

# Remote work made easy for Cheshire West and Chester's legal team

## Civica Legal enables reliable access to cases and streamlines court bundle creation

**One of the largest unitary authorities in the North West, Cheshire West and Chester Council provides services to more than 343,000 people.**

It was formed in 2009 through the merger of four councils. Each council's legal team came with a different case management system; but within a couple of years, Cheshire West and Chester made the decision to standardise to the on-premise **Civica Legal** case management system for its 45-person legal team.

### Cloud for flexible working

Some eight years later, the council was starting to shift away from purely office-based work to more flexible and mobile working practices. Although the legal team could access its Civica Legal system remotely, the council's IT infrastructure at the time — combined with home broadband services of varying quality — made for unstable connectivity.

"Unreliable access meant we couldn't always make full use of the case management system when working remotely," says Nicola Newton, Litigation Legal Officer and officer responsible for the legal case management system. "We knew that to make remote working easier and more efficient, we needed to migrate from our on-site system to a cloud-hosted solution."

With few cloud-hosted systems on the market to choose from, the council was pleased when Civica invited it to become involved in its early adopter program of its cloud-based **Civica Legal** solution, which is built on the iCasework case management platform. "We were excited to have the opportunity to input into the solution's development to help ensure it met our needs and expectations," says Nicola.

### Key outcomes

- 1 Cloud scalable allowing 45 full-time remote users
- 2 2 hours to create a court bundle, rather than 2 days
- 3 Lexcel quality mark retained, for client care, compliance and practice management

"The Civica team worked collaboratively with us to implement **Civica Legal** workflows and processes that enable the Council's legal team to do our jobs more efficiently."

Nicola Newton,  
Litigation Legal Officer,  
Cheshire West and  
Chester Council

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## Critical court bundles

Looking back at the days of full-time homeworking while still using the on-site system, Nicola recalls particular issues around creating court bundles, which run to thousands of pages and relate predominantly to children's and safeguarding cases. Those case numbers rose during the pandemic, which only added to the complexity.

"I've always appreciated the support provided by the Civica team, who understand the local authority legal environment and listen to our needs. Remote working has become much easier and users are more confident now that we have a reliable and stable case management system."

Nicola Newton,  
Litigation Legal Officer,  
Cheshire West and  
Chester Council

"You absolutely have to create and file court bundles on time, but it was a struggle when our remote connectivity to the case management system was unstable," says Nicola. To mitigate the potential risk of bundles not being ready by the court-mandated deadlines, key members of the legal team were required to go into the office to create them instead".

When the cloud-based **Civica Legal** case management solution went live in March 2021, everything changed for the better. "With the new **Civica Legal** case management solution and IT infrastructure investments made by the council, our connectivity and stability issues were resolved," says Nicola.

The legal team subsequently recommended **Civica Legal** to its colleagues in the Special Educational Needs (SEN) team, who were struggling with a purely manual process for creating bundles for tribunal hearings. "The SEN team is really pleased — **Civica Legal** has delivered massive efficiency savings for them," says Nicola. "They estimate it now takes about two hours to create a bundle that used to take around two days."

## Lexcel quality retained

Lexcel is the Law Society's legal practice quality mark for client care, compliance and practice management. The Lexcel quality mark aligns closely with other quality standards such as Investors in People or ISO 9001.

Some six months into using **Civica Legal**, the council's legal team underwent a Lexcel inspection. Nicola and her colleagues could confidently show the inspectors that all cases were compliant, with key elements of good practice such as acknowledgements of instructions and risk checks being incorporated into the workflows.

"By demonstrating that we met the standard in our use of **Civica Legal**, we successfully retained our Lexcel practice quality mark," says Nicola.



Cheshire West  
and Chester

"The Council's primary objective is to continue to deliver good quality public services. The Council's vision is for a Modern Workforce and it is committed to developing and maintaining a modern and agile approach to working, maximising flexibility in support of its aspiration to be a top performing local authority and employer of choice."

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