

District Councils

Background

The Public Health Act 1848 and the Local Government Act 1858 empowered local ratepayers to create Local Boards of Health (Sanitary Authorities after 1858) to control public services such as sanitation, water supply, and burial grounds. Most sanitary authorities began in urban areas. In some rural areas the responsibility was given to the Board of Guardians. The Local Government Act 1894 renamed urban and rural sanitary authorities as urban and rural district councils. There were some boundary changes and new districts created. These district councils remained intact until 1974 (see *How to Find the Records* below for a list). After 1974 the old district councils were abolished and 6 new larger authorities were created with new powers. Now in 2026, with 'Local Government Reorganisation' on the horizon these authorities could once again undergo a significant structural change.

The Local Boards of Health (1848-1858) had control over the following areas:

- Water supply & sewerage
- Street cleaning and maintenance
- Burial grounds
- Public toilets
- Slaughterhouses
- Controlling the spread of diseases – including appointing inspectors of public health and inspectors of nuisances

Sanitary Authorities (1858-1894) had control of the above, plus:

- Fires and fire prevention
- Removal of ruined or dangerous buildings
- Public parks, clocks & baths (swimming pools)
- Regulation of taxis
- Naming streets and numbering houses

District Councils (1894-1974) had control of the above, plus:

- Hospitals until 1948 (usually together with a Hospital Board or Authority).
- Planning
- Council housing

District Councils (1974 onwards) also regulated: [*shared with County Council]

- Allotments
- Cemeteries
- Environmental health & refuse collection
- Housing
- Markets & fairs
- Local planning*
- Rate collection (council tax)
- Museums & galleries, tourism*
- Footpaths, traffic, highways & public transport*

What records are there?

The number of records that have survived varies greatly across the councils. You may find that there are lots of records on sanitation and water supply but no records for planning. There could potentially be records relating to any of the above functions of the district councils. Some records may still be held by the council in question or the successor body.

How to Find the Records

Pre-1974 District Councils

DA1	Awre Urban	DA23	North Cotswold Rural
DA2	Bisley Urban	DA24	East Dean Rural
DA3	Charlton Kings Urban	DA25	West Dean Rural
DA4	Cirencester Urban	DA26	Dursley Rural
DA5	Coleford Urban	DA27	Gloucester Rural
DA6	East Dean Urban	DA28	Lydney Rural
DA8	Kingswood Urban	DA30	Newent Rural
DA9	Leckhampton Urban	DA31	Northleach Rural
DA10	Mangotsfield Urban	DA32	Pebworth Rural
DA11	Nailsworth Urban	DA33	Sodbury Rural
DA12	Newnham Urban	DA34	Stow-on-the-Wold Rural
DA15	Stow-on-the-Wold Urban	DA35	Stroud Rural
DA16	Stroud Urban	DA36	Tetbury Rural
DA17	Tetbury Urban	DA37	Tewkesbury Rural
DA18	Westbury-on-Severn Urban	DA38	Thornbury Rural
DA19	Barton Regis Rural	DA39	Warmley Rural
DA20	Campden Rural	DA40	Westbury-on-Severn Rural
DA21	Cheltenham Rural	DA41	Wheatenhurst Rural
DA22	Cirencester Rural	DA42	Winchcombe Rural

An urban district council covered one parish; rural district councils covered more than one. Therefore, the place which was covered by an urban district council may not have been a town. The functions of the district councils in Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury were taken on by the borough councils (references: **GBR**, **CBR** and **TBR** respectively).

Records are arranged in the catalogues by function and type. There is a classification scheme which gives each type of record a number. These include:

- Minutes & administrative records (100-199)
- Records relating to burial grounds (200-209)
- War time records (220-239)
- Accounts (300-499)
- Rating & valuation records (500-599)
- Housing records (600-699)
- Planning records (700-799)
- Records of the Public Health Inspector (800-889)

References will consist of the district council's collection number followed by the record classification number, e.g. records relating to WW2 for Nailsworth will be held under the references **DA11/220** to **DA11/239**. Each item will then be given a unique sub-number to identify it.

Post-1974 District Councils

Records of the post-1974 district councils (Cheltenham Borough, Cotswold DC, Forest of Dean DC, Gloucester City Council, Stroud DC and Tewkesbury Borough) are held under the reference **DC**.

How to Find the Records

To view the records and documents we hold at Gloucestershire Archives, use our online catalogue which can be found on our website at: <https://catalogue.gloucestershire.gov.uk/> Use the references and search terms listed above if you are trying to locate these examples or explore these collections further. You can also refine or sort your search by other search categories, such as date created.

For more guidance on using our online catalogue please see the Help page and FAQs or watch our YouTube tutorial.