and information, and ensure it is fit for purpose.

## **Information is standardised and integrated**

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We will link and integrate information sources allowing us a better view of our residents and our services.

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Integrated information gives us a unified view of the functions of the Council. It allows us to spot patterns and solve problems more effectively. The linking of the data behind our information requires an element of standardisation. Standardisation is important if datasets are to be combined to allow better leverage and analysis. Standard nomenclature and formats must be established across services and systems.

We can achieve improved data integration through Master Data Management. We must consider what our key sources of data are, what we want to integrate, and what we can integrate. Starting with low complexity data which is common and has a low change frequency we can learn, identify patterns of consumption, common formats, and so on. We can then consider other potential sources such as property data, business data, supplier data and employee data.



## Information is reusable and reused

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We will maximise the potential benefit of the information we hold by reusing it where possible.

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The information and data we collect or create can have multiple uses – the primary use for which it was collected or created, but also additional uses either by the council or externally. We should collect or create the same piece of data only once, and the use of that data should be maximised.

Risk analysis must be carried out to balance the need for information to be protected and the opportunities to exploit the data we hold for further use. We can minimise risk by recognising that data can be presented in different ways. Where it is not possible for reasons of security or privacy to release data in its original state, we should consider whether the data may have value and interest if reformatted, anonymised or aggregated.

The Re-Use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2015 encourage and make it easier to re-use information produced, held or distributed by the Council as part of its public task.

Internally we should seek to reuse our information to help us innovate. Business intelligence provides the tools and best practices to enable access to and analysis of information and data aimed at understanding the organisation, its activities and potential opportunities for improvement and innovation. Business intelligence allows insight into the Council, its residents, and its services. This insight and knowledge can be used to improve decision making and performance across the Council. We should support the development of skills that allow data driven decision-making. Data integration supports business intelligence activities and enables effective analysis which, in turn, allows us to innovate.

## Governance

### Roles, responsibilities and accountabilities

Managing our information requires key roles and groups within the council with strategic and operational responsibilities, including the following:

- Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO)
- Data Protection Officer
- Freedom of Information Officer
- Records Manager
- Information Security Officer
- Information Asset Owners

- Information Governance Group

Key outputs of these stakeholders include policies, best practice, strategy, and resolution of shared information issues.

All staff who create, receive, or maintain information have responsibilities towards that information and putting into practice the principles of good information management. To support them to do this, they must have appropriate skills and tools. The council will provide appropriate tools, for example a classification scheme and retention schedules, to facilitate good information management. Appropriate training will be available to staff along with procedures and guidance.

## **Policies, standards, procedures and processes**

Within the council, how we collect, store, manage, maintain, and use our information is influenced and controlled by corporate strategies, policies, procedures, processes, codes of practice and guides. This framework of documentation allows for consistency across the council. Our information is subject to the following:

### Strategies and plans

- Council Plan 2017 – 2022
- Digital Strategy
- Open Data Strategy
- Records Management Plan

### Policies and Codes of Practice

- Information Management Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Information Security Policy
- Mandatory Operating Procedure: Acceptable Use (ICT)
- Mandatory Operating Procedure: ICT Asset Management
- Code of Practice: Information Asset Classification
- Code of Practice: Remote Working

## **Legislative framework**

Internal policies and practices should support compliance with legislation and governmental and industry regulations. Good information management supports legislative compliance. Over recent years there have been significant changes to the legislative and regulatory landscape affecting information management, as well as ongoing compliance requirements. The current framework includes:

- Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011
- Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulation
- Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002
- Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004
- Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
- INSPIRE (Scotland) Regulations

- Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2015
- Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

## **Ethical and social responsibility**

In addition to the legal and regulatory obligations on the council, there are also ethical reasons to protect information and prevent its misuse. This is part of the social responsibility of the council.

The data we hold frequently represents the characteristics of individuals or is used to make decisions about individuals. Consequently, there is an imperative to manage its quality and reliability. Misuse of information can negatively affect individuals and the organisation.

There are ethical considerations around the economic value of our information, how that value can be accessed and by whom. Ethical information management can increase the level of trust stakeholders have in the council.

While the SIRO and risk management team are involved in controlling risk, ultimately it is the responsibility of every member of staff handling information to manage it in a secure, legal, and ethical manner.

## **Delivering and Measuring Progress**

This strategy sets out our vision for information and the principles underpinning our information management. We will measure our progress. Measures for progress will include:

- legislative and regulatory compliance
- compliance with internal policies
- current, up-to-date policies and guidance
- Records Management Plan RAG status
- the Data Protection Officer's annual report
- numbers of data breaches
- information request responses
- system usage reports
- system performance reports
- Data Protection and Records Management training completion
- complaints, issues, and incident reports
- volume of information held on M365
- volume of information held in physical storage on-site and off-site.

Progress will be reviewed on a regular basis to coincide with the annual Progress Update on the Records Management Plan.

## Version Control

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<b>Version</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Summary of Changes</b>
1.0	30/09/20	Approved version published
1.1	20/12/2022	Minor updates to reflect changes to Council nomenclature and UK GDPR

## Distribution

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