

> FACT SHEET

DIGITISING RECORDS

DIGITISING RECORDS – YOUR LEGAL OBLIGATIONS REGARDING ORIGINAL RECORDS

Many public offices and local authorities are considering, or have started, programmes to digitise their paper records. This fact sheet gives some advice on what you can then do with the original paper documents.

CONVERTING A RECORD INTO ELECTRONIC FORM

Digitisation of paper records can help you to cut down on the time required to retrieve documents and can improve access from different locations. It enables integration of physical records into electronic recordkeeping systems. It can also protect frequently used or historical paper records from deterioration through excessive handling.

The electronic records that you create through a digitisation programme are covered by the Public Records Act and need to be maintained in accessible form until their authorised disposal. While quality digitisation makes access to records easier and faster, the pace of technological change can make it difficult to keep digitised versions of documents accessible in the long term. You need to plan ahead to ensure that digitised records have enough contextual information (metadata) and readability for their purpose, and you need to actively manage their accessibility for as long as they are needed.

DISPOSAL OF ORIGINALS

One aim of a digitisation programme can be to save storage costs by destroying source documents. There are two requirements that need to be met under the Electronic Transactions Act before you can destroy original documents.

They are:

- (a) the electronic form must provide a reliable means of assuring the maintenance of the integrity of the information; and
- (b) the information must be readily accessible so people can use it for subsequent reference.

The information's integrity is only maintained if the information remains complete and unaltered.

You must also be able to provide a hardcopy printout because, under the Electronic Transactions Act, a person asking for information is not obliged to accept it in electronic form.



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AUTHORISATION FOR DESTRUCTION

> PUBLIC OFFICES

Under the Electronic Transactions Act, public offices need the approval of the Chief Archivist if they are proposing to keep only the digitised version of paper records, and destroy the paper or other non-electronic form of the record. The Chief Archivist may take into account various factors including the specifications of the electronic record system, the procedures that you have or plan to put in place, and relevant standards.

If the requirements have not been met, the Chief Archivist may:

1. Decline to approve the retention in electronic form only; or
2. Ask for more information before making a decision; or
3. Make approval contingent on certain requirements being met.

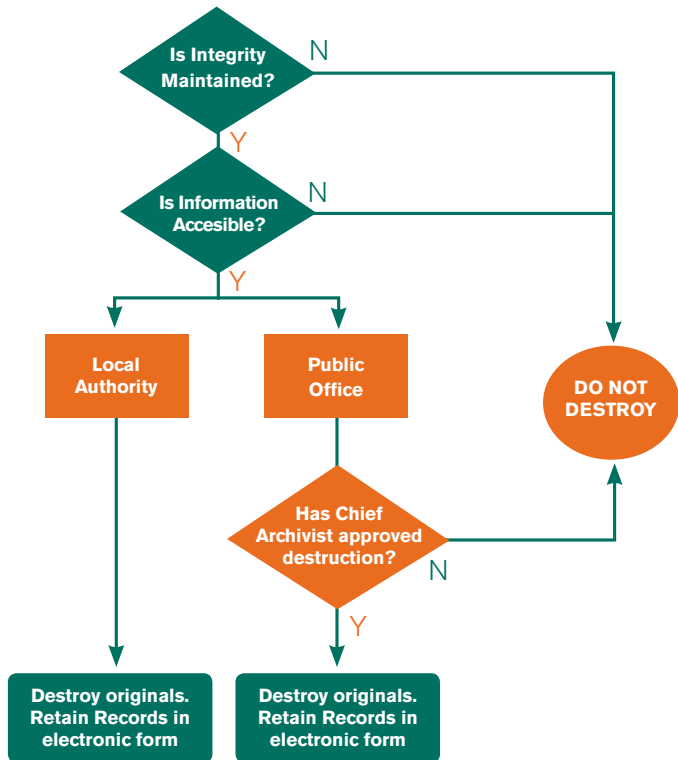
If the Chief Archivist has approved retention of a record in electronic form only under the Electronic Transactions Act, authorisation to destroy the original is not required under the Public Records Act.

> LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Provided the electronic form of the record meets the requirements of the Electronic Transactions Act, set out above, a local authority may destroy original records, including original protected records, without the need for the Chief Archivist's authorisation.

However, local authorities should keep in mind that the electronic versions of protected records are still protected local authority records under the PRA regardless of this change to their format. This means that, unless authorised for disposal, they must be preserved and permanently accessible.

The following flowchart will help public offices and local authorities decide whether they can destroy source documents.



USEFUL INFORMATION

The Digitisation Standard will provide detailed information regarding the conversion of records into electronic form, including guidance on good practice.

See also:

- Factsheet F1: *Make a Record.*
- Factsheet F2: *What is Disposal?*
- Factsheet F5: *How Do I Legally Dispose of Records?*

If you are unsure about any of the advice in this factsheet or require further details, contact Archives New Zealand at: rkadvice@archives.govt.nz.

