

Chapter 19

Management of Local Authority Records at Zvishavane Town Council

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated records management practices at a local authority in Zimbabwe, with reference to Zvishavane Town Council in the South Midlands province of Zimbabwe. The purpose of the study was to establish the records management practice to expose the bedevil and recommend the best practice. To achieve the purpose of the study, qualitative research methodology was used through a case study design. Data was collected using interviews, document analysis, and direct observations. The findings of the study revealed that Zvishavane Town Council was practicing records management without a standard written down policy of records management. This led to an ad hoc system of practice in terms of good governance, accountability, and transparency in managing council records. The study recommends that records management at this council be done using a well-documented records management policy.

INTRODUCTION

The constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No.20) Act 2013 under Chapter 14, section 264 (2) (b, d) demands local authorities, to carry out their responsibilities, of good governance by being effective, transparent, accountable and recognise the right of communities to manage their own affairs and to further their development. Therefore, such demands are achieved through good records management practices. The local authorities need to know that without records management, which is good in practice, local authorities will not be able to account, deliver transparency, good governance, and good service delivery to citizens (The World Bank, 2000). This study evaluated records management practices at Zvishavane Town Council (ZTC), Midlands's province of Zimbabwe.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-7740-0.ch019

The ZTC is mandated by law to deliver good services to residents of Zvishavane community. Learning from experiences of other countries, for example United States, South Africa, and the United Kingdom where best records management laws exist. Records management of local authorities in the above-mentioned countries are helping the society by providing better platform for accountability, transparency; good service delivery and providing better governance system that are democratic to societies through good practice of records management (Shepherd,2011; Nengomasha,2009). The local authority records management policy is the strategic framework which should guide the local authority to be complaint with Zimbabwe National Constitution amendment no 20 Act of 2013 and other legislations that helps in the management of records being Zimbabwe National Archives Act of 1986. The Zimbabwe National Archives Act of 1986 is however said to be outdated in a study carried out by Mutsagondo & Chaterera, 2016 in an article titled “Mirroring the Zimbabwe National Archives Act of 1986”. The scope of local authorities’ records management must be governed by continuum care of records and archives. In the continuum concept four actions continue or recur; creation or receipt, classification within a logical system, maintenance and use and disposal by destruction or transfer as archives throughout the life of a record. This practice of continuum care for records is silent in the Zimbabwe National Archive Act of 1986.

The management of local authority records is a critical element for corporate memory that must be supported by policy and standards (Chancellor, 2002). Therefore, there was need for conducting a research on how records management practices are being done at ZTC for the council to be able to manage local authority records for good governance and good services delivery to citizens using good records management practices.

BACKGROUND

Zvishavane Town Council (ZTC) started as a local government board in the mining town of Midlands Province of Zimbabwe. In 1999, the town was enacted through Urban Act (Section 29.15) to become a town council headed by elected council members. The administrative management structure is headed by Town Secretary, Town Engineer, Finance director and Housing director. In Zimbabwe local authorities are there to provide good service delivery to the community at large, hence this can be achieved through good governance, transparency, and accountability. Therefore, to achieve good governance local authorities must adopt continuum care of records management. In the continuum approach, there are no strict boundaries between archives and records management responsibilities, as current records can also become archives right from creation, instead of waiting for final disposal to determine this. Scholars of the continuum paradigm, such as (Bearman, 1994 & Cook, 1997) have advanced debates in favour of this model as a better approach to modern record keeping. They argue that archivists should not wait until the end of the life cycle but be actively involved in the management of records from creation.

According to the Auditor-General of Zimbabwe’s report of local authorities in terms of section 309(2) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe read together with Section 10(1) of the Audit Office Act [chapter 22:18], for the year ended December 31 of 2015 observed that ZTC was operating without approved policy and procedure documents. This resulted in council duties executed without approved standards and guidelines or set standards in records management practice. It was noted that officers at ZTC were keeping records without following proper records management practices. Some records that were created were difficult to retrieve. To the extent that these records could not be retrieved when the need arise, hence there was no continuum care of records. Tsabedze, Mutula & Jacobs (2012) observed a similar situation in the

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