

Report on Seminar
Managing Municipal Archives

1. **Date** - 06-07 September, 2018.

2. **Venue** - Department of National Archives, Colombo, Sri Lanka

3. **Theme** - Managing Municipal Archives

4. **Feedback received from –**

- Provincial Departments of Local Government (1)
- Municipal Councils (9)
- Urban Councils (9)
- Pradeshiya Sabhas / Divisional Secretariats (43) – including 29 Secretaries
- Department of National Archives officers (20)
- University Lecturers (3)

5. Background information -

The British established Municipal Councils during the nineteenth century under Ordinance No. 17 of 1865, aiming at an efficient local administration and service to the public. It was a landmark in the history of local government in Sri Lanka during the nineteenth century. Accordingly, Municipal Councils were first established in the major cities of Colombo, Kandy and Galle. Through this, urban community services such as constructions and maintenance of roads, street lighting, water supply, public health services, sanitary systems, and market facilities were provided. The records of these councils are deposited in the Department of National Archives.

6. Objectives of the seminar

The seminar was held with the objective of discussing the management of traditional records as well as digital records in local authorities. The records management systems of all local authorities in Sri Lanka should be re-vamped so that the principal of good governance can be put into practice, minimizing corruption, costs, and delays in administration for the benefit of the citizens. Municipalities are vital institutions in a democracy and the archives of a municipality are fundamental to the course of business in a local authority. Their preservation is important in order to preserve local memory. They are vital points of reference for carrying out day to day activities, and citizens have the right to access information safeguarded in such municipal archives.

Hence, municipal archives have a central role to play in safeguarding local history and forming the identity of citizens. Local government records are important for the public, as many decisions on the rendering of services to citizens are based on information in them. By drawing up retention schedules, which are the systematic listing of which records can be destroyed and when, and which records must be retained for permanent preservation, either in the institution itself or by transfer to the National Archives, these institutions can organize their records management in a systematic manner.

7. Pilot survey conducted before the seminar

The Department of National Archives of Sri Lanka carried out a pilot survey on the records and record rooms of municipal and urban councils in Sri Lanka through a questionnaire to gather data with regard to the management of municipal records. I am pleased to mention that we received responses from all municipal councils and town councils. The data obtained from the questionnaires was analysed during the seminar by Assistant Director Chamila Rajapathirana.

That was the first step in this programme to improve records management in municipal bodies. The second step was to conduct the seminar; through which we hoped to initiate drawing up the retention schedules for local government authorities.

8. Legal Background

Important records should be retained in the record room of the creating agency for 25 years after creation and then transferred to the National Archives. The National Archives Law No. 48 of 1973, and National Archives (Amendment) Act No. 30 of 1981 ensures the official custody and physical safety of archives of all public offices. This law covers the preservation, conservation, accrual, and access to records, within a very broad definition of records which also includes physical evidence. It covers the creation of retention schedules for disposal of records. Giving advice to public institutions and the private sector on records and archives management is one of the major responsibilities of the National Archives and conducting workshops/seminars on the theme of records management and conservation for officers of the public sector is another key responsibility.

9. Current situation with the RTI act

It is at present not possible for state institutions to destroy unwanted records as Section 7 of the Right to Information Act conflicts with the National Archives Law. However, this is a situation that the Department of National Archives is taking steps to rectify as soon as possible. I hope that all local government authorities will be able to extend their fullest support in drawing up retention schedules that we can present to parliament soon. This will benefit local authorities in the systematic management of municipal records and improve accountability, transparency and efficiency in local government institutions.

10. Resource Persons for Seminar

Bart Ballaux is the manager of the Records Management Unit at the City of Rotterdam. Between 2010 and 2015, he worked at the Municipal Archives of Rotterdam as project manager for records management. He is also part-time professor at the Flemish Interuniversity Master's programme Archival Studies and Records Management at Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussels (in Belgium), where he teaches records management. Before joining the City of Rotterdam and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Bart worked at the University of Antwerp (in Belgium) and the Royal Library of Belgium in Brussels. Bart holds a PhD in History from the University of Antwerp (Belgium) and Master's degrees in Archival Studies from the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and the University of British Columbia (in Vancouver, Canada).

Laura Taylor is a Senior Archivist at London Metropolitan Archives which is run by the City of London Corporation. She is a registered member of the Archives and Records Association (UK and Ireland) and

qualified as an Archivist and Records Manager from the University College of London in 2004. Laura has led teams in various sections during the last thirteen years at London Metropolitan Archives including in the City of London Records Management Service and the Public Services team. She has also had secondments to Guy's and St Thomas's Hospital (a historic major hospital) and The Barbican (a leading arts venue). Prior to joining London Metropolitan Archives, Laura has also worked at Nottinghamshire Records Office and in the corporate archives sections of Lloyds TSB and the Sainsbury Archive. Laura was formerly the Chair of the Archives for Education and Learning Group, a sub-group of the Archive and Records Association. Between 2008 and 2012 Laura was a Member of the Security and Access Group of Archive and Records Association UK and Ireland which involved working across the nations of UK and Ireland to improve collaboration on collection security matters.

11. Workshop contents

The lectures on Managing Municipal Archives were delivered as follows:

Day 01 - 06 September, 2018.

01. Observations on records management in Municipal Councils and Urban Councils in Sri Lanka – Ms. Chamila Rajapathirana, Assistant Director (AtD)
02. Management of traditional historical archives - Ms. Laura Taylor
03. Implementing an electronic work (and records management) environment: how to make it work? – Dr. Bart Ballaux
04. Metadata, classification and appraisal in an electronic environment – Dr. Bart Ballaux

Day 02 - 06 September, 2018.

01. Paper Records Management at London Metropolitan Archives & creating retention schedules – Ms. Laura Taylor
02. Paper Records Management at London Metropolitan Archives & creating retention schedules – Ms. Laura Taylor
03. Records disposal, sensitive records, personal information – Ms. Laura Taylor
04. Steps in creating a retention schedule – Dr. Bart Ballaux

12. Evaluation of workshop

An evaluation form was distributed among participants of the workshop. A key point to keep in mind is that the medium used for the lectures, English, is not a language frequently used by most of the participants which may have affected adequate understanding of the seminar. Of the participants who handed over feedback forms, 41 had requested for translations in Sinhala or Tamil. In reviewing the evaluation forms the following findings were observed:

Overall assessment

1	Insufficient	01
2	Below average	06

3	Average	33
4	Good	27
5	Excellent	15

Achieving programme objectives

1	Yes	67
2	Average	07
3	No	15
4	Language difficulties	09
5	No ground arrangement	01

Knowledge and information gained

1	Yes	56
2	No	0
3	Somewhat	25

Useful/applicable to work

1	Definitely	16
2	Mostly	34
3	Somewhat	23
4	Not at all	09

Organisation

1	Insufficient	01
2	Below average	04
3	Average	27
4	Good	26
5	Excellent	22

13. Conclusion and Future Outcomes

This seminar was an excellent starting point for future endeavours of addressing challenges and problems faced by archivists as well as officials of local government institutions in the country. The contribution of two international experts on municipal archives was extremely helpful for the two-day seminar focusing on appraisal of records, disposal of records, accrual of valuable records for permanent preservation under certain rules and regulations, and the drawing up of retention schedules. Together with our participants from Sri Lanka, they were able to share their knowledge and experiences.

It opened up a platform of discussion among participants on the issues and challenges in managing municipal records. Participants were able to gain knowledge and learn basic skills in managing traditional and electronic records from creation until disposal of records.

The formulation of a retention schedule for local government authorities will be a vital step in the proper management of records in such institutions. State institutions should list the order of series and sub series in schedules specially designed for such purpose. We will begin to collect sample retention schedules from the municipalities. We will circulate a letter with brief instructions on how to identify series and sub-series, and a retention schedule format to be filled in and sent to us within a stipulated period. We can then work on one schedule each for the three tiers of municipalities in Sri Lanka, and enter into discussions with as many institutions as possible to finalise them.

In general, the workshop was good and many people declared it to be very useful. It helped them to reflect on the effective management of municipal archives. The seminar enabled participants to share experiences in developing strategies on managing municipal records.

15. Acknowledgements

Finally, I would like to thank the International Council on Archives (ICA) who are the part sponsor of this programme for their cooperation and support extended to this professional venture. The Department of National Archives has for many years held institutional membership of the International Council on Archives. A special thank you goes to Tim Harris of the ICA for his assistance. Furthermore, I must thank the two resource persons who contributed to the success of this event, Dr Bart Ballaux and Laura Taylor, experts from The Netherlands and the United Kingdom and the dedicated staff of this department, especially the chief organizer Assistant Director (AtD) Ms Chamila Rajapathirana for making this event a reality.

I believe that this seminar was an important occasion for sharing experiences and successes in records management in Sri Lanka.