

*Sue: I know you'll let Margaret
see this when you can.
Answer,*

GRO-C

15/5/06

The Lord Morris of Manchester asked Her Majesty's Government:

What is the administrative procedure for authorising the shredding of documents within the Department of Health that have been stored or archived; what grade of official can make an order for the shredding of documents that have been stored or archived; and what action senior officials take if the administrative procedure for authorising the shredding of documents that have been stored or archived has been breached. (HL5511)

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Lord Warner):

The Department of Health is obliged under the Public Records Act 1958 to identify records needing long-term retention, while destroying most records as soon as their administrative value ends. Administrative decisions on retention or destruction of records are routinely made between two and five years after the date of the last paper on the file.

Records marked for destruction are held in the file store until the marked destruction date, then batched into consignments, marked as destroyed on the file store database, and despatched for secure destruction. The Department receives a certificate of destruction for each batch destroyed.

Current guidance states that decisions on retention or destruction should be made by "whoever has best knowledge of the subject matter. The reviewer should be in Payband IP2 (Executive Officer Grade) or above". Departmental policy on records management also states that "Line managers are responsible for ensuring that record keeping within their areas is consistent and meets Departmental standards".

Senior officials would become aware that the procedures had been breached if poor practice were revealed by an audit, or if a request for records could not be satisfied because records had been inappropriately destroyed.

Any action taken would depend on the specific circumstances of the breach.

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