

Records Management Health-Check

Paper from the Director General of Information Services

Purpose

1. This paper summarises the findings of a 'health-check' carried out by the Parliamentary Archives in April and May 2010 to assess progress on implementing the recommendations of the 2008-09 Records Management Compliance Audit across the House of Commons.

Conclusions and decisions

2. The Board is invited to:
- a) note progress made in implementing recommendations; and
 - b) approve a further health-check to be carried out in June 2011.

Background

3. Between October 2008 and July 2009 a records management compliance audit was carried out as a risk management control to examine and evaluate the degree to which compliance with the *Parliamentary Records Management Policy* is being met across the House of Commons. Findings and recommendations were reported to the Board in July 2009 at which point the Board approved this health-check be undertaken.

4. Management responses setting out each Department's commitment to addressing issues raised, with corresponding timescales, were submitted in response to audit recommendations. Programmes of work set out in those management responses will take between 1.5 and 3 years to complete, depending on each Department's level of compliance at the time of the audit.

5. The purpose of the health-check is to provide assurance to the Board that Departments have acknowledged the risks highlighted by the original audit and to ensure that actions to address weaknesses have been implemented. The Board should be aware that timescales for the implementation of recommendations were such that it was not anticipated that Departments would have achieved full compliance by the time of this health-check.

6. A 'light touch' approach was taken to the health-check. The Records Manager met with Record Champions and other staff with responsibilities for implementing recommendations to discuss progress to date and any delays to this work. Supporting evidence was supplied where available.

Findings

7. Follow-up investigations confirm that, in general, good progress has been made by Departments in rectifying weaknesses identified at the time of the original audits. In line with the original target completion dates, there are a number of areas where work is still required to address the recommendations made. This is an

ongoing process and progress will be monitored by the Parliamentary Archives and issues escalated as appropriate. A summary of progress by each Department to date is given below.

Department of Facilities

8. The audit of the Department of Facilities, completed in December 2009, concluded that the Department did not meet the basic requirements for records management as set out in the *Parliamentary Records Management Policy*. Compliance with even basic records management procedures was particularly poor in the Parliamentary Estates Directorate (PED).

9. **Substantial progress has been made towards resolving the issues identified by the audit and raising the Department's level of compliance.** The Department's Record Champion has permanent responsibility for "overseeing and co-ordinating the quality of records management via an effective network of Directorate Records Officers"¹. Progress is reported to the Department of Facilities Management Board on a quarterly basis.

10. Actions taken by the Department to date include (but are not limited to):

- Establishment of a new structure of Record Officers and Records Assistants responsible for overseeing local implementation and compliance with policy. PDMs reflect records management responsibilities as appropriate.
- Briefings were led by the Record Champion and Parliamentary Archives for approximately 300 staff across the Department. Records management has also been integrated into departmental induction processes.
- Review and updating of file lists across all directorates to ensure the department knows what information it holds and can locate and retrieve information as required.
- Ensuring contractors are made aware of their responsibilities to manage records in line with policy. Requirements to return full and accurate records to the Department upon completion of projects is explicit in contracts.
- Trial review of 100 boxes of records held in semi-current storage. Results have been reported and the process will be revised, taking into account lessons learned, before the remaining legacy is tackled.

11. Less progress has been made in PED than other directorates. However, it should be noted that records management is recognised as a priority by the directorate and a Records Management Advisory Group has been set up to drive work forward. Particular priorities for the group include creating and implementing a standardised electronic folder structure for projects; approving disposal instructions for project records; reviewing electronic records held on shared drives; updating all file lists; and completing the review of the Directorate's records held in off-site storage. Many of these issues are being addressed as part of a wider review of project and programme management processes in the Directorate.

Department of Resources

¹ Facilities Records Management Improvement Plan, last updated May 2010

12. The audit of the Department of Resources, completed in December 2009, concluded that the department had broadly implemented the basic requirements of the records management programme. However, practices were inconsistent and some significant weaknesses in the implementation and enforcement of records management policy were identified, particularly in the management of electronic information and the disposal of all records.

13. **Good progress has been made towards completing a number of key recommendations.** Progress is overseen by the Record Champion and the Departmental Management Board updated as appropriate. Strengthening records management and information security is a key objective in the Department of Resources 2010/11 Business Plan.

14. Actions taken by the Department to date include (but are not limited to):

- Raising awareness of records management requirements across all staff, with particular emphasis on engaging managers.
- Appointment of records and information management representatives in each section of the Department (“DRIVERS”) who are assisting with the establishment of better records management practice.
- Development of a number of policy and procedure documents setting out records management requirements. This includes standardised procedures for the management of personal files and implementation of a “weeding” checklist to ensure their contents are disposed of in line with policy.
- Working with teams to raise awareness of how to manage records effectively in line with policy on a daily basis.
- Development of procedures for the timely destruction of semi-current records held both on and off-site, including notifying Directors of records due for destruction to ensure appropriate authorisation.

15. Although less progress has been achieved than was projected in the Department’s management response of January 2009, this should be considered in the context of a difficult and busy year for the Department. The impending accommodation move is being used as a driver to encourage completion of a number of targets, including the review of hard copy legacy materials in line with the Authorised Records Disposal Practice.

Department of Chamber and Committee Services

16. The audit of the Department of Chamber and Committee Services, completed in March 2009, concluded that the Department had implemented the key features of the records management programme. The Department has a culture of valuing information and staff were keen to interact with the records management programme and improve on current practices. However, practices were inconsistent and some weaknesses in the implementation and enforcement of records management policy were identified, particularly in the management of electronic information.

17. **The target timescales for completion in the Department’s response to the audit recommendations were ambitious. Despite the challenges presented**

to achieving unified, department-wide management of records, the Department is on track to meet a high proportion of its targets and raise its level of compliance.

18. Actions taken by the Department to date include (but are not limited to):

- Requiring all staff across the Department to undertake records management training to raise awareness and understanding of individual records management responsibilities at both senior and junior levels. Training sessions have sought to dispel the notion prevalent in some areas of the department that records management is an additional task to be delegated to designated members of staff only. Tailored training sessions have been provided by the Parliamentary Archives and attendance by DCCS staff at House-wide training remains high.
- Review and updating of file lists across all offices to ensure the Department knows what information it holds, and can locate and retrieve information as required.
- Working to implement key policy requirements in the Office of the Editorial Supervisor of the Vote, which had previously had no contact with records management. This includes the creation of files lists and disposal of information in line with the Authorised Records Disposal Practice.

19 Particular note should be made of the efforts in the Committee Office to implement consistent records management practices across all Committees and bring the office up to best practice by October 2010. This has included:

- Introduction of specific Committee Office records management guidance.
- Visits by the Record Officers to Committees to check levels of compliance and progress of implementation of recommendations at regular intervals.
- Introduction of a standard electronic folder structure on Committees' network drives and deletion of legacy materials.

Department of Information Services

20. The audit of the Department of Information Services, completed in March 2009, concluded that the Department was complying with the key features of the records management programme. Examples of best practice were found across the Department. However, levels of compliance relating to the day-to-day creation and management of records were higher than those for disposal. The Department's response to the audit's recommendations provided a practical and sustainable programme of work. Targets built on existing initiatives and the Department was in a good position to address areas of weakness and move towards full compliance.

21. **The majority of high priority recommendations identified at the time of the audit have been implemented or are in progress.** Over the past year the Department has focused on developing and embedding procedures for the effective management of electronic information. Actions taken by the Department to date include (but are not limited to):

- Move to a new department-wide drive structured in line with the Classification Scheme for Parliamentary Records and the development of procedures for the ongoing management of this drive. Review and deletion of redundant electronic information held on existing shared drives. Work continues on migrating the department's newer offices and teams to this drive.
- Establishment of a network of Records Management Champions across the Department to support the Record Officers in overseeing implementation and compliance with records management policy and procedures. Inclusion of records management responsibilities in PDMs.
- Introduction of procedures to ensure the records of departing staff receive due consideration. The Department also plans to review whether records management can be included in departmental induction processes.
- Review and updating of file lists across all offices to ensure the Department knows what information it holds, and can locate and retrieve information as required.

22. Upcoming priorities for the Department include a review of hard copy materials in line with the Authorised Records Disposal Practice, to be achieved in preparation for accommodation moves in Spring 2011; a review of office manuals and desk notes by Record Management Champions to identify opportunities to incorporate records management requirements; and an analysis of departmental databases to ensure information is managed in line with data protection principles.

PICT

23. The audit of PICT, completed in July 2009, concluded that the directorate was partially meeting the basic requirements of the records management programme. Levels of compliance varied widely, as did the consistency of implementation and enforcement of records management policy, most notably in the requirement to print all *substantive* records to paper, and in the disposal of electronic information. PICT's management response to the audit provided a practical response to the majority of recommendations made, although the response highlighted the policy requirement to print all substantive records would be difficult to implement.

24. **Less progress has been made on implementing recommendations than set out in the management response. This is in part due to staff shortages in key areas, particularly in the Secretariat team, who are responsible for co-ordinating action, and in programme and projects where some significant weaknesses were found. With the return of the Secretariat team to full strength, quicker progress is expected in implementing the directorate's management response.**

25. Actions taken by the Department to date include (but are not limited to):

- Establishment of a network of RM Champions in each section of the Department to support the Record Officer in overseeing implementation and compliance with records management policy and procedures. Records management responsibilities are planned for inclusion in PDMs as appropriate.

- Inclusion of a 'quick guide' to records management in the departmental induction presentation.
- Working with the Parliamentary Archives to ensure the *Classification Scheme* and *Authorised Records Disposal Practice* fully reflect PICT's activities.
- Incorporation of processes for disposing of project records in line with policy requirements into project methodology agreed with Programme Manager.

26. A meeting of the RM Champions is planned to devise an action plan for implementing audit recommendations, and a training session for PICT staff is scheduled for July. However, while lack of support for the print to paper policy requirement remains within certain sections of the directorate, full compliance with the *Parliamentary Records Management Policy* is not achievable.

Conclusions

27. The completion of the health-check shows that Departments have made good progress in addressing key issues identified at the time of the audit. In particular, the Parliamentary Archives have noted greater levels of engagement with the records management programme. Attendance at records management training has increased and understanding of personal records management responsibilities has risen significantly across the administration. This will have a positive effect on the ability of Departments to comply fully with policy requirements. Work undertaken by staff, particularly in relation to electronic records including email, also contributes to the preparation of business units for the implementation of an Electronic Document and Records Management System through the SPIRE programme.

28. The health-check revealed some examples where Departments have made less progress than expected, or where greater guidance on implementing recommendations is required. These include:

- Review of information held in strategic systems and databases and, related to this, assigning responsibilities for the management and disposal of this information.
- Records management responsibilities are not always included on job descriptions or forward job plans.
- There is confusion over how to manage local personnel records held by line managers, including uncertainty of their responsibilities and when information should be retained locally or transferred to departmental or central HR units.

29. The Parliamentary Archives will continue to work with Departments, PICT and Human Resources staff to resolve the issues above and provide guidance on implementing actions related to these.

30. It is recommended that a further health-check is carried out to assess the continued progress of Departments in this area. Compliance levels will be updated at this time

The Board is invited to approve a 'records management health-check' in June 2011, to assess progress against audit recommendations.