

Information Management Principles

Glossary of Terms

Metadata	A set of data that describes and gives information about other information
Taxonomy	The hierarchical classification of information or data held by an organisation can also referred to as classification scheme or filing structure.

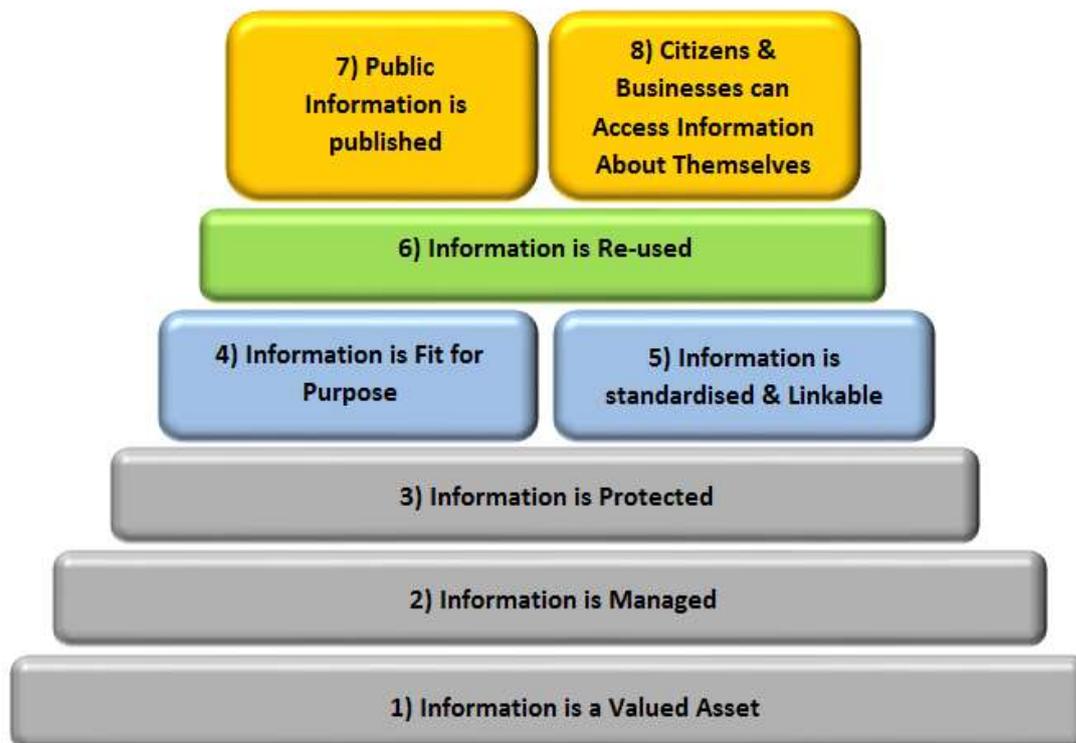
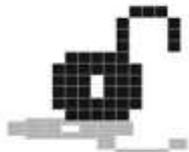
Introduction

Information is important to all organisations, it is needed to inform policy development and to make evidence based decisions, as well as to ensure accountability to the public. Recognising the importance of information to the public sector in 2011 the UK Government produced a set of information management principles to provide high level guidance to enable organisations across the public sector to draw their own local strategy and practices from a common set of principles and best practices.

This document describes those and Gloucestershire County Council's (GCC) principles for good information management and sets out how we intend to interpret them at GCC taking into account our unique organisational context and information usage.

The Principles

The principles build into a hierarchy. This hierarchy is important as the principles build on what has gone before, for example you cannot reuse information if it has not been managed and is not fit for purpose, and similarly it will not have been managed if it is not also valued. The hierarchy is demonstrated in the diagram below:



1. Information is a valued asset

Information is an asset which is fundamental to the efficient and effective delivery of public services and should therefore be understood and valued in the same way as buildings, people, machinery or money.

Information has a purpose, and in order to fully understand its value it is necessary to understand the purpose for which it was created and managed, as well as any possible future secondary uses.

Knowing what information exists, along with an assessment of its use and value, is a prerequisite for appropriately protecting and fully utilising and exploiting the information.

Putting it into Practice

Creating a culture where information is a valued asset requires that information management is seen as an integral part of people's roles not just something to be done when there is some rare quiet time. This can be done through:

- i. A declaration from GCC that establishes the importance of information to the business - this can be seen in the [Information and Data Management strategy](#) and the [Digital strategy](#) which sets information at the heart of providing a smarter, more agile public service.

- ii. The provision of training – making sure that information management is part of new starter inductions and regular refresher sessions to remind staff of the importance of information and their responsibilities.
- iii. Adding information management to job roles – information management should be part of all job roles, not just departmental administrators. Having it as part of their job description will help give staff the permission they need to spend the time managing their information without feeling that they are not making the best use of their working time.
- iv. Consistently identify, categorise and catalogue information assets and their purpose – using the [Information Asset Register](#) to identify and categorise all information assets across GCC and the purpose for which they are put. This will need to be reviewed regularly as information assets, their value and purpose may change over time.
- v. Transferring records of permanent value to Gloucestershire Archives, to preserve corporate memory for future generations.

2. Information is Managed

Information should be stored, protected and exploited according to its value. This requires consideration of the whole lifecycle of the information from identification of need, creation, use, reuse and ultimately disposition once the information has ceased to be useful from an operational point of view.

A range of best practices need to be in place to ensure appropriate availability, continued integrity, avoid loss and ensure continuity across technology changes. It is particularly important that information containing personal data is adequately protected.

The organisational culture must support best practice in information management and make sure that everyone responsible for processing business assets is appropriately skilled.

Putting it into Practice

Creating an environment in which information can be managed, protected and exploited, whilst ensuring legal and regulatory compliance and information security is maintained, can be done through:

- i. Establishing a framework for managing information through the different stages of its lifecycle. Policies and procedures are in place to help staff understand this framework; these include, but are not limited to:
 - [Information Sharing](#)
 - [Information and records management policy](#)
 - [Records retention and disposal schedule](#)

- [Digital Continuity Policy](#)
- ii. Providing technological assistance to automate or semi-automate the information management lifecycle for electronic information, this can be achieved through using approved systems for storing information instead of network drives. If the approved system does not have the functionality available this should be sought as part of system improvements or upgrades.

3. Information is protected

Although information security forms an important part of principle 2, information is managed, as a custodian of large volumes of personal data for GCC it was important to separate this aspect out and make it a principle in itself. Poor information management and governance practices will expose the public sector to unnecessary risk. The public have a right to expect us to keep their data safe when they are sharing it with us to interact with our services. Poor practices can result in inconsistencies and breaches which may ultimately lead to reputational damage and potential fines from the ICO. It is particularly important when considering any new technology that the risks are appropriately balanced against the opportunities and benefits they may bring.

Adversely poor information management can also result in an overly risk averse approach which will hinder reuse and necessary information sharing. The need therefore is to ensure that the policies and frameworks in place allows information to be shared and reused for legitimate purposes, whilst at the same time ensuring that information is protected so that legal obligations are met and that only those who need to have access may do so.

Putting it into practice

A framework for information risk assessment and information governance has been developed to define the approach to protecting information. In particular it is important to ensure that all staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities, in particular for those with defined roles, such as Information Asset Owners (IAOs) and the Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO) in the Information Governance landscape. This framework includes, but is not limited to, the following policies:

- [Information Protection and Handling Policy](#)
- [Software Management Policy](#)
- [Information IT Access Policy](#)
- [Clear Desk Policy](#)
- [GCC Password Policy](#)
- [The Information Security Management Policy](#)

4. Information is fit for purpose

Information must be good quality and fit both for its primary purpose and potential secondary uses. Naturally it will not always be possible to foresee additional uses so it is important that the quality of the information is communicated consistently so future users can make informed decisions as to its suitability.

Quality includes factors such as accuracy, validity, reliability, timeliness, relevance and completeness. The quality of information should be regularly monitored to ensure that they at least meet the levels that have been assessed as necessary for the intended purpose.

Putting it into Practice

To ensure information is fit for purpose in GCC it is important to make sure that staff are able to trust the information they are using is accurate, the most recent version and complete. This means:

- i. Ensuring that policies around the storing and handling of information are followed, in particular to ensure that:
 - [Information is stored in an approved system that is shared with the appropriate people](#);
 - Version control is implemented, either automated through application or via an agreed [naming convention](#); and
 - Redundant, obsolete and temporary information (ROT) is destroyed as soon as it is no longer required.
- ii. In lieu of an electronic document management system adding a [metadata block](#) and document history information at the beginning of a document can also be used to flag the accuracy, relevance and completeness of information to staff.

5. Information is standardised and linkable

The opportunity to reuse information is increased when it is made available in standardised and linkable forms. Standardisation needs to be considered on a number of levels, including:

- Standardisation of format (e.g. date is yyyyymmdd)
- Standardisation of content (e.g. forename, surname, address etc.)
- Standardisation of concepts (e.g. patient, offender, learner, claimant, driver – are all roles a person can take)

Some value is added by standardising information within an organisation but there is also value in making information more widely available by using Open Standards. The use of Open Standards unlocks value by enabling others to understand and reuse information by providing it in a consistent and comparable format, without restrictions caused by proprietary software.

The value of information can also be enhanced when it is linked to other information, allowing users to explore and discover new information that is useful to their needs. The benefit of linking grows exponentially as more information is linked and more links are established between information. Linking can be achieved through the familiar usage of references and citations but can also be achieved through the consistent use of identifiers, for example tagging a transport contract with a transport route code would allow it to be unambiguously linked with more details about the route held elsewhere.

Putting it into Practice

Standardisation can be achieved through:

- i. Following the [corporate naming conventions](#) and adding the prescribed metadata blocks to documents to provide a regular method of identification understood by all staff.
- ii. Where teams use identifiers, such as route codes, for bringing related information together, these should be well documented and published as a key for all staff that may need to use the information to access.
- iii. Standardisation should also be implemented across the organisational filing structure. Using the Council's functions for the taxonomy rather than departments, to both future proof the set up and also standardise how records of activities are stored, no matter which department has created them.
- iv. In line with the [Digital strategy](#) information systems should be reviewed for standardisation and integration to rationalise information and maximise its potential. By removing systems which duplicate information, replacing outdated systems that cannot be integrated and implementing a suite of corporate solutions for common functionality across the whole council will ensure that the information is linked and accessible to staff in a standardised way.

6. Information is reused

The value of information is increased through reuse, although this requires a change of mindset to look outside of traditional silos and proactively look for opportunities to reuse information. There are three aspects of reuse:

- Internal reuse – making sure that value is gained from using information both for its primary purpose and from identifying secondary uses to which it can be put, for example data collected as part of a contract review of public health services could be used for research into health trends.
- External reuse – sharing information with other organisations, either within the public sector or with private businesses, charities or citizens in line with the Reuse of Public Sector Information Regulations 2015.

- Master data – another aspect of reuse consists of ensuring there is only one authoritative source for business information, e.g. an authoritative list of transport route codes, which is nominated, maintained and promoted as such.

Reuse involves considering what information you can make available to others but also involves looking at what others have on offer and how you might reuse this external information.

Reuse of information presents opportunities for cost savings and efficiencies. There is a cost burden to finding and collating information, so once it has been collected opportunities should be sought to reuse it rather than having to start again with new information. Reuse also avoids the problem of multiple sources of information within an organisation competing to the authoritative source, or using information that has incorrectly been assumed to be the authoritative source.

Putting it into Practice

Information should be stored in approved shared areas of the network, based on a functional taxonomy, to ensure it is accessible and findable to any staff who may have a use for it. Those shared areas should by default be as open as possible; only where information is considered sensitive should it be restricted. Moving away from needless silos will assist with sharing information and therefore allowing it to be reused for purposes beyond what it was originally intended for.

The use of personal drives and Outlook inboxes is discouraged for the storage of corporate information as it is inaccessible to other staff and therefore cannot be shared or reused.

Technology supports the sharing of information with external bodies for reuse; systems such as Egress allow workspaces to be created to work together with third parties to reuse information to improve public services across Gloucestershire.

7. Public Information should be published

Public information includes the objective, factual, non-personal information on which public services run and are assessed, and on which policy decisions are based, or which is collected or generated in the course of public service delivery¹. This public information should be published, unless there are overriding reasons not to.

Publishing public information provides benefits to the public sector and the communities it serves through:

- Making government more accountable and approachable

¹ See definition of “Public Data”: <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110131164344/http://data.gov.uk/blog/new-public-sector-transparency-board-and-public-data-transparency-principles>.

- Creating better value for money by providing an insight into how money is spent and thereby encouraging departments to improve controls and reduce costs
- Stimulating growth by enabling businesses to develop innovative information based products and applications
- Providing choice and improving public sector outcomes by giving citizens the information they need to make informed decisions about services they use.
- Opening up public sector contracts giving companies, social enterprises, charities and employee owned cooperatives the opportunity to compete.
- Reduces the costs and risks of information management by promoting a self service approach to accessing information.

Putting it into Practice

The council publishes information in line with Transparency requirements and the [Publication Scheme](#) in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act. Where possible any information that could be considered public should be published on the council's website, unless there is continuing commercial sensitivity attached to it.

8. Citizens and businesses can access information about themselves

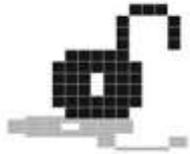
Citizens and businesses should be able to access information about themselves, including an explanation of how it is used. The information should be considered as belonging to the citizen and only entrusted to the care of a public body. This goes beyond the minimum requirements imposed by legislation and should be about a proactive approach to sharing information with the individual the information about, through a secure online portal for instance.

Providing citizens and businesses with information held about them, combined with the public information published under principle 6, completes the picture for citizens to inform their choices and interactions with the public sector.

Putting it into Practice

In accordance with GDPR and the Freedom of Information Act, GCC has an Information Request team to coordinate and respond to requests for information, including personal information. Any requests received by staff should be forwarded to the request team to process. If staff are asked for information by the Request team they should provide this as soon as possible and at least within the specified timescales as there are strict response times set out within the legislation. Guidance on complying with information requests is provided to staff through the following documents:

- [Responding to Requests](#)
- [Exemptions & Exceptions](#)



Document Information

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