

Agenda Item

Committee: **Cabinet**
Date: **28 April 2009**
Title: **Scrutiny Review of Records Management**
By: **Director of Law and Personnel**
Purpose: **To provide an opportunity for the Cabinet to comment on the report of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee**

RECOMMENDATION –

To consider any comments the Cabinet wishes to make to the County Council on the report of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee

1. Background Information

1.1 The Community Services Scrutiny Committee has completed its scrutiny review of records management.

1.2 The Committee's report will be submitted to the County Council on 23 June and a copy is attached. The Cabinet now has an opportunity to comment to the County Council on the recommendations in the Scrutiny Committee's report, although it cannot alter the report. Elsewhere on the agenda is a separate report by the Director of Law and Personnel commenting on the Scrutiny Committee's report.

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Scrutiny review of records management

Final Report by the Review Board

Councillor Philip Howson (Chairman)

Councillor Phil Scott

Councillor Francis Whetstone

March 2009

Community Services Scrutiny Committee – 11 March 2009

Cabinet – 28 April 2009

Full Council – 23 June 2009

The report of the Scrutiny Review of records management

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2	Repairs to the buildings should be prioritised in order to enable the use of currently empty shelf space and to reduce staff time, costs and risks associated with damaged records. In the longer term, alternative ways to manage the buildings should be investigated in order to avoid specialist records staff being diverted from their records management duties.	9
3	Secure carrying receptacles (e.g. security wallets) should be introduced for highly sensitive records in order to improve security of records in transit.	9
4	Records management should be included in staff induction and on-line records management training made available to all staff, supported by specific advice from the records management team as required.	10
5	A network of departmental records management champions should be created. Each department should nominate a champion who will receive additional training from records management, promote good records management in their department and meet quarterly with other champions and records management staff to share good practice and promote consistency of approach.	10
6	The Records Management service should undertake the National Archives self-assessment process, prioritising the modules so that those likely to be of most benefit are undertaken first.	11
7	The Council should continue to take a proactive approach to the introduction of EDRM and scanning technology in order to realise the medium and long term benefits, but should be aware that this will not relieve pressure on systems for managing paper records in the short term.	13
8	There should be a mechanism for ensuring a co-ordinated corporate approach to EDRM once the EDRM pilot project concludes.	13
9	The records management team needs to increase its work with departments now to ensure that the same standards of records management are applied to e-records systems as are currently applied to paper records. Ways to free up staff time to undertake this role must be identified as a priority.	13
10	On an 'invest to save' basis, resources for a time-limited additional post should be considered. This would recognise the demands of the 'transitional' period when EDRM is being established at the same time as the paper records workload must also continue to be managed. The post should enable increased provision of advice and input to departments on the introduction of EDRM, the revision of retention schedules and offer training for staff.	15
11	The specific recharges made to departments should be reviewed with a view to using these to incentivise good records management and to relieve pressure on the records centre.	15

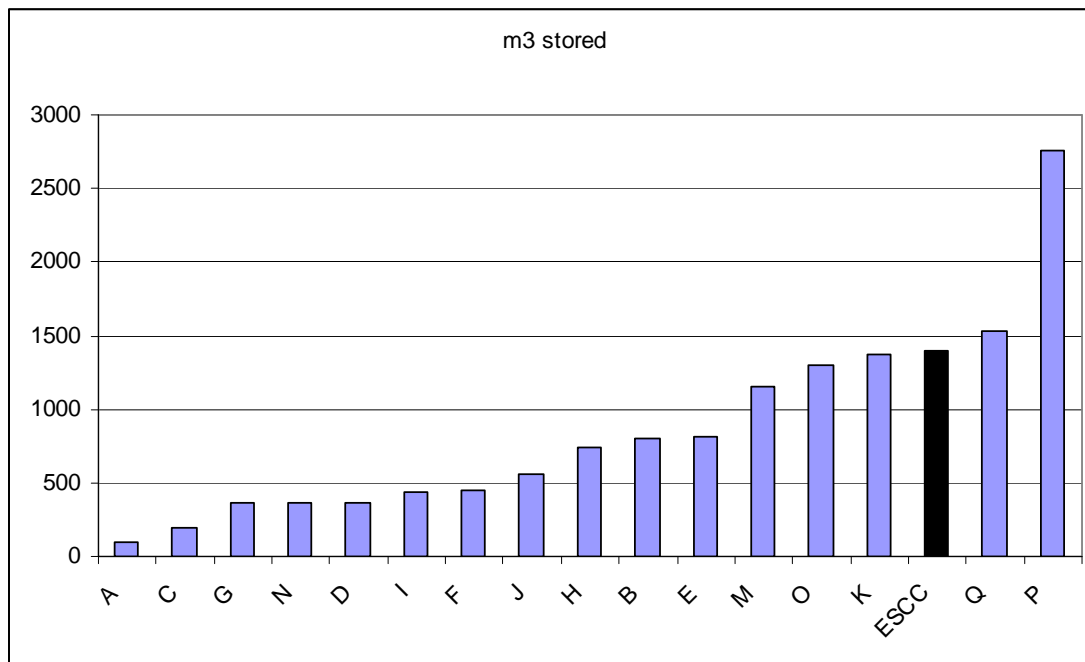
12	The potential savings and feasibility of a single corporate or multi-organisation contract for destruction of confidential waste should be explored.	16
13	Costs of private sector provided records management should be investigated to determine whether ESCC's current charges to external clients are set at an appropriate level.	17

Action against recommendations will be monitored at 6, 12 and 18 months by the Community Services Scrutiny Committee.

1. Background

1. Records and the information they contain are an important asset and should be managed with the same care as the County Council's finances, estates and properties. The records management service was established in 1974 and provides for the orderly transfer of modern administrative papers from East Sussex County Council (ESCC) offices to high-density, low-cost storage when they are no longer required for frequent reference. The documents are managed, not just stored. Documents are assigned a shelf life with specific retention periods and the option for departmental review and archive appraisal for certain classes of records. This ensures that records are retained as long as they need to be for legal or administrative purposes and then confidentially shredded. Some documents, which are considered important enough for permanent preservation are transferred to the County Record Office to augment the archives of the County Council.

2. The total volume of records held by the service is approximately 1400m³, enough to completely fill 14 double decker buses. This is a relatively large amount compared to other county councils surveyed by the Review Board (see chart below) although only 56% of this is ESCC's own records – the remainder being held for external clients. Since 1997 the records management service has provided records management for Brighton and Hove City Council (B&HCC) under a substantial service level agreement and they remain the major external client.



3. The service is operated from four warehouses in Newhaven (the 'records centre'), which provide approximately ten miles of shelving. The records are controlled via a database called CALM, which identifies all documents currently held at the Records Centre and their location, and all records ever held, thus creating an audit trail of all records which have been destroyed. The database also identifies those records which are due for destruction, review or appraisal for archive, and tracks files which are on loan. The Records Management service also manages the storage and retrieval of ESCC's deeds and agreements.

4. While the service began as a paper storage and management service, it is now advising ESCC on the management of electronic records, which should be managed according to the same principles as paper records.

Targets and performance requirements

5. Information management of this sort has never formed part of the government's assessment of local authorities. However, records management is now seen as an essential element of a local authority's ability to fulfil its obligations under the Freedom of Information (Fol) Act. The National Archives has produced a (voluntary) self-assessment toolkit to assess the compliance of organisations' records management with the code of practice under section 46 of the Fol Act. The service has not as yet used this toolkit. The records management international standard is ISO 15489 – ESCC is not yet fully compliant with this.

6. As the service is not public-facing, it does not have council plan targets. The team's targets for 2008/09 were to accommodate all records requiring transfer, and to work towards the renewal of the contract with Brighton & Hove, which ends in August 2009. The service also contributes to a number of the County Council's priorities, including its ability to fulfil its accommodation strategy, its obligations under Fol, and information governance. It has also enabled Legal Services to maintain its Lexel accreditation.

2. Objectives and Scope of the Review

7. The objective of the Scrutiny Review has been to assess the Council's policy and practice for records management, and the sustainability of the service, making recommendations for improvement where appropriate.

8. The Review Board focussed on the following areas:

- Records storage capacity
- Risk management
- Use of electronic records management and digital storage/scanning (high level consideration only)
- Funding, charging and income generation

9. In undertaking the review the Board aimed to:

- Consider how the service compares to that at other County Councils;
- Consider whether there are opportunities for income generation and more effective use of resources;
- Review the main risks associated with records management and how these are managed.
- Consider the need for future records storage capacity, including the opportunities and risks presented by electronic storage.

10. The review specifically excluded the archives side of the Archives and Records Management service. The review therefore did not look in any detail at 'The Keep' project, except in so far as the possibility of future records storage being provided as part of the project.

11. Although the review gave some consideration to the issue of digital storage/scanning, it was recognised that it would not be possible to examine this complex issue in depth. The Board also did not look in detail at the policy and practice relating to retention schedules within departments, or the storage of records currently in active use within departments.

3. Findings

Capacity and future needs

Introduction

12. The major and immediate pressures on the records management service are essentially those of capacity, both in terms of space and of staffing. The workload has increased considerably over the past 10 years for two reasons. Firstly, more teams across the Council are recognising the benefits of records management but secondly, and most significantly, the accommodation strategies of ESCC and B&HCC are enabling fewer documents to be stored in offices and they are therefore being transferred to the records centre. This has created pressure on storage and on staff. Restrictions have been placed on the number of new boxes which can be accepted from departments and recently the records centre had to close completely to new consignments of records.

13. These pressures had meant that an 18 month backlog of processing newly received records had built up, which has recently been eliminated through ESCC 'invest to save' funding. There is a risk that this backlog could build up again now that the funding has ceased, although streamlining of procedures and the introduction of an electronic system for logging records will mitigate this risk. There are also some records which cannot yet be destroyed because they are still awaiting selection of those that should be transferred to archives – the backlog for this type of appraisal is running into years.

14. Electronic document records management and digital storage have the potential to address capacity pressures in the longer term (see later section), but will not begin to have an impact for several years. Initially the impact will be on reducing demand so that it is more balanced with space created through destruction of records no longer required. Physical capacity will therefore be an issue for some time to come.

Storage capacity

15. A focus group of internal service users, which was very positive about the records management service in general, showed that the only significant area of frustration is the recent restrictions on the number of boxes that departments are able to send for storage due to the lack of capacity in the records centre. There is currently a waiting list in operation and some departments have build-ups of boxes awaiting transfer within their own buildings, which is creating a conflict with the office accommodation strategy.

16. The Board witnessed the pressures on records centre space at first hand and noted the actions being taken to maximise the use of the available space. These include installing additional or mobile shelving where possible and ensuring that destruction is fully up to date. A benchmarking survey of 17 other authorities showed that over two thirds of authorities have destruction backlog, whereas ESCC has none. The Board's view is that everything reasonably possible is being done to maximise the use of space in the current records centre warehouses.

17. The survey also showed that ESCC is not alone in facing storage pressures. All but two authorities said they faced the same issue and it was named as one of the top two challenges for records managers. Other Councils are taking similar measures to ESCC in terms of installing extra shelving and imposing restrictions/waiting lists on departments. There are risks, however, in not taking records, in that these are then not within the corporate records management system (and may not be managed at all). It also creates a 'hidden' backlog which will have to be dealt with at some later point and creates pressures on departmental office accommodation, potentially impacting on records security.

18. A number of other authorities have bought extra space through commercial providers, often recharging this to departments. ESCC could consider this, but the costs could not be funded from the current central records management budget. Departments could consider whether they are willing to pay for additional storage in order to bring their records under the management of the corporate team, based on an assessment of costs and benefits. If the Council decides not to invest in additional storage space, the increasing amount of records having to be retained by departments and not managed through the corporate system will have to continue to be accepted as a risk.

19. As part of 'The Keep' project which is overseeing the development of a new building to house East Sussex and Brighton & Hove archives, the feasibility of accommodating modern records has been investigated. Accommodating records within the new archive building was found to be unaffordable and the second option of an additional adjacent building, although not completely ruled out, also looks financially unviable. The Board accepted that a new building to house modern records is highly unlikely to be an option for resolving or easing the current pressures on capacity.

Recommendation 1

Additional warehouse space will now be required for several years to come if the records management service is to be able to manage all modern records as intended and minimise the associated risks to the Council in this area. The Council needs to consider how this could be resourced, either corporately or through departmental budgets.

Risk management

Introduction

20. The Review Board considered three main areas of risk in relation to records managed by the service. Firstly, the physical security of the records centre; secondly, the security of records in transit to and from the records centre and thirdly, the consistency of records management within ESCC.

Physical security

21. The records centre buildings from which the service operates have caused problems in the past through water ingress and vandalism. The latter has recently been addressed and the roofs are gradually being attended to. Modern records do not need such strict atmospheric conditions as archives, though buildings must be secure and in good condition.

22. The main risk to records is the fabric of the buildings, resulting in rain water penetration. Recent water damage has resulted in records having to be sent for freeze drying at a cost of £35,000. Although this cost is largely covered by ESCC's insurance policy, there is a £500 excess for each incident and future insurance premiums may also increase as a result of regular claims. A recent Ofsted inspection has resulted in a statutory requirement to repair the roof of the building used to store adoption records.

23. When visiting the buildings, the Board noted that some areas cannot currently be used for storage as they are susceptible to water ingress. Given the extreme pressure on storage space, this is particularly wasteful. The Review Board is also concerned that the administrative work involved in managing the buildings, and damage to records is considerable and takes staff away from providing the core service.

24. The building is alarmed (both intruder and fire) and the alarm system has recently been upgraded to address the relatively large number of false call-outs under the old system. The Board were concerned to note that staff had been attending alarm call-outs (whether false or genuine) alone, often in the middle of the night. However, this issue was resolved during the course of the review, through the employment of a security company to respond to call-outs.

25. It is possible that the ongoing building issues may force consideration of a move to alternative premises. However, it would be very difficult to find suitable buildings which remain accessible to B&HCC. Given this, and the associated costs, a move looks unlikely.

Security of records

26. The records management service has a range of measures in place to ensure the security of records. For example, the records centre is only accessible to records staff, files are not labelled whilst stored (instead they are tracked by the secure database) and the council's own courier service is used to transport records.

27. Results from the benchmarking survey show that these measures are commonly taken by other authorities. However, around a third of authorities use additional security for sensitive files whilst in transit, such as sealed pouches or security wallets. ESCC records are transported by the Council's courier in sealed envelopes marked confidential. Introducing the use of lockable pockets for sensitive records (e.g. looked after children, legal services) would improve document security. The Board noted that a project looking in more detail at wider aspects of the security of records in transit is currently being undertaken by Corporate Resources Department. To avoid duplication, the review did not go into further detail on this area.

28. The survey also showed that most authorities (including ESCC) use a private contractor for destruction and require destruction certificates to ensure security. Three authorities carry out destruction in-house which has the benefit of increased security, since records do not need to be taken off-site, but requires staff time and investment in an industrial standard shredder. It is not clear that there are sufficient benefits to offset the costs of this and there is a lack of space in the East Sussex records centre to undertake shredding in-house.

29. Although this review did not intend to look in detail at records management practice within departments, the Board noted that a 'clear desk' policy operates in departments as part of ensuring the security of records and that the Information Governance Steering Group is looking at issues of data security. Evidence from a focus group of internal service users suggested that staff awareness of records management could be improved (see next section). The Board's view is that this is particularly important with regard to ensuring the security of records.

Recommendation 2

Repairs to the buildings should be prioritised in order to enable the use of currently empty shelf space and to reduce staff time, costs and risks associated with damaged records. In the longer term, alternative ways to manage the buildings should be investigated in order to avoid specialist records staff being diverted from their records management duties.

Recommendation 3

Secure carrying receptacles (e.g. security wallets) should be introduced for highly sensitive records in order to improve security of records in transit.

Ensuring consistently good practice

30. The corporate records management system is designed to ensure that the Council meets legal requirements and good practice. The Board considered whether there were risks to this system. For example, are records being managed consistently, are the right records being transferred to the records centre for management or are records being retained unnecessarily, thus adding to pressures on capacity?

31. A focus group of service user representatives suggested that there are varying levels of awareness and knowledge amongst departmental staff of records management principles. For example, an office accommodation rationalisation project in one department had improved staff knowledge of retention schedules and there had been an increased awareness and willingness amongst staff to ensure the appropriateness of records sent for archiving. It was suggested that there may be a similar need to raise awareness in other departments.

32. There is currently no records management information included in new staff induction and no routine training on offer. In comparison, an on-line training course on Freedom of Information is a required part of the induction process for new staff and it is available to existing staff, with an expectation that staff in key roles will complete it. There is potential to complement this with on-line records management training and some work has been done on this. However, staff capacity has delayed its development, and will limit what additional training can be offered. 15 of the 17 county councils responding to the benchmarking survey undertake training for officers/teams in records management practice and there is a clear gap here in what ESCC's team are able to provide within the resources available.

33. The records management service liaises on a regular basis with key individuals in each department who have a role in dealing with their department's records. However, these links are informal. The benchmarking survey showed that over three quarters of other authorities have named contacts for records management in departments. Evidence from records management staff and internal service users suggests that a more formalised system of departmental contacts or records management 'champions' would be helpful in raising awareness, spreading good practice and improving processes. These contacts should receive additional training which they can use to advise staff in their department, and meet on a quarterly basis with records staff to problem solve and share good practice. Their role would include ensuring that staff in departments access appropriate training in records management.

34. The Board's view is that more 'upstream' working with departments is key to reducing the risk that records may be inappropriately managed or left unmanaged. The Board is also conscious that this review was not able to examine in great detail how well the Council meets all aspects of good practice and to identify fully the risks and opportunities. National Archives produces a self-assessment toolkit to enable authorities to assess compliance with national codes of practice and to identify risks. The Board believes it would be helpful for the Records Management service to use this toolkit to assist in risk management in the future.

Recommendation 4

Records management should be included in staff induction and on-line records management training made available to all staff, supported by specific advice from the records management team as required.

Recommendation 5

A network of departmental records management champions should be created. Each department should nominate a champion who will receive additional training from records management, promote good records management in their department and meet quarterly with other champions and records management staff to share good practice and promote consistency of approach.

Recommendation 6

The Records Management service should undertake the National Archives self-assessment process, prioritising the modules so that those likely to be of most benefit are undertaken first.

Electronic records management

Introduction

35. There are two main strands to electronic records – one is the creation, filing and storage of new records electronically (electronic document records management or EDRM). The second is the use of digital storage for existing paper documents, for example on CD or by scanning the document and storing it electronically. The same principles of good records management apply equally to electronic records as to paper records.

36. EDRM is a relatively new area to all local authorities and in most, if not all, authorities (including ESCC) the level of records management applied to paper records does not currently exist for e-records. ESCC's records management team has now begun to advise the Council on EDRM, as well as managing paper records, and a corporate project, sponsored by the County Archivist, is underway. This includes pilots of EDRM in Personnel and Training and Special Educational Needs. Adult Social Care is also beginning to introduce EDRM, with advice from the records management team.

37. There are potential opportunities to save space through scanning documents. However, the cost effectiveness of this depends on a variety of factors, including the length of time that the scanned records need to be kept and their importance for legal admissibility. The service has commissioned business analysis to establish broad guidelines on judging the likely return on investment. This analysis was underway in parallel with this review.

EDRM

38. Electronic document records management represents a major challenge and opportunity for records management services and organisations generally. In the longer term it has the potential to considerably reduce the amount of paper records requiring storage and the time spent processing, retrieving and destroying records. However, it is early days and it is clear to the Review Board that EDRM is not a panacea and does not represent a solution to capacity problems in the short to medium term. It will take several years to move to a full EDRM strategy which will apply both to new records as opposed to those already held.

39. ESCC has a well established and effective system for managing paper records, built up over a number of years. Whilst EDRM presents opportunities, there is also a real risk that, if not implemented effectively and consistently across Council departments, much of the good practice could be undone. The inconsistency and risks experienced with paper records before effective records management was introduced could creep back in, resulting in the Council's records management system moving backwards instead of forwards.

40. The benchmarking survey of other authorities placed EDRM as one of the top two challenges facing records managers. There is a mix of arrangements in place for EDRM, some authorities having a single team managing both paper and e-records and others with separate teams. This mix probably reflects the relative 'newness' of this area and its links to ICT. ESCC currently has a separate team working on EDRM, based in the Corporate Resources/ICT department but the records management team are actively involved in an advisory role.

41. The Board has concerns about the potential for inconsistency or gaps if the management of e-records is completely devolved to individual teams across the council. Although day to day file management should be a team level responsibility, central management, or as a minimum, oversight, of e-records systems by the records management team is probably the only way to maintain the current standards of records management across the organisation. This would involve, for example, ensuring that correct retention periods are built into systems and that electronic documents are destroyed in a timely and appropriate way. However, this would involve a significant amount of additional work for the team, particularly in the earlier stages whilst systems are being established and benefits from a reduction in paper records are yet to be realised.

42. Whatever the balance between a central or devolved approach to e-records, it is clear that the records management service will have to adapt its role as the authority moves to EDRM and the number of paper records reduces over time. The management and storage of electronic material will have to be significantly developed and the records management team have expertise which is essential to ensuring this happens in such a way as to meet legal requirements and national standards. The aim must be to ensure that EDRM is as good or better than the current system for paper records.

43. To achieve this, the records management team must spend significantly more time working with departments to bring their expertise to the design of EDRM systems and to train staff in records management. However, there is currently very limited staff time available to work with departments in this way as staff are drawn back into the day to day management of the records centre which takes inevitable priority.

44. When drawing up business cases for the introduction of EDRM, it will be crucial for departments to build in records management staff time for advice, input to the system design and review of retention schedules. Departments may need to be prepared to fund their time and expertise as part of the costs of introducing EDRM.

45. ESCC's corporate EDRM project is coming to a close and it is unclear how the work will be taken forward. The Board's view is that a consistent, corporate approach to this new area will be needed across the council. The benchmarking survey indicated that some other authorities have established corporate information management groups which could act as forums to oversee EDRM as well as paper records systems and this could be a potential way forward.

Digital Storage

46. A casual observer may find it difficult to understand why, in the modern technological environment, it is not possible to convert box upon box of paper records into electronic formats and store them in a fraction of the space. In reality there are a number of constraints, particularly where documents must be kept for decades, or indefinitely as archives, or where they may be required by a court of law.

47. Digital media such as CDs are currently guaranteed by manufacturers to last for only around 10 years. As for electronic formats, it is impossible to know what software will be in use in the 22nd century and whether documents we create now will still be readable by computers then, even if the investment has been made in migrating documents from one software package to another every few years. On top of this, courts will often only accept original paper copies of documents due to security concerns. So far, only paper has stood the test of time.

48. Despite these constraints, there are some opportunities to be had from digital storage of documents, notably scanning of documents, either new documents arriving at the Council, or 'back-scanning' existing documents. The Board noted the findings of the Council's business analysis work which found that the benefits of 'back scanning' must outweigh the costs of doing so and that it is probably only cost-effective to scan documents being kept for a number of years. The Board endorsed the conclusion that it is likely to be a case by case decision for different categories of document.

49. In terms of scanning new and existing paper documents, there are arguments for and against establishing a central corporate scanning bureau or undertaking scanning within departments. A central bureau would concentrate expertise and ensure consistent quality but staff would have less service knowledge to assist them in decisions about appropriate storage or distribution. A departmental model would enable a more locally tailored approach with more service knowledge but risks inconsistent quality. The costs associated with these models were yet to be calculated at the conclusion of this review. In addition, a pilot scanning bureau in Adult Social Care had yet to be evaluated.

50. The Board were not able to consider this issue in detail, and recognise that the business analysis was unfinished, but on the basis of the available information, favoured a centralised model to ensure consistent quality.

Recommendation 7

The Council should continue to take a proactive approach to the introduction of EDRM and scanning technology in order to realise the medium and long term benefits, but should be aware that this will not relieve pressure on systems for managing paper records in the short term.

Recommendation 8

There should be a mechanism for ensuring a co-ordinated corporate approach to EDRM once the EDRM pilot project concludes.

Recommendation 9

The records management team needs to increase its work with departments now to ensure that the same standards of records management are applied to e-records systems as are currently applied to paper records. Ways to free up staff time to undertake this role must be identified as a priority.

Funding, charging and income generation

Introduction

51. The records management service has its own budget (it is not a trading service). As well as managing the County Council's own records, the service has several paying clients, notably Brighton and Hove City Council (B&HCC), but also East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service, CAF/CASS (Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service) and a parish council. Staff have also undertaken occasional paid external consultancy work but ability to undertake this is limited by staff capacity.

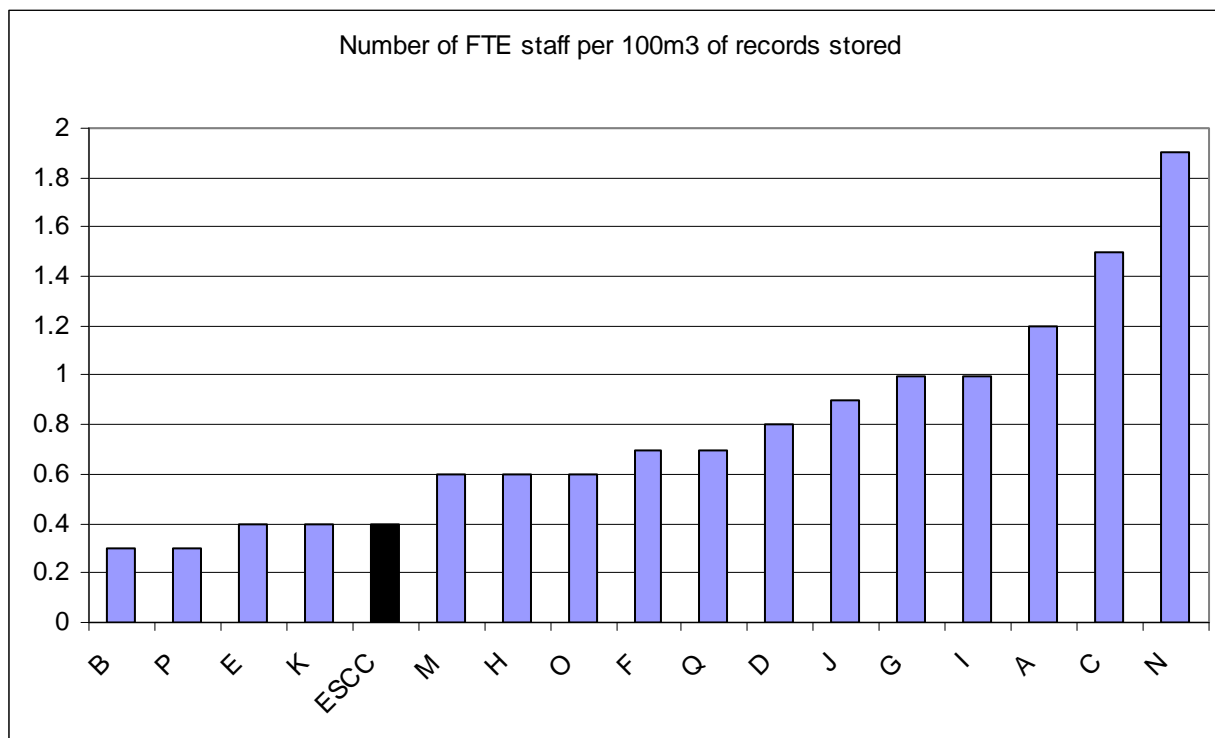
52. The budget for 2008/9 is £353,000. £229,000 is received in income from external clients including B&HCC, the Fire and Rescue Service and CAF/CASS in proportion to the amount of records held for each. Further income is received through recharging departments for boxes and for shredding. The net cost to the County Council is £124,000.

53. The 10 year Service Level Agreement with B&HCC ends in August 2009. This agreement has been mutually beneficial for several years, enabling more efficient use of staff and resources. The contract is currently being renegotiated.

Staffing

54. The ESCC records management team consists of 6 full-time equivalent (FTE) core staff, which includes 1 FTE professional records manager. These have been supplemented by project staff at various times, paid for from project funding e.g. 'invest to save' or office accommodation rationalisation projects.

55. Benchmarking staffing numbers with other authorities is difficult due to the differing staffing structures between authorities. In addition, the amount of records held varies widely between councils. However, based on the information gathered from a survey of 17 authorities, plotting FTE staff against the number of cubic metres of records held, ESCC appears to have a relatively low number of staff compared to most of the other authorities surveyed.



56. 11 of the 17 county councils surveyed by the Review Board (including ESCC) have a single professional records manager or less within their team. However, of the six authorities with the largest amounts of records stored, four have two FTE or more professional records managers, as shown in the table below:

Authority	m ³	FTE Records Managers
P	2763	2.0
Q	1534	3.5
East Sussex	1395	1.0
K	1368	1.0
O	1300	3.0
M	1155	4.0

57. This suggests that ESCC has a low professional records manager presence for the amount of records held. The other authority listed above with 1.0 FTE records manager is Kent County Council. The Board's visit to Kent indicated that although that authority has one professional manager with the records management service, a separate team elsewhere in the council undertakes much of the advisory work which, in East Sussex, falls to the single records manager.

58. Based on this data the Review Board believes the service offers an efficient service which provides good value for money. However, the Board has also noted that the service is stretched and therefore unable to undertake some functions which are becoming increasingly necessary to further develop good records management across ESCC, particularly in the context of the introduction of electronic records management. The service's advisory role in particular needs to be strengthened in order to maintain standards into the future.

Recommendation 10

On an 'invest to save' basis, resources for a time-limited additional post should be considered. This would recognise the demands of the 'transitional' period when EDRM is being established at the same time as the paper records workload must also continue to be managed. The post should enable increased provision of advice and input to departments on the introduction of EDRM, the revision of retention schedules and offer training for staff.

Budgetary arrangements

59. The records management service currently has its own budget and makes only limited recharges to departments for the cost of storage boxes and for destruction (shredding). Destruction costs are shared equally between departments regardless of relative amounts.

60. Benchmarking with other county councils shows that only three of 17 authorities surveyed operate a fully recharged service but that 13 of the 17 make some sort of recharge to departments such as a specified amount per box, for retrievals, destruction or for additional storage capacity commissioned due to lack of space in the authority's own records centre.

61. Moving to a fully recharged service has previously been considered by the ESCC team but was rejected due to the administrative complexity. The Review Board are inclined to agree, especially as this would simply result in shunting costs around the organisation. However, the Board believes that there are opportunities to review the recharges currently made to departments and to consider introducing specific recharges where these incentivise good records management and therefore potentially reduce pressure on the records centre.

62. For example, making a recharge for urgent retrievals would ensure departments only requested essential documents in this way. If extra storage space was commissioned from a private provider this would have to be recharged to departments/external clients as there is no provision with the records management budget. However, recharging for this may also encourage departments to review records currently held in, or destined for, the records centre to ensure only essential records are stored, and only for the required timescale. Recharging departments proportionately for destruction may provide a similar incentive. Such approaches may also encourage proactive development of electronic records management, but should not discourage departments from transferring appropriate records to the records centre for management.

Recommendation 11

The specific recharges made to departments should be reviewed with a view to using these to incentivise good records management and to relieve pressure on the records centre.

Costs

63. A major cost for the service is the destruction of records. The records management service uses a local shredding company under a contract which has not been reviewed for some time. This company is different to that used by other parts of the county council – for example, for collection of confidential waste from County Hall.

64. Benchmarking with several other authorities suggests that the cost of the current destruction service is in line with that paid by other authorities which use private providers. A notable exception is one authority which makes a saving through a contract based on bulk collections (5-6 tonnes per collection):

Authority	Cost per kg (£)
D	0.15
E	0.25
F	0.21
I	0.16
ESCC	0.15
N	0.30
O	0.04 (collected in bulk)

65. It may not be possible or appropriate to replicate this arrangement in East Sussex, but it may be possible to make savings through one corporate contract for the destruction of confidential waste across the whole county council. The potential for a shared contract with other local statutory sector organisations could also be explored through work on shared services.

Recommendation 12

The potential savings and feasibility of a single corporate or multi-organisation contract for destruction of confidential waste should be explored.

Income generation

66. External clients are charged per foot of storage and a 10% administration charge. The survey of other authorities failed to provide useful comparative data, as each charges on a different basis. There is therefore no evidence to indicate whether ESCC's charge is in line with others. ESCC's charge could, however, be compared with private providers to assess how it compares to the alternative on offer to external clients.

67. There are opportunities for further income generation in two main areas – consultancy and taking on records management for additional clients. However, both are dependent on capacity being available to do this, and it currently is not. In addition, the costs and benefits of taking on additional work for others have to be carefully weighed up.

68. Benchmarking with other county councils shows that ESCC already holds a large proportion of records for external clients, notably Brighton and Hove City Council, whose area was formerly part of East Sussex County. However, there are some additional potential clients who could be approached, notably district and borough councils and the police.

69. Similarly, other councils have undertaken consultancy work, notably for district and borough councils, and this is an option for ESCC, building on the consultancy work undertaken in the past. However, Councils have found this to be an occasional, rather than a reliable source of income.

70. There are two main barriers to these income generating activities. Firstly, a lack of staff time to undertake consultancy and market services to potential clients and secondly, a lack of storage space in the records centre, which is currently full to capacity. Potential custom from a parish council recently had to be turned down due to lack of space.

71. It may be possible to consider including the cost of externally commissioned additional storage capacity within costings for external clients, together with cost of additional staff required to manage the records but the costs and benefits of taking on more clients are finely balanced.

72. The Review Board's view is that the benefits of taking on additional activities are marginal and, given the challenges and pressures on records management internally, the team's efforts are better focussed on ESCC and existing clients.

Recommendation 13

Costs of private sector provided records management should be investigated to determine whether ESCC's current charges to external clients are set at an appropriate level.

Appendix 1 – Methodology

Review Board membership and project support

The Review Board Members: Councillor Philip Howson (Chairman), Councillor Phil Scott, Councillor Francis Whetstone

The Project Manager was Claire Lee (Scrutiny Lead Officer) with logistics and support provided by Sam White (Scrutiny Support Officer)

Elizabeth Hughes (County Archivist) and Ellen Taylor (Senior Archivist - Records Management) provided ongoing support to the Board throughout the review.

Review Board meetings and activities

The Review Board met on 5 occasions between July 2008 and February 2009. A number of witnesses attended these meetings to provide verbal evidence to the Board.

The Board visited the ESCC Records Centre in Newhaven to see the current arrangements for records management.

In order to compare ESCC's arrangements for records management with those of other authorities the Board visited Kent County Council Records Centre and undertook a benchmarking survey of other county councils, to which 17 councils responded. The visit to Kent County Council was hosted by Jackie Davidson, Assistant Records Manager/Modern Records Archivist and Stuart Bligh, Archives and Local History Service.

To understand the experience of departments using the records management service a focus group of internal service users was undertaken. Regular users of the service from each main Council department were identified and invited to attend.

To gain an insight into national best practice, a telephone interview was conducted with a representative of the National Archives.

Witnesses providing evidence

The Board would like to thank all the witnesses who took the time to provide evidence to the Review Board:

External witnesses

Richard Blake, Head of Records Management Advisory Service, National Archives

ESCC Officers

Heidi Judd, Business Analyst Team Lead, Corporate Resources Department

Participants at focus group of service users, 22nd October 2008

Helen Batstone, Planning Admin Support, Transport & Environment

Jan Butler, Practice Manager, Legal Services

Hilary Duncan, Business Support Officer, Looked After Children's Services

Lucy Johnson, Business Analyst, Adult Social Care

Vicky Parsley, Administrative Assistant, Legal Services

Julian Patmore, Senior Strategic Resource Officer, Children's Services

Colin Skinner, Administrative Assistant - Records and Storage Management, Transport & Environment

Respondents to benchmarking survey

Kevin Ward, Head of Archives and Countryside Access, Bedfordshire County Council

Neil Martin Doling, Modern Records Manager and Freedom of Information Officer, Buckinghamshire County Council

Christine May, Archives and Local Studies Manager, Cambridgeshire County Council

Will Bell, Acting Assistant County Archivist (Records Management), Cumbria County Council

John Draisey, County Archivist, Devon County Council

Elizabeth Hughes, County Archivist, East Sussex County Council

David Humphreys, Records Manager, Essex County Council

Jenny Grodzicka, Corporate Information and Compliance Manager, Gloucestershire County Council

Janet Smith, County Archivist, Hampshire County Council

Stuart Bligh, Archives and Local History Service, Kent County Council

Rachel Moffat, County Records Manager, Lancashire County Council

Paul Dodgson, Business Partner, Information Management, Leicester County Council

Mark Dorrington, Assistant Head: Archives, Heritage and Records Management, Nottinghamshire County Council

Andrea Binding, Records Manager, Somerset County Council

Dr David Briggs, Corporate Records Manager, Staffordshire County Council

Lizi Bird, Records Manager, Warwickshire County Council

Bill Gage, Assistant County Archivist, West Sussex County Council

Heidi Mcintosh, Corporate Information Manager, Worcestershire County Council

Evidence documents

The Board considered the following papers:

	Name of document	Date of document
1	East Sussex County Council – Corporate Scanning Feasibility – Progress to date/Executive Summary - Heidi Judd, Business Analyst Team Lead, Corporate Resources Department	December 2008
2	Full Assessment Tool for Compliance with Records Management Code of Practice – The National Archives	February 2006

3	Complying with the Records Management Code: Evaluation Workbook and Methodology – The National Archives	February 2006
4	East Sussex County Council: Records Management Policy	December 2005
5	East Sussex County Council: Electronic Records Management Policy	December 2005

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